Phred's Flight Test by Mike Hamill

Here's a bit of a yarn from my days way back when I was a young LAC. Ron Sturt, Les Meadows, Leighton John and a few others may remember the times that Phredd and Phreddrika, the squadron mascots, used to get their wings clipped to ensure they did not go AWOL.

John Bartlett, John Dunn and a Geordie lad whose name escapes me plus those previously mentioned decided that it was only right and proper that Phredd and his mate had a post clipping air test and duly launched Phredd up in to the air. Not only was Phredd surprised that no matter how hard he flapped his wings he was going down; We had, unfortunately, launched Phredd with a rather strong breeze up his tail feathers and he somewhat overshot his pond and scared the hell out of the Jengo (Warrant Officer Wally Walters) when he crashed into his office window.

Air tests on the ducks were banned from then on and I think the Warrant found the volunteers needed to clean out the duck pond in time for AOC's.

A Case of Mistaken Identity by John Malcolm

In the early sixties, it was not uncommon for Coastal Command Shackleton aircraft to be u/s abroad (Norway, Iceland, Bermuda, Canada, etc.) - quite often requiring a replacement engine, prop or the like.

It might be several days before Transport Command could provide an aircraft and crew to ferry out the replacement item. However, Coastal Command was very fortunate in that it had it's own private fleet of transport aircraft - the Met Hastings of No. 202 Squadron. It was therefore quite common for a crew to be called at short notice to ferry some spares to an ailing Shackleton. One such trip was tasked to take a replacement engine to Greenwood Nova Scotia:-Aldergrove to Ballykelly; collect engine. Ballykelly to Keflavik; night stop. Keflavik to Argentia; refuel. Argentia to Greenwood; night stop, while the engine was replaced and the u/s one loaded. Greenwood to Argentia; night stop. Argentia to Ballykelly; unload engine. Ballykelly to Aldergrove.

The full crew went on these trips - pilot, co-pilot, flight engineer, navigator, two signalers, and two metmen who acted as quartermasters/loadmasters! On this particular trip, apart from the two sergeant Met. men, the entire crew was either commissioned or Master Aircrew. Apart from the Met. men, they would therefore all be able to stay in the Bachelor Officers Quarters (BOQ) at Argentia. To keep the crew together, it was decided, during the Greenwood Argentia leg, to 'promote' the two met men to Master Air Met Observers! They changed into civvies before landing, signed in to the BOQ as MAMOs, and all went well, including a very pleasant social evening there.

About ten days later, a Royal Air Force police corporal appeared at the Squadron. He was carrying the Form 1250 of one of the met men (who was not even aware that it was no longer in his possession).
The 1250 had been found in the BOQ at Argentia; the owner had been tracked down via the booking in book; and the ID Card had been returned by the American Military Police! The embarrassed owner said he must

have dropped it when he was helping the officers with their baggage, and fortunately no one thought to query his name being in the book at reception!

Air Test Went With A Bang by Ron Sturt

I was as a young SAC sent up on an air-test? It must have been '69 and all went sadly wrong when the damn fuel computer blew. When the pilot (can't remember his name) got us back to Leconfield just about everyone had heard and were waiting for us. I scuttled to the nearest toilet vowing that I would never fly again. I was wrong of course, they said it was something to do with falling off a horse - getting back on again. Anyway, second time lucky but I will never, ever, forgive him for doing a stall turn in a Whirlwind with me as a passenger!

By the way I do remember the air test attempt on the ducks. Phredd had a real hatred of me after that. Probably why I'm paranoid now!

Another Airtest – by Richard Castle

Talking about air tests...

..
I was volunteered (being the Junior Tech on the flight) to carry out an air test on a Whirlwind 10 after a major rebuild consisting of engine, gearbox, blades and a shed load of other items sent to us from Leconfield (that's the time when we were given the Northern spare). She had been dumped on the beach West of Lossie after an overspeed (if I remember correctly) and couldn't be flown down South for repair. After a month or so of work by the groundcrew, we were ready for the first flight.

For some reason there seemed to be a bit of a problem getting the aircrew (or groundcrew for that matter) to accompany the pilot on his little soirée. The words "too bloody high" and "dinghy's don't make good parachutes", seem to remain in my mind to this day!.
Anyway, duly sitting in the co-pilot/nav's seat with a stopwatch and a small piece of paper and a lot of ignorance, we took off, climbing vertically over the airfield to a height of ten thousand(?)feet. God, it was a long way up in one of those things. It took what seemed an age to get up to height and when we got there, neither of us liked the Jaguars and Phantoms zapping past us at four hundred+ knots whilst we just sat there waiting for this bloody rotary wing to hit the magic height.

