



THE KRIEGIE

NEWS-SHEET OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCES EX-P.O.W. ASSOCIATION

No. 43 AUGUST 1998

Editor Cal Younger

WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?



Peter Skinner carries our Standard from St Clement Danes, escorted by Squadron Leaders Bob Anderson (left) and Robbie Stewart

Photo Bob Coles

Some months ago, many members received a letter from Mr.C.F.Jago, Reunion Organiser and Vice Chairman of The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association. Mr.Jago had been "given to understand" that our Association no longer existed, and he extended an invitation to members to join the National Association. No doubt Mr. Jago meant well and certainly the National Association has much to offer, but it is a pity he did not check with our Secretary before sending out duff gen. His mistake would be amusing, except that some members became alarmed. Unfortunately, there was no Vic to counter the story quickly in his unfailingly regular *Newsletter*. So, belatedly, we assure members that our Standard, the symbol of the Association's being, cared for and carried so conscientiously by Peter Skinner, will not be put away for a long time to come.

That is a brave assertion and it has to be admitted that there seems to be some falling off of interest in our activities. Attendance at the AGM and Reunion has been

under 50 for three years now. There were many requests for a venue out of London, so the 1997 AGM was held in Birmingham. Some unfamiliar faces appeared, which was good, but some familiar ones were missing. Overall, the number attending was 47, the same as the previous year. We also opened up the Reunion to wives but even that does not seem to have brought more members along.

The number of members marching on Remembrance Sunday has fallen from 25-30 to only twelve in 1997. Two of those were Gulf War members and here it is appropriate to say that the contribution of our Gulf Chapter to the life of the Association has been a real shot in the arm. Moreover, to have Squadron Leader Bob Ankersen on the Committee provides us with a wonderful link with the present RAF generation. It also ensures that our welfare work will be in good hands.

Recently Batch, who works so hard organising interesting outings and functions, found himself in the invidious position of having to cancel a visit to RAF



Photo: Batch

*The Committee meets in a splendid room lent by Andersen Consulting
Clockwise: "Batch" Batchelder, Dave Bernard, Charles Clarke, John Banfield,
Col Younger, Phil Potts, Doug Endors, Bob Ankerson*

Stafford, through lack of support. As Batch says, "If members want the opportunity to gather for 'mini-reunions', I do not know of too many places prepared to offer us Dinner, bed and breakfast and two lunches for £25 per head." True, invitations went only to members living within reasonable distance of Stafford. As the maximum number who could be accommodated was 29, we envisaged over-subscription. This has always been the case in the past when a visit to a RAF station was on offer.

That it was RAF Stafford was especially sad. When Group Captain Bob Dixon was CO of the Station, he took a great interest in the Association and established a Kriegie Room. Succeeding COs have preserved the link with us.

Members have a very hard-working Committee, who meet every month except January and August and are constantly on the lookout for opportunities to interest members. Our President and Chairman, Air Commodore Charles Clarke, gives a great deal of his time to Association affairs. He has a huge correspondence, is full of ideas and has a network of helpful contacts. Recent visits to Irvin's, to Bletchley Park, to the Tower for the Ceremony of the Keys, to the Royal Tournament, demonstrate the variety of choice that members have. These and other outings have attracted members, which gives rise to optimism for the future.

Age is reducing our membership and it is restricting the activity of many members. There are increasing demands on our Welfare which we welcome - and we know, too, that the purses of many members are becoming ever lighter. But lack of means has never prevented members brave enough to get in touch with us from attending functions. We CAN help. We accept the difficulties, but we still have about 1000 members, not counting the Widows' section of the Association, and we would ask that, if you are fit and well, you make an effort to take part in our activities. The old kriegie spirit still counts.

Finally, we know how important communication is. Vic's Newsletter was invaluable. In taking on the editorship, as well as helping Sylvia Gammon to complete Vic's *No Time for Fear*, I bit off a little more than I could chew for, apart from kriegie duties, I have several charitable commitments. Nevertheless, it was a mistake to embark on a *Kriegie* rather than a *Newsletter*. I did so because of the books that deserved review. I do apologise to members for the absence of a news sheet of some kind for more than a year. However, the ever reliable twosome, Batch and John Banfield, have kept members posted, for which I, and I am sure they, are most grateful.

This may well be the last *Kriegie*. In future I will concentrate on the *Newsletter*.

Cal Younger
Editor

1998 ANNUAL DINNER AT RAF HENLOW

The annual dinner in the Autumn has always been popular, especially with our ladies for whom, until the 1997 AGM, it was almost the only opportunity to take part in Association activities. This year's dinner on 4 September, is likely to be more popular than ever in the ambience of a RAF station. We are extremely grateful (not for the first time) to Bob Ankerson for arranging for

us to have the Dinner in the Officers' Mess at RAF Henlow. Full details have been circulated by Batch.

Bob is proving to be a tremendous acquisition for the Committee and the Association. One example is our latest Directory which, with the practical assistance of staff at Henlow, he produced.

THANK YOU

The President and Committee express their sincere thanks to all of you who, when responding to circulars from the Association, include a donation to any of our three funds. In an effort to save our rather hefty post bill we do not generally acknowledge such payments individually but would ask that those concerned please accept this note as recognition of your generosity and our gratitude.

MASSSED BANDS SPECTACULAR Jimmy Howe's Swansong

The 80th anniversary of the end of the First World War is to be celebrated at the Fairfield Halls Croydon, on 11 November 1998 at 7.30pm. The occasion will also mark the retirement from concert presentation, after 25 years, of Major James Howe MBE, Scots Guards (Ret'd). Jimmy Howe, an ex-krigie himself, has long been a friend of this Association (of which he is an honorary member) and, especially in concert with Vic Gammon, has done much to augment the funds of our Charitable Fund.

Three great bands will take part, the other conductors being Capt. Ted Whealey MVO, Royal Marines (Ret'd) and WO2 Geoff Broome, Irish Guards (Ret'd). Vocalists will be David Bole and Gloria Whealey and Pipe Major Jess Taylor also will be there. There will be a performance by the Fort Newhaven Display team and Brigadier A.G. Ross OBE will give a Great War commentary. Ex-Service Association Standards will be paraded (Peter Skinner will be on duty) and the Chelsea Pensioners also will be on parade. The music will be from World War 1 and you are asked to bring flags for the finale - *Land of Hope and Glory*. Jimmy Howe will say farewell with *Auld Lang Syne*.

This promises to be a really tremendous evening. Tickets cost £10, £11 and £13. So get in early. Ring the Box Office on 0181 658 9291, or at least keep the number handy.

DAILY RECCO COMES OFF THE WALL

Alan Mackay, who edited the *Daily Recco*, that wonderful wall-newspaper published first in the NCOs' compound at Stalag Luft 3 and then at Heydekrug, is anxious to contact those who helped in the production of the paper.

"After 57 years," Alan writes, "the *Daily Recco* is about, in Dixie Deans's words, 'to come off the wall' and into the present." Argyll Publishing of Edinburgh is to publish in August Alan's story of the *Recco* in a book titled *313 Days to Christmas*. The book will contain a number of reproductions which will certainly stir latent memories. Alan is anxious to hear news of Bill Butcher, Phil (Streak) Adams and Stanley (Joe) Whitlock. Bill was Alan's first co-editor, reporter, writer and dogbody; Streak Adams was an Australian airman and peacetime journalist.

"I would also like to trace and name the cartoonist who brought 'Big Eitz' to life, as well as brightening pages

and filling otherwise white spaces with humorous drawings," Alan says. "To my shame and sorrow I have completely forgotten his name, although there is a niggling suspicion that he might have been my own navigator Alan Butler."

If any reader knows the whereabouts of any of the above or anyone else "who owns up to taking part in the production of the *Recco* all those years ago, I would dearly like to hear from you."

Alan's address is: 5 Abbotswalk, Kirkcaldy, Fife KY2 5NL and his telephone number is: 01592 206432.

WERE YOU LIBERATED BY THE RUSSIANS?

The National Ex-Prisoner of War Association is investigating the possibility that "thousands of British and Commonwealth prisoners of war, liberated by the Russians in 1945, may have been shipped east into Siberian labour camps."

They are looking for anyone who may have been in prison camps overrun by the Russians, including Stalags 2B, 2D, 3B, 3C, 8A, 8B, 8C, 17A, 18A, 20A, 20B, 21D, 344, Ofag 64, Stalag Luft 3, 4, 7 and any outlying sites, farms factories, etc.