Anyway, after a few minutes of this, Castle and the pilot (can't remember his name) were both of a mind that this was not a sane place to be and that if it got up here at all the rate of climb must be bloody marvelous and therefore there was absolutely no reason to stay up here or repeat the test. If my memory serves me well after 28 years, I finished writing the rate of climb figures up on the descent! Oh, the kite was fine, and went on to do quite a few more hours with us before going to HQ flight. Says something for first line maintenance.

The Stopwatch – by Mike Hamill

The Stopwatch

Ron's story reminded me of another happening during my days at Base Flight. It proves that age and experience didn't always mean the "Oldies" were necessarily right (Except now when I'm the "oldie".)

We had just finished a minor servicing on a Whirlwind and it had gone for it's ground runs and air tests. All had gone well until the first All Up Weight power climb. The pilot started a timed climb between two specified altitudes. The test failed miserably, so bad were the results that the pilot cancelled the rest of the airtest and returned to base.

There was only one outcome, replace the engine. This was duly done, the engine boys working late to complete the change. Next day off they went again, same thing, engine failed to achieve acceptable times. Back down to base and a third engine fitted. Air test time again and another failure. By this time the problem was attracting a lot of attention from senior squadron personnel and a hasty conference was arranged to talk the problem through.

While this conference was in progress with all the squadrons Engineering Officers (Eng O's), Trade Managers, and Engine Bay Sgts deciding whether to try a fourth engine, along came the most junior engine LAC and stood listening. Thinking that the lad was showing some interest in Senior Management decision making and wishing to encourage the young mans trade knowledge the Engineering Officer asked the airman what his thoughts were. "Well sir", said the junior LAC, "I think the stopwatch is wrong". Not impressed with this flippant remark about a highly calibrated and revered item of
engineering equipment, the lad was verbally cuffed about the ears and sent to wipe up some spilt oil.

The funny thing was that the engineering committee disappeared into the Eng O's office and were observed through a window checking THE STOPWATCH against the Senior Eng O's Rolex. We never changed the engine for the fourth time and, at the next airtest, a new stopwatch appeared and the engine greatly exceeded the minimums required. !!!

The young engine LAC was, I believe, one John Bartlett, but if you know different why not give us your version

The Trawlermans Tale – by Mike Watson

The trawlermans tale

On the 18th July 1966 2155 hrs Call to trawler "Ross Eagle" to pick up a seaman with respiratory distress. Flt Lt Gumbrell was the pilot of XP404. Even though it was summer time it was rather late in the day. In those days we were not supposed to be over the sea after dark when there was no longer a visible horizon. It was about 2245 by the time we reached the trawler and went down to see what the problem was.

The seaman really was in distress as he had enormous abscesses on either side of his tonsilar areas. However the skipper of the Ross Eagle was, like other skippers I noted on several occasions on other ships, a very resourceful character. He had got a length of electrical cable and pulled out the inner wires to leave a quite serviceable tube to use as an airway. This allowed the seaman to breathe a little easier.

He was then winched up to the chopper where I inserted a more medical type of airway and we set off back to land. It was dark by this time and as we had made no previous arrangements to land in Hull I advised we should return to base at Leconfield whence we could transport the seaman to a hospital in the RAF ambulance. We landed at Leconfield at 2340 and transferred the seaman to the ambulance. But where to take him? I went to the "B" flight crewroom and started phoning to the hospitals in Beverley and Hull.

One after another said they had no beds and it seemed difficult to find a member of the medical staff whose mother tongue was English. Excuses such as " we have no beds for infectious cases" to "we have no emergency beds at all" and having explained we had just picked the sick man up from a ship at sea to be asked if it was an emergency was frustrating to say the least. At last I managed to contact a sympathetic nursing staff member who found the duty house officer who spoke good English. However his main concern was how old was the seaman.

This was too much for our navigator (I am pretty sure it was John Hill, who had a dry sense of humour) he shouted out "Just hold on a minute and I will cut off one of his legs and count the rings" . This seemed to do the trick and the sick man was duly taken to the hospital in Hull where he did well.

Gone Gnome – by Richard Castle

Gone Gnome

Webmasters' Note: This is about the other Helicopter Search & Rescue Squadron in the Royal Air Force and is shown only because the author was lucky enough to eventually come to the Premier Squadron - Only joking 22 Squadron guys.