They have not indicated the purpose of this investigation, but if this applies to you and you are willing to take part in their canvass please write to:

Mr. P.D. Chinnery, Association Historian,
The National ex-POW Association
10 Lambert Avenue, Langley, Berkshire SL3 7EB
Tel: 01753 541085

REMEMBRANCE DAY PARADE

The 1997 Remembrance Day Parade in Whitehall took place on Sunday, 9 November and, unhappily, we mustered only twelve members on this occasion. Among those present were our President, Charles Clarke, and Vice-Chairman Dave Bernard. Others in attendance included Gulf War PoW John Nichol and John Morrison, who travelled from County Durham.

Despite speaking to the BBC in advance, and informing their representative who we were as we approached the Cenotaph, we still received no mention during their commentary, although some of us were seen on TV.

Many of you will recall that it was on this occasion that the Union Flag on the MOD building in Whitehall was hoisted incorrectly and was holed. I believe we can claim that we were the first to notice it and it was thanks to John Nichol's mobile 'phone that the Press got the story.

On a serious note, the Committee must again appeal to members who can travel to Whitehall on Remembrance Day to endeavour to do so. The Association is allocated fifty tickets each year and we are fearful that, if we continue to have such a small representation, we shall lose our individual identity. "Batch".

EAST ANGLIAN BRANCH ACTIVE

Twenty-five members of the Branch met again at Ashwellthorpe Hall Hotel in March 1997. It was good to see new faces - Len Halford and partner from Wicklewood, W.R. (Jackie) Homer and wife from Bedford, Victor Bruce and near neighbour Harry Lewis from Great Shelford, 'Doc' John Williams of Colchester and Pauline Sparrow from Norwich. Percy Everett was unable to be present but gave financial support. Thank you, Percy, for your goodwill. Deryk Polley and his three-piece band played old favourites and led the singing of songs from kriegie days. David Denchfield read poetic compositions of that time.

Visit to Reymerton Hall

The Branch visited Reymerton Hall to view the hangar full of autogyros and it turned out to be a great day. To suddenly see 20 or more craft all at once made quite an impact. This was followed by a delightful discourse by Wing Commander Ken Wallis and then a flying exhibition which proved that 007's exploits in *You Only Live Twice* were for real. Altogether an exhilarating morning.

Then we were off to nearby Shipham aerodrome for a steak and kidney pudding lunch and to inspect a replica of a 1910 steel tube monoplane, a world first. It was built by Ken Wallis himself over a period of four years, about twenty years ago. The original machine was constructed by his father and uncle - hence the name, Wallbro aeroplane. Ken Wallis admitted that it was the start of a family vice. His enthusiasm for autogyros is quite infectious and we are very grateful to him for a memorable day.

Maurice Butt

SSAFA OFFERS SERVICES

The Soldiers', Sailors' and Airmen's Family Association has merged with Forces Help to form SSAFA Forces Help. The charity, which is very helpful to our Welfare Officer, has sent leaflets relating to two services it offers.

Firstly, SSAFA has self-catering holiday apartments in Ryde, Isle of Wight. They are for disabled ex-Service men, women, their families, those who care for them and other serving and ex-Service persons in need. The self-contained, bungalow-style apartments are located in the grounds of St. Vincent's Residential Care Home. Available throughout the year, the apartments are comfortably furnished, with gas-fired central heating and, as the estate agents say, many other attractive features. The cost of an apartment, for two people, varies from £100 per week in the winter months to £130 in high season. If any member wants further information or a booking form (which includes a doctor's certificate), please let me know.

SSAFA also has a Housing Advisory Service which offers free, impartial advice and guidance on a wide range of housing issues. This Service also has a database of organisations providing accommodation exclusively to ex-Service personnel. Again, I can provide further information to any interested member.

Cal Younger (Welfare Officer)

FAR-EASTERN CAMPAIGNS MEMORIAL

Batch writes of a moving service

A group of Aldermen and Members of Common Council of the Corporation of London proposed in 1996 that a commemorative plaque be installed in the church of St. Lawrence Jewry in honour of those who took part in the Far Eastern Campaigns of World War II.

The proposal was approved; the plaque was installed and was dedicated on the 11th December 1997.

The first church on the site of St. Lawrence Jewry dated from 1136 and was destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and was rebuilt by Wren in 1677. It was this Church which was destroyed on the night of 29th December 1940 in the fire bomb raid on the City. The Church, which is immediately adjacent to the Guildhall, was rebuilt again to become a Guild, not a Parish Church, responsible for the life of the Corporation, now its Patron.

The President and I were privileged to attend, on behalf of the Association, the very moving Service of Dedication which preceded the unveiling of the Plaque. The Memorial, with its simple poignant message, is located in the Commonwealth Chapel which is on the north side of the Nave. The Chapel was designated "Commonwealth" as a reminder of the part played by the City of London in the development of the Commonwealth. The Arms in the windows record the Sovereign Independent States in 1957 and the national flags of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Bermuda, as well as Service Standards, are hanging on the walls and screen.

After the Service we were invited to a Reception and light Luncheon, attended by the Right Honourable The Lord Mayor, Countess Mountbatten of Burma and the Viscount Lord Slim, in the Members' Room of the Guildhall Club.

Members who attended the Dinner at the Guildhall during the Association's Reunion in London in July 1995 will be pleased to know that during the Reception Charles and I established contact with John Holland, who represented the Lord Mayor and Corporation at our Dinner. He took us to a cabinet displaying much of the City's silverware and pointed out that the statuette of a wartime airman, which we presented to him during the Dinner has a place of honour. He told us that it attracts many enquiries and much interest!

ASSOCIATION NORMANDE DU SOUVENIR AIRIEN 1939-45

M. Laurent Viton has written on behalf of the above Association, which investigates World War 2 crash sites, in Normandy in particular, but elsewhere in France also. It is hoped to establish an Air Warfare museum in Eurex, Normandy. M. Viton asks for information about aircraft and their crews downed in France and especially for photographs. For anyone who wishes to respond to this appeal, M. Viton's address is:

La Poste, 76110 Goderville, France

ROGER PEACOCK

It was some months before we learned of the death of Roger Peacock on 20 December 1996. Roger had been an active member of the Association for many years and the news, as well as the delay, came as a shock.

Roger was born on 1 January 1920 and his childhood in the back streets of Liverpool was described in his third book, *Thursday is Missing* (1984). A modest, sensitive, self-contained man, Roger used the nom de plume Richard Passmore for his four books. *Blenheim Boy* (1981), his first, was perhaps his best. Having left school at 16 and worked in a succession of ill-paid jobs, he enlisted as a wireless operator in the RAF, so realising a pent-up ambition to fly. Later he became an air gunner and was still an "erk" (and proud of it) when he was shot down.

Roger's second book *Moving Tent* (1982) is a vivid account of his kriegle days and a testament to his Christian faith. His last work was a book of short stories, *Back so Soon? and Other Stories* (1989). He also "ghosted" several books. Invalided out after the War, Roger became a teacher. He never married.

TED COOTE DFM

Like Roger Peacock, Ted Coote was a Blenheim boy. He joined the RAF in March 1938 and, again like Roger, was trained as a wireless operator before volunteering to become an air gunner. From the outbreak of war he was in action with 107 Squadron. In April 1940 the Squadron transferred to Lossiemouth and took part in the Norwegian campaign. The Squadron soon went south again and, on 12 May, attacked bridges in the Maastricht area. Ted's Blenheim was one of four which failed to return. Ted was injured as his pilot made a forced landing. The crew were got safely into British hands and Ted was sent to a British Army hospital at Le Touquet. The Germans captured the town; Ted was taken prisoner and marched in the desolate procession of British prisoners to Germany. His Distinguished Flying Medal was gazetted on 30 July 1940. Ted was an enthusiastic member of the Association as well as the RAFA and the Air Crew Association.

EDNA WESTON

Edna Weston, wife of Arthur Weston, passed away on Sunday 22 June 1997. Members may recall that Edna accompanied Arthur when he attended some of our earlier International Reunions in his capacity as a Medical First Aid Officer. As an Army PoW in Stalag 8b Lamsdorf he made wooden legs for hundreds of disabled PoWs. He and Edna were responsible, along with Jimmy Howe, in organising the first PoW Pilgrimage to Poland in 1978 when a number of PoW camp sites were visited and services conducted at several cemeteries where British PoWs are at rest. Also, services were held at the Tomb of the Unknown Warrior in Warsaw and at the Wall of Death in Auschwitz. Arthur contracted TB in Lamsdorf and it was Edna who nursed him back to health on his return to the UK.

HENRY SÖDERBERG

Henry Söderberg died on 21 September 1997, aged 81. Earlier in the month, with his wife Claire, he attended the last Oflag 64 reunion in Newport, Rhode Island. As a YMCA delegate, he visited many British and American prisoners of war and internment camps, but he tended in later years to keep in touch with the Americans rather than ourselves. He attended many American reunions, helped by his constant travels on SAS business. It was an American journalist, Frank Diggs, himself an ex-PoW, who gave an account of Söderberg's work in Germany, between 1943 and 1945, in a book entitled *The Welcome Swede*. Söderberg's papers are lodged in the library of the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs.