Another one for the telling, from my oppo (a Sgt Pilot/Air Comms). When I was on 22 at Thorney holiday camp, we had to do an engine change. C shift were duty and they landed the plum job over the 24 hours with B shift coming in the next day.

As there were only four groundcrew (Engines, Airframe, Electrics and Comms) everyone got involved with the work...doing what they could, even down to making tea!

Anyway, the engine Chief had done his bit and the life-ex Gnome had been removed and placed in its cradle whilst the replacement one was connected onto the winch and hoisted into position for alignment into the engine bay when the boss walked into the hangar.

Then, for some reason (shock at seeing the boss in the hangar?) the winch cable was released by a fitter sending one refurbished Gnome falling three feet onto the hangar floor. It was said that you could hear the expletives half a mile away!

Never Volunteer – by Richard Castle

Never volunteer

Webmasters Note: Another one from Richards collection for which I am grateful

Now memory being what it is, I can't quite remember when this took place at Lossie; But it is true. Again, being a young J/T placed on shift with wizened old Sgt's and Chiefs, Castle seemed to be volunteered for just about anything. Mind you, in youth one feels quite invulnerable or should that be gullible.

Now a new type of stretcher was delivered to us with an invitation to see how well it would work. It consisted of the conventional 2 aluminium poles and 4 strops and a bit of canvas to lay the patient on, similar to an ambulance job. This would then be attached onto the winch wire and hoisted away into the blue yonder. I believe that the idea was to make it easier to get the patient into said stretcher than either the usual strop or bamboo fully secured unit. If you have ever been in one of those, that is a real experience on helplessness!

Anyway, there is, as you can imagine, only one way to test such a unit and that is with a "live" patient and as usual Castle was to be that patient! So, once again., I stood (well laid) patiently on the pan for the kite to get airborne do a quick twirl, lower the hook and pick me up along with the winch-man who was to "do" the biz. Well, this was not the first time I had done this type of thing, so no great scare there, but it was the first time I had ever been placed on an open stretcher with only a winchie steadying it.

So, with a couple of tons on Whirlwind hovering above us, the hook was sent down to us, clipped onto the stretcher and winchie and away we flew into the air. Now I have to admit that I liked being on the wire, the views were superb and one always had a great feeling of freedom, it's just a pity that I never took any photo's of the experience but photography was hardly encouraged on RAF stations was it! Anyway, there I am 50 foot above ther ground and 20 foot below the chopper with the winchie steadying me when the bloody thing tilts to the side, rolling me onto my front .

Imagine the view and the sensation, to my right side a piece of canvas, to the left 2 of the strops supporting the stretcher and below....nothing, bugger all! 50 foot of space and just 2 bits of wire digging into my legs and chest saving me from being a real casualty! Now the Nav was doing what the Nav's do best, reeling in the wire whilst looking out of the door admiring whatever Nav's admire, when this bit of metal and canvas arrived at the door with a J/T trying to evacuate himself from more than just the stretcher! After duly being dumped into the cabin, we returned to Terra Firma, where I was asked my opinion on the ride from a casualties point of view. Needless to say I responded in the negative.

Oh! Does anyone remember changing wheels or cleaning the belly off with WD40 with a kite in the hover? Or should I once again suffer from loss of memory for another 30 years.

I think I heard about that one Richard. I think it's a story that should be told. (Webmaster)

Guardian Angel – by Pete Fuller

GUARDIAN ANGEL

Gas Rig BP Alpha & Whirlwind10 XD165					
Date	**Type**	**Pilot**	**Crew**	**Mission**	**Hours**
20 Feb 1972	WW10 XD 165	Self	Master Nav Dedman Flt Sgt Danes Flt Lt Eley	Scramble Leconfield to BP Alpha	0.8
20 Feb 1972	WW10 XD 165	Self	Master Nav Dedman Flt Sgt Danes Flt Lt Eley	BP Alpha to BP Alpha WX, Tail Rotor, DECCA	1.0
21 Feb 1972	WW10 XD 165	Self	Master Nav Dedman Flt Sgt Danes	BP Alpha to Leconfield	0.9

The Background
The above are entries from the log book of Captain Peter Fuller, Canadian Armed Forces pilot on exchange posting with 202 Sqn, RAF, at Leconfield, Yorkshire. The crew are Master Navigator Ron Dedman (Navigator), Flight Sergeant Bob Danes (Winchman) and Flight Lieutenant Tony Eley (Medical Officer);.
To merely list names and trades does not do justice to the men involved. If I had to pick my crew for a dirty job, I could not have done better. It is easy to separate the cream from the milk; the hard part is picking the best part of the cream. 202 Squadron was fortunate in having excellent cream.