After the War the Welcome Swede worked among German prisoners of war in Belgium and Holland before beginning a long and distinguished career in civil aviation. In retirement he researched the history of aviation and wrote a biography of Swedenborg. Those of us who remained in touch with Henry Söderberg have lost a warm and considerate friend.

TOM MILLER GM

Tom Miller, usually known as TB in Germany, was the first Canadian to win the George Medal. In September 1941 he was shot down over England, probably by one of our own night-fighters. The aircraft crashed and burned. Miller rescued two unconscious members of the crew and suffered burns which put him in hospital for six months. In June 1942 he resumed flying and was shot down into the North Sea. This time it was his turn to be rescued. Temporarily paralysed, he was pulled into a dinghy and after four days was picked up by a German submarine.

In Germany Miller was a dedicated escaper, but he found time for study too. Postwar he read History at the University of Toronto, then did a doctorate at the LSE, where he often ran into Dixie Deans who was on the staff. In 1954 he became a teacher at Lakehead Technical Institute, which became a university in 1965. Ultimately Miller occupied the Chair of History. He involved himself in a whole range of university, community and arts activities in Thunder Bay, of which his wife, Dusty was the well-known mayor.

On retirement in 1986, despite indifferent health, he became a popular and pithy commentator on current affairs on radio and television. To quote, not from an obituary but an editorial, in the *Thunder Bay Chronicle Journal*, "Miller projected far more than he said, a trait that would have stood him well in politics ... but he preferred a more anonymous approach to interests that were as broad and his influence was considerable. From quiet but effective community activism to thoughtful and influential service to the arts, Tom Miller made his own kind of contribution to Thunder Bay ... a wise and unique man."

FRIENDS AND SISTERS

The wives of the President and his Committee are indispensable in the functioning of the Association. They are not merely supportive of their husbands but play an important role in everything from welfare to selling raffle tickets. Eileen Clarke is the perfect hostess for the big occasion; Mary Endors is as familiar with the Association's accounts as Doug, and her way with figures and wonderful memory were crucial in the organisation of major, international reunions. We cannot afford to lose any of them and, statistically, we should precede them



Betty Batchelder, Eleane and
Doug Bernard at the 1997 Reunion

Sadly, ELEANE, wife of Vice-Chairman, WING COMMANDER DAVE BERNARD, and DOUG SMALLBONE'S wife, MOLLY, died within months of each other - Eleane on 6 August 1997 and Molly on 20 March 1997. Pleasingly, both lived long enough to celebrate their Golden Weddings.

Eleane was a dentist in the WAAF and often, in horrible conditions, had to attend aircrew injured in crashes. She married Dave Bernard in 1946 and became a model RAF wife. Her voluntary welfare work, especially on overseas postings, was characteristic of her. In Cyprus, during the EOKA era, she mustered RAF wives to help build and furnish a church. She taught, unpaid, in the Service Children's School. On RAF stations in England she created a Sunday School and ran amateur dramatic clubs among many other achievements. At NATO functions in France and Holland she was an outstanding ambassador for the UK and continued her efforts to help other people. Indeed, she was concerned for others to the end of her life and our Association benefited in large measure. We all miss her kindness and warmth, and she is especially missed by the "sisterhood" (her own concept) of Committee wives.

Molly Smallbone was the first to volunteer to help when Dee Younger, with Mary Endors and Betty Batchelder, began the Women's Liaison Group to look after our widows. Like Eleane, Molly was by nature a "giver", always cheerful, encouraging, looking for ways to help. She was a tonic. She and Doug were married in 1946. From 1943 she had been a teacher and, except for two years after the birth of her son John in 1948, she taught until 1981 when she retired as Deputy Head of Wells Primary School, Woodford Green. At reunions Molly was always to the fore, ready to help wherever help was needed. She was also involved in British Legion activities, particularly the Poppy Appeal. When she had time to herself, she enjoyed bowls and music. She is irreplaceable.

Not a Committee wife but a lady who also contributed much to the Association, DOREEN KNOTT died last February. JOHN KNOTT has been for years the first man the Committee calls upon when extra help is needed, be it organising stewards for a service at St Clement Danes or taking charge of a coachload of kriegies on a reunion outing. Doreen was a staunch supporter of John and of the Association and we will not forget her.

BARTH MEMORIAL DEDICATED

In the last Newsletter (No. 63) mention was made of the memorial erected on the site of Stalag Luft 1 and we published a photograph in colour. Here PHIL POTTS gives a full account of the ceremony and other events which took place from 26-28 September 1996.

Frau Helga Radau, a researcher and historian in the German Ministry at Barth, was the instigator of this memorial dedicated to the memory of those imprisoned in Stalag Luft I between July 1940 and April 1945.

Our party was welcomed in the hotel on Thursday, 26 September, by Frau Radau, her assistant Margaret Schell, the Deputy Bürgermeister, Rainer Thomas, and Stephan Scherer, son of former Barth Commandant, Oberst W. Scherer. The British contingent comprised Phil Potts representing the Royal Air Forces Ex-PoW Association, Stanley Croft, an inmate of the camp, who was awarded the MBE for his escaping activities; Ron Winton and Roddy McKittrick both of whom were in the camp from January 1945; and Timothy Minnitt whose father Arthur was an inmate from mid 1943. Ron and Roddy were accompanied by their wives.

On Friday morning we were taken by coach to the new school built, at a cost of DM12 million, next to the Flak site, and were entertained by the children (aged from 8 to 18), who sang, recited and acted a play - all in English. Lunch, a traditional dish of boiled bacon, potatoes and sauerkraut, was taken with students, of both sexes. In the afternoon we did a tour of the town which included the 13th Century church of St. Marien, the tower of which could be seen from the camp, the aerodrome from which the kriegies were flown home, the Russian memorial and the Concentration Camp memorial, where we laid flowers.

In the evening, an official dinner, with the Burgermeister, his wife and honoured guests from many countries, was held in the hotel. Speeches were kept to a minimum - just a welcome from the Burgermeister and a reply on behalf of our Association by Phil Potts. The Burgermeister and Helga Radau were presented with Association plaques and Helga also received two copies of *Not All Glory*, one for herself, the other for the town archives. There were bouquets, too, for Helga, Margaret Scheel and the Burgermeister's wife.

Fortunately, Saturday was a bright, sunny day. It began with a reception at the Town Hall where speeches were given by the Burgermeister and the Prime Minister of the county of Mecklenburg-Vorpommern, Dr. Berndt Seite. Ron Winton's reply was ably translated by his grandson, Matthew Farrell.

From the Town Hall we all went to the Memorial site, on the perimeter of the old camp. The unveiling was

performed by Ron Winton and Roddy McKittrick. Flowers were laid by the Burgermeister on behalf of the citizens of Barth and roses by each ex-krigies. The Memorial consists of a massive rock with an inscription in English on one side and German on the other. The latter was read by the Burgermeister, then Ron Winton read the English inscription.

A TV news camera crew attended and it was interesting to see that same night an extract of the ceremony on local TV. Everyone returned to the hotel for a finale lunch. Presents were given to the five ex-krigies and Helga Radau; the Burgermeister made a farewell speech; and the proceedings ended with a talk by Christian Christiansen, representative of the Danish YMCA who, like his colleague Henry Söderberg from Sweden, visited PoW camps and provided equipment. (At the end of the War Christiansen was arrested by the Russians and did not see Denmark again for quite a long time.)



The Ceremony at Barth

THE SHUTTLEWORTH COLLECTION

The visit to Old Warden aerodrome, the memorial to Richard Shuttleworth, which took place on 5 May last year, provided a feast of memorabilia, motor bikes, motor cars, monoplanes, biplanes, and triplanes from the first half of this century. The devoted work of volunteers in repairing and replenishing the innumerable exhibits is a fitting tribute to the man and to the tireless efforts of an almost unseen army of workers who made these bygone flying machines airworthy and, with few exceptions, certified so.

A Sea Hurricane beat the place up, with all the glorious manoeuvres that set the heart racing. Back in a hangar Secretary John Banfield, interviewed by BBC Radio 3, described the aims and activities of the Association, whilst Graham Hall recalled happy days and nights of long ago.

There was also a record of some of Shuttleworth's eccentricities while training at RAF Ternhill in May 1940. He was decidedly miffed when he was not allowed to wear his own blue flying helmet. Off duty, he would be found at the back of the Mess tinkering with his car, which he converted to roof-top gas-bag fuel.