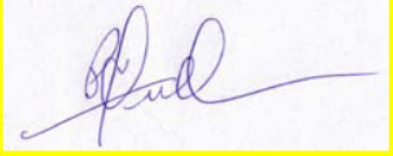
The Story
We were doing our normal 24 hours on duty, 15 minutes to airborne, standby at B Flight RAF Leconfield. The weather was at its usual February ugliness with a 300 to 400 foot ceiling and a reasonable 2 to 3 miles visibility under it. The cloud cover was thick and there was a low 500 to 600 foot freezing level.
To add to the "soup" occasional rain showers were present. In short, a typical Yorkshire winter afternoon. Late in the afternoon, the scramble bell goes. Ron grabs the red phone and Bob and I head for the Whirlwind to get cranked up. It turns out to be a call from a trawler to pick up a seaman that has collapsed.
There is a short delay as we wait for Tony, the duty doctor, to join us as we may need his services. Everyoneand everything is finally on board so we are off. The position is some 30 to 40 NM ENE of BP Alpha. No big problem here; I decide that we will proceed to BP Alpha, refuel and then head for the ship. We have about 1hr 45min to sunset, not that we can see the sun, but it will become a factor as the mission progresses. Ron is up front with me working on our DECCA track and it is a dirty, grey, low level run all the way to BP Alpha.
We have contacted the RCC at Pitreavie and told them of our decision to refuel and they have alerted the rig. They are also trying to make contact with a Shackleton on patrol over the North Sea; be nice to have him around in this rain reduced visibility to find the ship on its radar and give us its position. About 40 minutes into the flight BP Alpha looms out of the grey and we make a normal landing on its helideck. JP4 is taken on board, the books are signed off, we start up and are on our way again. Night time is 30 minutes away.
As we head in the direction of the ship's last position, Ron is having problems with the DECCA; not to worry, experience has shown that it will misbehave for a few minutes after being on a metal platform. Bob is trying unsuccessfully to contact the ship. Tony is mentally preparing himself for the upcoming winch ride, treatment and evacuation. My stomach is knotting up a little as darkness approaches, the weather gets worse and the tail rotor starts to "twitch" the helicopter 5 to 10 degrees left and right as I put pressure on the pedals.
Feels like it is jamming and then releasing. We keep trying to contact the Shackleton or the trawler; no response from either. Ron is really having his doubts about the DECCA; it does not appear to be working at all.
Ron has been keeping a dead reckoning plot as he continues trying to get the DECCA to work. The tail rotor is really giving me problems now; jerking us up to 15 degrees left and right. Tried to climb up to 300 to 400 feet a couple of times and met with thick cloud and icing. Enough of that; get back down to 100 feet. We do not need icing on top of all the other problems. We are in the dark now, 30 minutes from BP Alpha. My stomach is hurting!
We are without a navaid. The tail rotor is making precise instrument flying impossible. There is no sign of the ship and no contact with it. Can't even get hold of the Shackleton for some help.
A difficult choice has to be made right now: do I press on and risk the lives and aircraft entrusted to me to help a man on a ship that we cannot locate, or do I turn tail and get back at least to Alpha? My mind is made up, as there is only one right action to take; we are going back to Alpha.
Although I can't recall precise details, it sticks in my mind that we did not, at this time, have sufficient fuel to make it back to the coast. We had planned to do the pickup, return to the Alpha to refuel and then head directly to the hospital at Grimsby. Ron, a truly professional navigator, had been working calmly on his DR plot and gave me a heading for Alpha. The helicopter twitched its way around to the course as best I could force it and settled down for the anticipated 20 to 30 minute fight. Visibility was lousy. Night was hard upon us now and we had no more than a mile visibility. A ragged, rain filled ceiling still there at 300 to 400 feet, but at least we were clear of the clouds down here at 100 feet and not getting iced up. Smooth control is a thing of the past. Talk about a quiet crew. No jokes or asides on this trip! I have often wondered about our collective private thoughts on this bloody awful part of this mission. We should be getting close to Alpha; everyone is keeping their eyes out for the lights. Bob has talked to them on the PYE radio and they are aware of us coming back. Nothing but blackness. Not even one of the ten or so wells around Alpha can be seen.
A new player enters the game. Ron and the Shackleton have made contact! Man, I was not aware that my guardian angel had 4 engines and 8 contra-rotating props. Ron passes our most probable position and, after what seems like an eternity, the Shackleton Navigator says that he thinks he has us on radar and asks for a 20 degree