About ten years above the average age of his course,

he tended to take charge. Once he called on four of the course to help him select a manager for his mother's farm, the manager's wife to cook and help in the house. From a suitcase he took the replies to a newspaper advertisement and gave each of us about twenty letters from which to choose two applicants, so producing a shortlist of eight and saving himself the chore. It took nearly two hours and taught us the art of delegation.

Sadly, Richard was killed in a Fairey Battle whilst night-flying at Benson, four months later. A remarkable engineer and aviator.

Across the road from the aerodrome is the Swiss Garden, a wonderfully realised landscape, with lakes and bridges, mature trees and a unique grotto roofed with interlocking glass pantries. This, too, is manned by volunteers whose accounts of the history of the Garden added greatly to the interest.

Then, on in convoy to RAF Henlow for tea in the Mess. Squadron Leader Bob Ankerson had liaised well with his CO, Air Commodore Graham Jones. Their charming wives enchanted us with their warm welcome. A day not to be missed. Maurice Butt

OTTAWA REUNION IN '99

Braver than we are, or perhaps younger, the Canadians are organising another reunion. Based on the Raddison Hotel in central Ottawa, the reunion will begin on Friday 24 September 1999 (Registration) and run to Wednesday, 29 September. Hotel accommodation before and after these dates can be negotiated when you are making your hotel reservations. Many events are planned and the reunion committee hope to please everyone. As always, it is important that the committee has numbers for accurate planning. So, if you intend to go, please advise the Secretary as soon as possible and not later than the end of September 1998. No money is asked for at this stage. The Secretary is Mr. H. Hayes, 885 Plaine Dr., Ottawa, Ontario, K1V 9E3.

1997 HALIFAX REUNION

ERIC RAFFILL, who was one of only eleven representatives from the United Kingdom, reports on a successful event.

Contrary to most expectations, this was a great five-night, four-day affair. Earlier, like many others, I was under the impression that it was to be just a weekend and rather costly. The air fares were expensive, especially a stopover charge of £83 per person. Other costs proved to be far more reasonable than expected; i.e. five nights in first class hotels, with breakfast: was £385 for two. The three hotels and the Conference Centre, all within 100 yards of one another: could be reached by covered walkways.

Most of us arrived on the Thursday. We were met by the very hardworking committee and given the gen about accommodation and the reunion programme, plus hats, T shirts, badges etc..

Friday: After a full breakfast, we boarded coaches at 0600 and were driven to the docks. There, the frigate VILLE DE QUEBEC was waiting for us. Only three years old, she normally carries a Sea King chopper, missiles and a quick-firer. She put to sea and we lunched on board. Afterwards, we were given a conducted tour of the ship, then the chopper arrived from a temporary base on land, and demonstrated picking up a man from the sea. Then the crew showed the paces of the frigate, carrying out manoeuvres at 30 knots, including stopping in the ship's own length. There was a flypast by RCAF aircraft. Dinner that evening was in the Conference Centre.

Saturday: After breakfast we were coached to RCAF base, Shearwater, where we were met by a pipe band. Staff escorted us round the base. We were shown various types of aircraft and spent some time in the museum. Lunch, with the pipe band again in attendance, was excellent.

That evening, again in the Conference Centre, there was

a 'lobster hash'. Each person had a 194b lobster and mussels done in wine. Very, very good.

Sunday: A church service was provided by a ceremony at the Cenotaph. The ROAF provided a guard of honour of fifty - the pipeband and a bugler. An airman, with reversed arms, stood at each corner of the cenotaph. Wreaths were laid by the Lieutenant Governor, Tony Little (President of the RAF ex PoWs) and, on behalf of the UK Association, by myself.

That evening, the Sheraton Hotel was the venue for a Grand Dinner. My wife Gladys and I were privileged to be at the top table. Huge windows overlooked the harbour and we had a wonderful sight of hundreds of small craft moving around the harbour at night; there was also a huge firework display.

Monday: Coach to Peggy's Cove where we spent a pleasant couple of hours, including a lunch of either fish chowder or fish hash and beans.

The final dinner (and dance) took place that evening. The five-piece band, I would swear, came out of the 1940's. They were great.

Tuesday: After breakfast we said goodbye to friends, old and new. It had been a memorable reunion and this was due mainly to the principal organisers, Sharon Jeans and her sister, one blonde, the other brunette. By the end they were known to us all by their father's nicknames for them - Salt and Pepper. Sharon apparently took four weeks off work to attend to the final preparations. I can only say "Good luck and God Bless" to Salt and Pepper and their team of helpers.

ANNUAL DINNER

Ninety-two people attended the Dinner which was held at the RAF Club on Saturday, 4 October, 1997.

Before The Grace, the President spoke of the members and wives who, sadly, are no longer with us and asked those present to stand for a few quiet moments in their memory. After Dinner Jim Burt-Smith amused the gathering recounting his experiences after being selected as a contestant in the television show "Blind Date" and his consequent trip on the Orient Express - we were left with the impression that he had not made the best choice of partner!

Thanks to the generosity of members, both in donating prizes and in buying tickets, Association funds benefited by over £200.

A feature of last year's Dinner was the welcome participation of second and third generation "Kriegies"! The 43 members were accompanied by 28 wives, 6 widows, 7 children, 3 grandchildren and 5 friends - there was a suggestion that the first great-grandchild old enough to buy a drink at the bar should be admitted free!

Batch

BOOKS

NOT ALL GLORY

By Victor F. Gammon

Arms and Armour (Cassell) 1996

Price: £16.99 (h.b.) 10.99 (p.b.)

No-one has contributed more to the Association than Vic Gammon. Apart from his show-business skills which brought in thousands of pounds for our Charitable Fund, Vic kept the Newsletter going for over twenty years, publishing it with precise regularity, despite serious illness, constantly learning from the experience until he achieved an enviably high standard. He has left us a momentous gift. *Not All Glory* took ten years to write and the volume published is but half of the completed work. *No Time for Fear* is now due.

For a long time Vic was afraid that young historians, working inevitably at second hand, would not do justice to the history of the prison camps in Germany, especially that they would get wrong the story of airmen-prisoners. He need not have feared, for he has produced what must be the definitive account, and has provided material which historians of the future, distanced by time from the events of 1939 to 1945, will mine for its authenticity.

Very many members of the Association responded to Vic's appeals over the years for their reminiscences, and these he has woven in masterly fashion with his own experiences and with thorough research. No doubt, some memories are slightly flawed but this is not important; what is important is the sweep of the book, the way in which the author has set the experiences of so many individuals in the context of the development of the war itself. The book is, in its way, a history of the war from the perspective of men who, more than any other, knew what was happening on both sides. The book is full of insights, of understanding of human nature and of compassion. It also contains a shrewd commentary on events and, to cap it all, is beautifully written and hugely readable. In addition to some excellent photographs, some familiar, others not, Vic has used Bob Anderson's superb cartoons from *Handle With Care* throughout, to illustrate his text. Including a comprehensive index, the book runs to 288 pages.

Vic's captivity began when the 38 squadron Wellington in which he was the wireless operator was shot down in flames on the night of 30 September 1940. His graphic account of that most traumatic of events is the first of many in the book. The courage of some aircrew makes one proud to have been a member of that distinguished brotherhood. There was Paul Hilton's wonderful attempt to crash-land his Halifax; which he had held just long enough for his crew to bale out, not long enough to go himself. Having miraculously survived the crash, Paul then had to contend with a nervous sentry. Paul's gallantry was recognised, belatedly, with a CGM. Of all stories of survival perhaps the most incredible is that of

Bill Legg. Desperately wounded, apparently dead, he was left in the blazing Wellington when the rest of the crew baled out. Skipper 'Jock' Anderson left the aircraft on 'George' and the Wellington 'flew north like a fiery comet across the dark skies of Schleswig'. Regaining consciousness, he made a bemused way forward, only to make the awful discovery that he was alone. As he tried to clip on his parachute, weakness overcame him and it slipped away, through the hatch, into the night. Legg took over the controls and, never having landed an aircraft before, tried to do so. He survived the crash and was rescued from the blazing wreck by two German soldiers, who risked their own lives. Legg was not the only member of the crew badly wounded. Alex Kerr, the Australian second pilot, owed his life to the rear gunner, Dave Fraser, who clipped on Kerr's parachute, placed his hand on the 'D' ring and pushed him out. Fraser intended to do the same for Legg but was convinced he was dead. Vic also tells the story of that inspirational Canadian Spitfire pilot, Don Morrison. Shortly after bailing out into the sea during the Dieppe debacle, Don came under fire again, aboard the launch which had picked him up. Don dived overboard to rescue a crew member from a launch which had been sunk. A few weeks later, he was shot down near St. Malo; his left leg was severed.

Appropriately, *Not All Glory* begins with the very first prisoners of the war, Larry Slattery and George Booth, whose Blenheim went into the sea off Wilhelmshaven on 4th September 1939. On 13 October, 'Wings' Day followed them into captivity. From the early days at Spangenberg Vic charts the growth of the Luftwaffe's prison camps and, in doing so, tells the story of the RAF and allied air forces throughout the war, from the Blenheims and Battles, then the Hampdens, Whitneys and Wellingtons, to the Lancasters and Mosquitos. There were the raids that boosted kriegie morale: Augsburg, the first 1000-raid on Cologne, the dams. As the numbers of bombers grew and the new Pathfinder Force steered them onto their targets, the stream of kriegies increased, but for each one of them about six men lost their lives. Somehow Vic builds up the story of an ever-growing number of camps. He describes vividly events such as the 'Run up the road' and the awful winter marches. His accounts of these alone will jolt some of those people who believe imprisonment in Germany was not so bad.

There is no aspect of kriegie life that Vic has not covered. He brings alive people like Dixie Deans, John Bristow, Wings Day, Roger Bushell and so many more. Escape takes a rightfully important place, but in the whole context of camp life. The Great Escape and the incredible efforts of the master-escaper George Grimson, Vic makes exciting, as if they had never been written about before. The escape of Harry Burton, who made the first home run invigorated the men at Barth at a time when all the news was gloomy. The elation evaporated when John

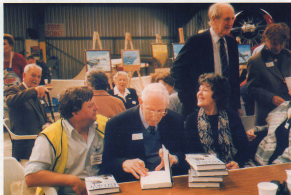
Shaw was shot dead as he attempted to cut his way through the wire. The description of Shaw's lying in state and of his funeral is one of the book's most moving passages. There are many sadnesses but also much humour. Although fifty years have elapsed, Vic has been able to recreate the atmosphere of the camps and the reader can almost feel the pain and the hunger of those on the march in the cruel winter.

In the end there was the tragedy of Gresse, on 19 April 1945, when, so near to freedom, the marching kriegies were attacked by Typhoons, with many casualties. Vic Gammon had already made his escape from the marching column, but he tells the story, piecing together the experiences of men who were there, accurately, almost

dispassionately, conveying the awfulness but reflecting the humour such as Dave Young's remark as he dived into a ditch: "How would you like to be an infantryman and do this sort of thing for a living?" The story of Dixie Deans's epic journey through the enemy lines and back to the column concludes the tragic episode at Gresse.

After an exciting passage through hostile country, Vic eventually reached home but many kriegies had been overrun by the Russians, who were reluctant to free them. Kriegies in Luckenwalde were held until 20 May.

No review could do justice to this book and the publishers are to be congratulated for realising the value of the work. They have done Vic proud. The production and presentation are first class.



At Lashenden Air Warfare Museum
Vic Gammon signs
copies of "Not All
Glory".

Trevor Matthews
is on his right,
Sylvia on his left.

Photo John Knowl

A DROP IN THE OCEAN

By Jim Burtt-Smith and John French
Leo Cooper (1996) £17.95

For his second (cleverly titled) book Jim Burtt-Smith has taken aboard as co-author his old crew mate, John French. Including the index, the book has 176 pages and consists of forty-two stories, mostly of members of the Goldfish Club. Inevitably there are similarities between the various accounts of ditching, but the authors have managed to give each its own individuality and to weave the mix with human interest items. One such story concerns the rescue of the crew of a Dakota shot down on D Day shortly after it had released a Horsa glider. They were picked up by RAF Rescue launch HSL2561.

Forty or so years later, a lady named Babs Ludlam bought a houseboat and became interested in its history. It proved to be HSL 2561, known to its crew as Blue Leader. She discovered also that Blue Leader was the boat used in the film *The Sea Shall Not Have Them*. So, on the 50th anniversary of Blue Leader's inaugural trip,

Babs Ludlam gave a party, to which most of its crew turned up.

Then there is the story of Gloria Pullan, "The Girl Who Did A Bleriot". Most of the stories relate to World War 2 aircrew, but not all. Gloria flew a Bleriot type XI aircraft dating from around 1909 in an attempt to emulate Bleriot's feat. She took off from Calais and nearly made it. She did a very gentle belly-flop a couple of miles from the coast. The machine was on view in Selfridges' window the following day, as Bleriot's had been in 1909.

This is a book to dip into rather than read at a sitting. It has tragic tales and humorous ones. There is excitement and despair. Men ditched in many parts of the world and rescuers ranged from Catalinas to battleships. The book is handsomely presented and contains many splendid photographs.

Note: Jim Burtt-Smith has a number of copies of his first book *One Of The Many On The Move*. For me this was a very interesting book, not just for Jim's wartime experiences but for his life in London before the War.

THE DARK SIDE OF THE SKY

By Harry Levy
Leo Cooper 1996
£16.95

This is a book to be savoured for the quality of the writing as much as for its compelling story. The author sums up life on a squadron thus: "However, the atmosphere of neatly ordered administration huts with flower-beds bordered by whitewashed stones hid a grimmer reality. The squadron kept from youngsters like myself the deadly nature of the game we were playing. Death and disfigurement were manifested not by screams, blood or horror, but by absence." For Harry Levy, "Life was a bizarre mixture of naked peril and the banal."

He was shot down on 31 July 1942 and his account of that sad flight will bring many memories juddering to life. The target was Dusseldorf (according to Bomber Command Losses) not Duisburg as Levy says. As they set out for home, over the target the searchlights "continued their careful play". Then came the ME 110 and it left a burning Wellington, still flying straight and level, with only Harry himself still alive. Though wounded, he baled out safely.

Unsure even of what country he was in (it was Belgium), Levy knocked on a door and struck lucky. An elderly man got the half-conscious airman on to a bicycle and pushed him to a retired doctor's house. Later he was taken by train and bicycle to Brussels. Passing from hand to hand, Levy felt apprehensive yet elated. Wearing a shabby suit and a trilby hat, he felt like Spencer Tracy and James Mason rolled into one. But he became anxious when his hosts, the Kauffmanns interrogated him and took his identity discs. He was in the bathroom when the Germans burst in. He was convinced that he had been betrayed by his hosts, the more so when the German officer who interrogated him possessed the information he had given the Kauffmanns and had his discs in front of him.

Levy was taken to the prison of Brussels St Gilles and was impatient to be sent to a P.O.W. camp. But the days went by. Each day he was taken for interrogation at Feldpolizei HQ and he began to look forward to the outing. Yet there was doubt, too. A Star of David was painted on his cell door and he feared being taken to a concentration camp. Luckily, he was in Army hands, not the Gestapo's. The interrogations were becoming a way of life when, at the end of the second week they stopped. In vain Levy waited to be called.

By standing on the back of a chair he managed to reach the cell window and discovered another wing of the prison opposite. He was able to talk to the men who crowded the windows, among them Monsieur Kauffmann whom he had believed betrayed him. After 28 hungry days, Levy was interviewed by a Luftwaffe officer and was transferred to the military wing of the prison. The food improved. He even scrounged a Red Cross parcel for his

twentieth birthday. But a Jew-hating Feldwebel took the parcel, opened the tins and mixed the contents, then handed him the resultant mess. The Luftwaffe officer came again and Levy's hopes of a P.O.W. camp rose. Nothing happened. Then, after ten weeks in solitary confinement, Levy was handed over to the Luftwaffe.

At Dulag Luft he was met with suspicion until a former OTU instructor recognised him. A three-day train journey took him to Lamsdorf. The author describes life at Stalag 8B with a fresh and perceptive pen, probing the prisoner psyche with growing understanding. He brings to life the men he was with and his dialogue rings true. He tells the story of the chaining after Dieppe and ex Lamsdorf members will delight in recalling how, at night, they would form a queue for the unlocking of handcuffs, pick them up again from the table where the guard put them and go round again, so prolonging the duty of the impatient guard.

About Christmas, 1944, Levy was suffering from asthma and shrewd characters got him violently exercising in the hope that the ensuing attack would get him repatriated. It worked, but there was no repatriation. Earlier, he had attempted a swap with a soldier but landed in the cooler.

Levy was recalled to the sick bay when the evacuation of Lamsdorf began. It was intended to keep the most vulnerable kriegies together. When the RAF contingent set off on their appalling winter trek, Levy was separated from his friends. He made new ones, including an astonishing character named Mitzac. Finally, he marched with an army column from which he and one of his army pals got away. They were soon picked up and returned to the cooler at the now almost deserted Lamsdorf. A German officer, not at all pleased to have them on his hands, commandeered an ambulance which had arrived fortuitously, and sent the pair off with a French driver and two elderly guards. They were driven to Prague where they were entrained for Stalag 13B at Weiden near Nuremberg.