get us pointed to Alpha which is some 7 or 8 miles away. A historical foot note is in order here. The exact number of degrees in the left turn and the distance are blurred with age. Rest assured, though, that we were going to miss the Alpha on our own. Would we have made the shore? I cannot truthfully say. Memory and the need for a good story plot play havoc with real fact. After another eternity, the lights of Alpha show up. My turn now; I key the microphone to express my sincerest thanks to the Shackleton crew. The conversation went something like this:
Me:;"Kilo Alpha November 23, this is Rescue 165. Thanks for the timely help".
Nav:;"Rescue 165, Kilo Alpha November 23. You're welcome; glad to have been of assistance".
Pilot:;"That Pete Fuller?"
Me:;"Yes, Sir"
Pilot:;"Ralph D'Andrea"
Me:;"Thanks, Ralph"
A little tightness in the throat after that exchange: then we get our act together and land on BP Alpha. We stayed on Alpha overnight, and the damned thing moved all night! This was blatantly obvious the next morning as I watched the pan of water used for poaching eggs and it was up to a sea state seven. My hand grips are permanently dented into the railing on the perforated steel plank stairs from the helicopter deck down some ten steps to the crew quarters. The fact that we were 100 feet off the water with nothing between me and the North Sea but ¼ inch of metal may have had something to do with it.
The man we had set out to pick up was safely carried back to Grimsby by his ship and proved to have no major medical problems. The tail rotor bearings were worn in an out-of-round fashion which caused them to stick and release. The 45 minute flight back to Leconfield in weak but welcome winter sunshine was a much easier trip.

The History
Ralph D'Andrea and I joined the RCAF as course mates on 5415 in the Autumn of 1954. I did my pilot training at Penhold in Alberta and he did his at Claresholm in Alberta. Ralph and I then both served as Harvard instructors and good friends at Penhold for four years. As things turned out he did not get his permanent commission, so a few years later joined the RAF. I next met Ralph in 1969 in the Officers' Mess at RAF Lyneham while I was Ops Officer for a joint RCAF/RAF operation and we got caught up in old times. Ralph was working out of RAF St Mawgan with Coastal Command. He was in the Lyneham area and decided to drop into the Mess for a quick pint. Ask me if I believe in co-incidence. We went to Salisbury the next day to see another old course mate, Stu Laing, but that's another story . . .

The Payback
I now jump ahead to D-Day + 50 years; 6th June 1994. Ralph D'Andrea telephones me on the way to Vernon, just north of our retirement home in Kelowna, BC, and promised to drop in for coffee. Well, after we get talking, Ralph and his wife Cathy decide to spend the night. Four steaks are barbecued to perfection with Marie's "scratch" Caesar Salad and a bottle of "special occasion" 1986 Chateauneuf du Pape duly marked the occasion and the sincerest personal "Thanks" on behalf of me and Ron and Bob and Tony was finally made 22 years after the event. A debt has been partially paid for saving a Whirlwind and its crew from a possible cold North Sea swim on a lousy winter night. Thanks again. Ralph. Guardian Angels don't have 4 engines and 8 contra-rotating props. They are flesh and blood and I now know for certain that one of them lives in Lethbridge, Alberta.
The Final Chapter
A phone call from Sid Popham, another course mate, who is retired in Comox, BC, on the morning of 10 April 1996 passes on the sad news that Ralph has succumbed to cancer - a constant companion of his for several years. No doubt in my mind - Ralph has joined an elite corps of Guardian Angels. I look forward to his tenure and anticipate his watchful eye looking out for all of those whose lives he touched and all of those he loved.

Sleep well and without pain, my good friend.



Guardian Angel
This article has been mirrored here from the Home Page of the 202 Squadron Association through Tony

Death by Friendly Fire - the story of Flt Sgt. R. Laverty, 202 Squadron
By John Mulholland

In the 1991 Gulf war there was an incident of a US warplane mistakenly killing British ground troops. In the fog of war death by friendly fire is

more frequent than most people imagine. This is the story of one such incident concerning my uncle, Flt Sgt. Robert Laverty, aged 18, who was killed along with his nine crew members in November 1942.