There they were liberated by the Americans. Mitzac had friends in the town and, through him, Levy enjoyed an extraordinary romantic adventure which he recounts with self-revelatory candour. He left Weiden on an American lorry. A Dakota took him from Nuremberg to Brussels, where he visited the flat in which he had been arrested. The Kauffmanns had not returned from Ravensbruck and Dachau, which both had survived. (Two years later, Levy lived with them for six months.) Others who had befriended him and escaped detection he did find and was relieved that they were safe. Ultimately, he landed "on an airstrip in the South of England. The multi-coloured triangular flags strung above the hangar where we were to be debriefed drooped miserably in the soft English rain. I was home."

Harry Levy had a distinguished career in education. I wonder that he did not become the writer he was surely born to be.

LISTEN TO US

Aircrew Memories by the Aircrew Association,
Vancouver Island Branch, B.C. Canada
Obtainable from

Maurice Butt, Ludlum, Norfolk NR29 5PB

Tel: (01692 678 001)

£19 inc p&p

Maurice writes: This is a valuable collection of personal reminiscences of many youthful Canadian flyers in the RAF and RCAF during the Second World War. Several contributors were born in the UK and emigrated to Canada after hostilities ceased, reflecting their zest for wide horizons.

Aircrew Association members will recognise some of the extreme situations encountered, both the dangerous and the hilarious. Veterans may quickly relate to places and dates from their own experiences and feed on the excitements such as the patrol flight that sank two U-Boats (confirmed) within an hour, an all-time record.

This book will stir the imagination of all outward-looking young people; it is action-packed and full of adventure. These stories of survival in the face of great difficulties are quite inspirational.

Listen to Us is a part of a mosaic of individual endeavours to stop evil domination of the world and, thankfully, it succeeded. Here are 444 pages of drama but it could well have been ten times more - if one could handle the tome.

THE LAST FLIGHT OF LANCASTER LL919W

Researched by Anne Grimshaw

Journalist Anne Grimshaw was asked by a friend to see what she could find out about a cousin of his who was killed on ops. in 1944. How she went about this task and what she discovered makes fascinating reading. Her book, which she published herself, runs to 80 pages in A4 format.

Lancaster LL919W from 619 Squadron, based at Dunholme Lodge in Lincolnshire, was shot down by a night-fighter near Landéville in France about midnight on 27 April 1944. The bomb aimer, J.W.(Jack) Mills survived, though badly injured. Anne Grimshaw gives a brief history of 619 Squadron, a description of Dunholme Lodge, with detailed maps and photographs, the story of the Lane, and everything she could find out about the crew. By the end of the book you feel that you knew each member, something of their families and backgrounds and the people of Landéville for whom the young airmen have become a symbol of the fight for liberation.

Anne Grimshaw was at Landéville for the 50th anniversary commemoration in 1994. There was a remembrance service in the church at which a plaque honouring the crew of the Lancaster was unveiled. Wreaths and flowers were laid on the graves and an exhibition consisting of photographs, maps, plans, models

and even parts of the crashed aircraft was opened by Anne Grimshaw herself. Mlle Mariette Coutret, who had helped at the crash site and tended the badly injured Mills, and who had contacted and corresponded with the families of the airmen, attended the service and the exhibition, though she was past ninety. Altogether, nearly 1,000 people attended. As Anne Grimshaw says, "Landéville has not forgotten its young wartime heroes." She has compiled an unusual and very moving book.

Anne Grimshaw's address is 19 Osterley Close,
Bragbury End, Stevenage, Herts. SG2 8SN

FROM WINGS TO JACKBOOTS

By Barry Keyter

Janus Publishing Company (1995)

Price £14.99

From boyhood, South African Barry Keyter wanted to fly. By retirement in 1986 he had logged over 19,000 hours on 27 different types of aircraft. This impressive book, of over 300 pages, covers his three years as a fighter pilot in Africa, Sicily and Italy, three months on the run with Italian partisans and thirteen months at Stalag Luft 1. Keyter kept diaries all through and uses them to advantage, achieving a sense of immediacy without being seduced into too much detail. He gives a vivid account of the nomadic life of a fighter pilot in the desert, a phase of the air war of which too little has been written.

Keyter joined the South African Air Force straight from school and trained in South Africa. He and his friends enjoyed leave in Cairo before being posted, in August 1941, to an OTU in the Sudan. They flew Harvards before converting first on to Hurricanes and then Tomahawks.

In January 1943, Keyter was posted to No.2 (SAAF) Squadron, flying Kittyhawks. From then on the pilots moved from one airfield to another, living in tents, on Army rations, as Rommel retreated westward. Once, Keyter and his friends found the decomposed bodies of two Italian soldiers on a beach near Tripoli. Engineers blew them to pieces and Keyter, a sensitive man, pitied the wives and children who would never know the fate of their loved ones.

Keyter's first mission was to bomb a 210mm gun which had been doing considerable damage. ME109s tried to upset the operation and later, accompanied by JU88s, bombed and strafed the airfield. The Squadron caught up with the Afrika Korps and there was mayhem. Keyter's description of the air war in the desert is detailed and shrewd. His Kittyhawk damaged in an encounter with ME109s, Keyter belly-landed at the far end of his airfield. An ambulance raced up "Well, bugger me," said the MO when he found the pilot unhurt, and in his astonishment drove away leaving Keyter to walk two miles, carrying his parachute. Keyter's last flight of the African campaign, after 21 ops, was escorting Boston bombers attacking shipping.

The South Africans converted to Spitfires and Keyter was soon in action in Sicily, invaded by the Allies in July 1943. In September Italy gave up the struggle. Keyter's squadron moved to Italy and kept moving, pitching their

tents only to strike them again. For some time they were without aircraft. When they did arrive, most were U/S.

There was some Luftwaffe activity but flak was the real danger for patrolling Spitfires. Odd characters sometimes appeared, like two Yugoslav pilots who had stolen a Fieseler Storch and flown it to Allied-held territory. One had recently been in Hamburg and Berlin and gave Keyter an account of a very different kind of war.

The pilots spent three weeks in Malta where their Spitfires were given 20mm cannons. Based at Palata, the Spits, loaded with ammunition and a 250lb bomb, went after trains in Northern Italy and Yugoslavia. On one of these sorties Keyter's aircraft was hit and set alight. He baled out and landed in a pine forest in the Apennines. A young Italian shepherd led Keyter to a friendly group in the mountains who were already sheltering escaped PoWs. He celebrated his 21st birthday on the run, but an adventurous three months ended with the capture by a German patrol of three British soldiers and himself.

Keyter was flown to Verona and from there went by train to Stalag Luft 1, Barth. (The author writes of his kriegie experiences with unflagging verve but there are occasional inaccuracies. He states, for example, that one officer in the camp had been shot down one hour after hostilities commenced).

Keyter recreates the last chaotic days when Russian troops, Mongols, overran the area, raping and looting. Later came more civilised times. Tension grew as the kriegies remained confined, but eventually Flying Fortresses were allowed to land and evacuate the camp. Later, in England, Keyter learned that he had been awarded the DFC. Altogether, Barry Keyter has written a splendid book.

SOLVITUR AMBULANDO

by Eric R Moss

Eric's book was reviewed by Vic Gammon in *Newsletter* No 43 and it has received excellent reviews in many other journals. *Intercom* for one. The original (1990) edition sold out and Eric has now had his book reprinted. He asks for a plug and we are very happy to reprint Vic's review:

Author Eric Moss chose to use Italian for his book title; it means "saved by walking" and immediately sets his story in context and the reproduction of the Italy Star and Africa Star on the cover gives the reader a darned good idea where the action will be. It is a good start. Shot down in North Africa, Moss was taken prisoner and his subsequent journey in the hold of a merchant ship was similar to the horrors endured by those in the *Justerberg*. Breaking out of an eyrie camp during an air attack, Moss and another prisoner also escaped the dreadful debacle of all those Allied servicemen who had been ordered to stay put by their officers and, as a result, were later handed by the Germans to the Reich. Eric Moss made his final exciting dash to freedom in May 1944. His story, told in the first person and in the service

language of the day, has the feeling of urgency and veracity that young "commissioned" writers would give their right arm to have. A good read."

The original price was £8.50 but Eric tells us that it is down to £6.40 including p&p, cash with order, delivery seven days in the UK from 5 Mapleway, Ascott-u-Wychwood, OX7 6AU. Prices for airmail posting abroad are Australia £9.44, Canada and USA £8.99. Sterling with order.

FLYER'S TALE

By William W. Hall

Merlin Books 1989 Price £2.95

This is a little gem of a book which I wish I had discovered years ago. Bill Hall has distilled his experiences in training, on the Squadron and as a PoW in 32 action-packed, thought provoking pages. "It was not the best who survived," he writes, "but those who survived became good." And in his final chapter, "Reflections", he says, "There were few moral doubts amongst aircrew at the time, and the willingness to kill was matched by a willingness to die. We were the instruments of Government who in turn were endorsed wholeheartedly by the people. It was not vengeance on the German people but destruction of the enemy to ensure our national survival that motivated us." The author is absolutely right, but few people have explained ourselves to ourselves quite so well.

Flyer's Tale may well be out of print. Certainly the 20 or so books Bill Hall generously donated to the 1995 Reunion were soon snapped up.

JUST ONE OF THE MANY

A NAVIGATOR'S MEMOIRS

By Dudley 'Pop' Eagles

Pentland Press (1996) Price £7.50

Dudley Eagles died recently. He was a splendid member and his vast moustache was a reunion landmark. His book is a delight to read - light-hearted, modest and humorous. He did two tours during which he was shot down three times earning membership of the Goldfish Club, the Flying Boot Club and the Caterpillar Club. Shot down over Romania, he was a prisoner in Bucharest but escaped. He received a mention in dispatches. One would have thought his record earned more recognition than that.

A DANGEROUS GAME

By Harry Ball

Silver quill (1997) Price £7.95

Harry Ball's first book, *Two Brothers at War* (1992) did well, especially on his home ground of Harrogate. Now he has written of his five years in the RAF. He was a wop/AG on 158 (Halifax) Squadron. Shot down in March 1944, he was a kriegie at Heydekrug and Fallingbommel. Harry has no pretensions as a writer; he simply tells a plain tale in plain language, and his book is none the worse for that.

His address is 11 Coppice Avenue, Harrogate, HG1 2DJ

DIRECTORY UPDATE

With the generous co-operation of the CO at RAF Henlow, Squadron Leader Bob Ankersen is organising a comprehensive update of the Directory - for which we also had them to thank. The new Directory will include new members, address changes, deaths and a revised widows' section. All information will be accurate to the end of May. The next Newsletter will take over from that point. This is a truly magnificent gift, especially of Bob Ankersen's time, which we know is precious.

PLEASE NOTE: Cal Younger's address is now Mill House, Great Bedwyn, Marlborough, Wiltshire SN8 3LY.

Correspondence on welfare matters or for the Newsletter should be addressed to him there.

WE WEEP NO MORE

By Peter Buttigieg

Aquila Services Ltd, Gibraltar (1997)

Price £10 (inc P & P)

This remarkable book is described as a trilogy. The first section describes the author's incredible childhood in Gibraltar and takes the story up to his time on 50 Squadron. The second part, sub-titled *My Last Flight*, is an account of Peter's battle from the rear turret with an ME10, which ended with a double knock-out, his five days on the run in Germany, his escape from Amersfoort Concentration Camp and eventual recapture and transfer to Dulag Luft. Book 3, *The Human Mole* encompasses his experiences as a PoW, his postwar activities as an officer in the ATC, and his sea voyages in small craft.

Peter has written several versions of his story over the years and I have had the privilege of reading them. The first was written at Heydekrug and that story, much reduced, forms the first part of the trilogy. English was not Peter's first language, but like another sailor, Joseph Conrad, he has mastered it. A friend of mine who was for thirty years a reviewer on a national newspaper and a very fine novelist, read *We Weep No More* and found the writing "admirable, honest and unpretentious".

Peter's family emigrated from Malta to Gibraltar when Peter was three. He went to school at six, knowing little Spanish and no English. His father was a cruel man and, at 12, Peter ran away with another boy whose father owned a "bum-boat". They commandeered the boat and attempted to sail across the strait to Africa. They failed but Peter ran away a second time. He looked 15 and was taken aboard a fishing boat. It was manned by smugglers and, taking fright, he left the boat when the crew were ashore in Malaga and walked back to Gibraltar.

At 14, Peter got a job in the Garrison library and at 16 signed on as deck-hand on *Dandy* a ketch owned by a very strange Englishman who taught him seamanship and navigation. Often he would leave the yacht in Peter's charge and disappear. On one such occasion, when a body was found in the harbour at Tangiers where Peter,

alone in the boat, had been blown in a storm, he spent 28 days in a Moorish dungeon before his employer turned up.

Later, Peter was employed as Mate on a War Department vessel. At the outbreak of war he applied to join the Navy but was refused because of the work he was already doing. He signed on a ship which took him to England, where he joined the RAF. Shot down in a Manchester on the night of 3/4 June 1942, Peter ensured that he got the night-fighter before he baled out. Two other members of the crew survived, four went down with the aircraft. In the next four days Peter walked about 150 miles, only to find himself back where he started.

To convince himself that he had indeed walked in a circle, he even dug up the ashes of a fire on which he had cooked some potatoes. On the fifth day, having been without water for three days, he ventured out and found a house with a pump outside and no-one in sight. A blonde woman came out and offered him lemonade, for which she demanded payment, Peter gave her a 100 franc note from his escape kit. It was Peter's luck that, in Holland, the first person he met was a German woman. The encounter led to his capture. He was taken to Amersfoort Concentration camp, persistently grilled and threatened with shooting. The Germans wanted to know who helped him, unaware of the self-sufficiency of the man they were dealing with. They even took him to execution posts some of which were already occupied. As he was marched away, he heard shots. He made an incredible escape from Amersfoort and, hidden in a lorry, got many miles away. Unfortunately he chanced to meet a German patrol from whom he broke away and leapt over a bridge. His blind leap was unavailing but at least he ended in Luftwaffe hands and was soon at Dulag Luft.

In prison camp his soubriquet, "the human mole" was well deserved. He made numerous attempts to escape, most famously at Stalag Luft 3 where, stripped naked, he burrowed from the latrine. His escape partners were Bill Higgs and Tom Miller (whose obituary appears elsewhere in this issue).

Peter was commissioned in 1954 and for twelve years served voluntarily as an ATC officer. His love of sailing never faded. In 1985 Peter was invited to Apeldoorn by a local committee and, with Dutch friends, traced his movements from the time he was shot down until his jump from the bridge. The following year, with one companion, he sailed his six-metre cutter *Melina* across the North Sea covering over 1000 miles and raising in sponsorship money nearly £1,500 for the Lowestoft lifeboat. It was an eventful voyage.

In 1988, at the age of almost 70, Peter Buttigieg decided to return to his roots. Except for a 14-day holiday in 1982, he had not been in Malta since he was three years old. He bought a flat, but over the next four years his views vanished as Malta embarked on a building spree. He sold the flat and bought a s/y *Tangelo*, a 8-metre sailing cruiser. From Malta he made many voyages in the Mediterranean until, in March 1995 he set sail for Gibraltar. His account of an adventurous three-month voyage, much of it taken from his log, is a thrilling read.

Tangelo was tied up at Queensway Quay Marina on 21 June 1995 since when it has been Peter's permanent residence.

This is the story of a brave, tenacious and modest man whose generous and indomitable spirit shines through on every page.

The book runs to 253 pages, is well presented and has loads of photographs. The publishers' occasional slips, for example, "a None Fiction Book" on the cover, are somehow endearing.

Copies may be obtained from Cal Younger, Mill House, Great Bedwyn, Marlborough, Wiltshire, SN8 3LY or direct from Peter Buttlegieg, S/Y Tangelo, Queensway Quay Marina, PO Box 19, Gibraltar. Peter plans to make a donation to the Association.

PRESS ON REWARDLESS

By Phil Darby

Private Publication

Price £10

Phil Darby has published a limited edition of his book but it deserves a much wider readership. Just as Barry Keyter covers fighter action in the desert war, Darby gives a fascinating account of the bomber force. A prisoner, first of the Italians then of the Germans, with weeks on the run between, he adds a fresh dimension to the literature of the camps.

A 21-year old student at the outbreak of war, Darby quickly joined the RAF Volunteer Reserve. After a frustrating wait, he was sent on a pilot's course, did OTU on Wellingtons and, having married his 18-year old girl friend, was sent to the Middle East in late 1941. He flew with the long range training group to Gibraltar, then to Malta, from which they carried out a raid on Naples, returning to find Malta itself was being bombed.

Darby and his friends were posted to 70 Squadron which operated from Kabrit but later moved to an advanced base. Sand was a constant problem and conditions were basic. Twice Darby made a forced landing. He has some good stories to tell of this period when the RAF was doing its best to frustrate the build-up of the Afrika Korps. Shot down over Benghazi, Darby was last to bale out and broke his back when he hit the ground. He was not wearing his dog-tag and someone removed his watch on which his details were engraved.

Darby was taken to an Italian hospital and coated in plaster. Lice and mosquitoes plagued him. He had no proof of identity; another body had been buried in his name and his young wife believed herself a widow. Transferred to a hospital in Lucca, he was eventually allowed to write to his wife, who informed Air Ministry.

Gradually the paralysis retreated and Darby was able to move around but, with thought of escape in mind, he concealed the extent of his recovery. Then a group of army men involved him in a well thought out scheme to steal an aircraft from a nearby airfield. Everything went as planned until the starter batteries proved inadequate. Still partially paralysed, Darby was recaptured and sent

to a new prison camp.

The accommodation was in large tents; conditions were appalling. Darby was the only RAF man. Most of the prisoners were desert rats. He started a lecture programme and organised classes. Red Cross parcels began to arrive and Darby invented a blower. No doubt others had the same idea for blowers of various types were ultimately ubiquitous. During the summer hutments, proper ablutions and latrines were built. There was a camp radio. Cinderella was performed at Christmas. In the winter there was a lot of illness and the camp was flooded, with nine inches of water in the huts.

In the early summer of 1943 Italy capitulated. PoWs were ordered by Allied Command to stay put apparently to save Italian women from hordes of British prisoners on the loose. The PoWs felt betrayed. German guards appeared and soon the prisoners were on their way to Germany. Darby was ready for the train journey and managed to escape from a cattle truck. Over the next weeks, on the run, sometimes with partisans, sometimes alone, he led an exciting life. In October 1943 he was recaptured in the mountains not far from the Swiss border.

At a camp in Austria he was reunited with RAF men for the first time in eighteen months. He moved on to Sagan then to 4B at Muhlberg. Among the 1500 in the RAF compound he found two of his crew, who had thought him dead. He was planning to escape and got to know French prisoners, some of them Resistance men. A group of them had a regular job looking after the cemetery and often swapped with French workers on the outside. Cigarettes kept the guards quiet and also satisfied German frauleins who lurked in the surrounding woods.

Darby and his friend Angus made careful plans, went on the cemetery work party and in the woods swapped clothes with French workers who wanted to come into the camp. In nearby marshalling yard, French labourers helped them to get a train going west. It stopped in Hanover mainline station, where unloading began. Under the noses of SS guards, they got out of the van through a ventilator and casually walked the length of the platform, then along the railway line and out of the city.

They stowed away on a train going to Brussels but the RAF bombed the yards and in the ensuing melee they were seen. They were sent to a straffe lager at Fallingbommel then, to their dismay, were transferred far from western Germany to a camp (probably Bankau) near Breslau. Then, as the Russians swept across Poland, they were marched at short notice into a blizzard. The march went on for weeks but eventually they got to Luckenwalde, the last lap being done by train.

When the Russians overran the camp and held the prisoners hostage, Darby and Angus left the camp and intercepted an empty American lorry from a convoy turned back by the Russians. They got to Magdeburg and made a cautious way to the railway bridge which had been destroyed. Under Russian fire, they ran hard along the first section, which was intact, then took to the water and hauled themselves along the section of the bridge which protruded above the water. They reached the Americans.

"FRIDAY THE 13TH"

On Friday, 13 September 1996, at Elvington in Yorkshire, the hard-working band of volunteers of the Yorkshire Air Museum witnessed the culmination of thirteen years of dedicated effort when a rebuilt Halifax bomber was "rolled out" of the splendid new CANADIAN MEMORIAL HANGAR.

Batch was there and reports:

Proceedings commenced with the Canadian High Commissioner, Hon Roy McLaren, accompanied by Lt. Gen. Al DeQuetteville, Commander, Air Command Canada, "opening" the Canadian Memorial Hangar. After a "salute" by the Patrouille de France, the French Red Arrows, the President of the Air Crew Association, Air Chief Marshal Sir Michael Knight, ended an excellent speech by ordering the "roll-out" of the aircraft. Later, the French Air Attache, Col. Marc Bottine, unveiled a plaque on the Commemorative Wall.

When the doors opened, a tractor towed the grand old lady from the new hangar, to spontaneous applause from over 6,000 enthusiasts, the majority of whom were ex-Halifax ground and air crews. And there she proudly stood - "Friday the 13th" resplendent in the markings of 158 Squadron with which unit the original aircraft completed a staggering 128 ops. between March 1944 and April 1945. Even the original "nose-art" and the bomb log are faithfully replicated. There was the odd tear in the eyes of some of the veterans present.

Apart from the Patrouille de France, aircraft were virtually lining up to salute "Friday". They included a "sword" formation of Tornados from RAF Leeming, a Canadian Hercules, an AWAC from Waddington, two Belgian aircraft and the Lancaster and Spitfire from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight. Finally, the RAF display Tornado arrived, spot on time, with our own member Sqn.Ldr. Robbie Stewart in the back seat, and, rather ironically, two Phantoms from the Luftwaffe.

This was an international occasion for RAF, RCAF and Free French Air Force squadrons were based at Elvington during the course of the War. The cost of the Hangar was met by the Canadian Government, the National Lottery, 4 Group and 6 Group Bomber Command associations and donations from commercial organisations and individuals.

The original Halifax Mk III LV907 was delivered to 158 Squadron, at RAF Lissett, on 10 March 1944. Her first operation was on 30 March when Flt.Sgt. Joe Hitchman took her to Nuremberg. The last of her 128 trips was on 25 April 1945; F/O Wheeler took her safely to Wangerooze and back. After the war, with most surviving wartime aircraft, she was scrapped without any thought or feeling for the future.

Fortunately, the bomb log panels were salvaged and are now displayed in the RAF Museum at Hendon.

The rebuilding of the Halifax was initiated by Ian Robinson, Chairman of Yorkshire Air Museum. The strong wartime connection of the aircraft with Yorkshire was a spur to Ian and his helpers. He had a close personal interest having tested Halifaxes from the Handley Page repair workshops at Clifton Airfield before returning them to squadrons.

The first part of the reconstruction was a 22 feet piece of the fuselage of Halifax HR792 which, in 1945, made a wheels-up landing on the Isle of Lewis. The section was acquired by a crofter for use as a hen coop. He relinquished the section forty years later when he upgraded the accommodation for his hens.

Perhaps, one day, more enthusiasts will rebuild a Battle, a Hampden, a Whitley or a Stirling, all of which tend to be overlooked. It is thanks to the Ian Robinsons of this world that some of our heritage is being preserved in voluntarily run museums and it is surely incumbent on members of our own and similar associations to support them wherever we can. You may need a repository for your old memorabilia - Yorkshire Air Museum, Lashenden Air Warfare Museum and others like them will be delighted to have them.

VISIT TO CATERPILLAR CLUB

On Tuesday, 20 May 1997, ten members visited Irvin Aerospace Ltd at Letchworth in Hertfordshire to tour their factories and to see the development in parachute design since those days when our lives "hung by a thread". Thanks to Geoff Shepherd, we enjoyed an informal lunch in the Letchworth Golf Club bar before proceeding to Irvin's. There we were met by Mrs Judy Adams, PA to the Managing Director and Secretary of the Caterpillar Club.

In the boardroom we watched a video of the Company's activities. We were then conducted around the factory to see all aspects of the manufacture of the many types of 'chute produced by Irvin's. Every parachute carries a tag identifying the operative responsible for it - a new angle on "taking it back if it doesn't work". Returning to the boardroom, we were each given a folio-case of "goodies", including an Irvin tie. In return, we presented the Company with an Association plaque which was received with real enthusiasm; it will be displayed in the Company's reception area.

Five years ago, the Airborne Forces Parachute Support Unit was privatised. Irvin personnel, based at RAF Hullington, took over. When the facility there burned down, Irvin developed a new building at Letchworth around which we were shown by Doug Hall, the Quality Assurance Manager. The Unit is responsible for washing and drying personal parachutes which have been used over water; cleaning equipment (including removal of blood stains) and repair of large parachutes which have been used for dropping equipment. After maintenance and repair, the equipment is stored in a temperature and humidity-controlled environment and racked for distribution in a sequence which ensures that parachutes are checked and repacked on a monthly basis.

Irvin's still has samples of the 'chutes we used in 1939-45. The Caterpillar Club still functions, with 32,031 members registered to date. Many of the original applications for membership are on file and Irvin's will supply a copy if possible but definitely not the originals. You can obtain a replacement Caterpillar pin; a gold one engraved with your name and rank at the time you qualified now costs £31, with delivery in about four weeks. To contact the Caterpillar Club write to: Mrs Judy Adams, The Caterpillar Club, Irvin Aerospace Ltd, Icknield Way, Letchworth SG6 1EU. "Batch"