Robert Anthony Laverty was born on 2 January 1924 in Moy. Co. Tyrone. He was the fifth of eight children born to Robert and Sarah Laverty. The Laverty family were well known as international horse dealers and breeders. The family had supplied horses to European armies for over 100 years including some of those used by the Light Brigade in the Crimea. Robert Laverty (senior) with his brother had travelled to Russia before the First World War to sell horses to the Czar for his Imperial Cavalry.

However, family fortunes changed dramatically in July 1921 when the Laverty brothers entered into an agreement with John Panagolopolous and Co of Athens who were contractors to the Greek Government. The agreement was to supply 3000 horses for the Greek Army. Two lots were shipped and paid for but the final lot was held up because of a disagreement between the contractor and the Greek Government.

This resulted in the Laverty family having to pay all their creditors without receiving payment themselves. Despite long legal battles the case was never resolved and the Laverty family faced severe financial difficulties for the following 30 years. It was in this uncertain financial environment that young Robert Laverty grew up. He was a lively child and had a love of animals and anything mechanical. After attending Aughanlig school he transferred to Armagh College in 1938.

In April 1940 Robert decided to run away from school to join the RAF. He enlisted in the RAFVR at Padigate on 22 April 1940, aged 16, as an Schools of Tactical Training, Robert qualified as Flight Mechanic Airframes (AC2) and was posted to 35 Squadron on 20 December 1940 at Linton-on-Ouse. In the previous month the Squadron had been reformed as the first Halifax Squadron and introduced the aircraft into operational service, flying its first night raid on 10 March 1941. The Squadron was commanded by Leonard Cheshire between January and April 1941. While Robert was serving at Linton-on-Ouse, 35 Squadron and 76 Squadron based at Middleton St. George, both flying Halifax bombers, took part in a daylight raid on the German battleship Scharnhorst. The attacking force consisted of 15 aircraft, nine from 35 Squadron and six from 76 Squadron. One Halifax achieved five direct hits on the Scharnhorst before being shot down. Four Halifaxes were lost in the raid but they shot down four German fighters. The raid took place on 24 July 1941.

A Catalina flies over Gibraltar in 1942.The airstrip is middle left and Catalina can be seen bottom left outside a hangar.
(IWM CM6239)

After a year with 35 Squadron Robert was transferred to 1652 Unit (Marston Moor) on 31 December 1941. On 7 February he was posted to Tactical Training Unit at Abbotsinch and to No. 9 Air Gunnery School (Llandwrog) and No. 9 AFU (Hulavington) on 13 June 1942.

All these postings were for aircrew training. On 13 June he was promoted to Flight Sergeant and qualified as an Air Gunner. Five days later Robert finally joined 235 Squadron of Coastal Command flying Beaufighters VI's from Docking in Norfolk. The Beaufighters were used for attacking shipping off the Dutch coast. Between June and October the Squadron records show no sign of Robert taking place in any operations with the Squadron.

Robert no doubt must have felt some relief in getting a new posting to 202 Squadron based in Gibraltar. He joined the Squadron on 18 October during the preparation stages for the Allied invasion of North Africa - `Operation Torch' 202 Squadron were flying Catalina flying boats from Gibraltar on anti-submarine patrols, escorting the main convoys sailing from the UK to North Africa.

The Squadron records show that Robert flew a total of seven sorties between joining the Squadron and his death on 20 November. All sorties were antisubmarine patrols escorting convoys either in the Atlantic or Mediterranean. On 5 November, on a 10 hour flight the Catalina was escorting convoy UGF 1 from the USA, making its way to the landing beaches off Casablanca. The flight details noted: "Diverted to search for missing corvette Cowslip standing by, two damaged Merchant Vessels. Nothing sighted".

The longest sortie was on 8 November 1942 - the day of the Torch landings. Robert's aircraft took off from Gibraltar at 0153 and landed back at base at 1808. During the day they circled the invasion force which was landing at Algiers. On the 11 November they carried out similar duties off Oran.

On the 14 November Robert's Catalina was detailed to escort a convoy; but by the time they reached the rendezvous position the convoy had dispersed because of a U-boat attack. Instead they escorted a damaged merchant vessel
and escorted it to safety.

This Catalina (AH562) has acquired No. 413 Squadron code AX when moored in Gibraltar harbour. Several squadrons supplied aircraft for attachment to 202 Squadron (IWM CM2307)

The last fateful flight of Catalina K202 began on 20 November 1942. The Catalina took off on what should have been a routine anti-submarine patrol escorting a convoy en-route from Greenock to Oran. The convoy KMS-3 sailed from the Clyde on 8 November. There were 53 ships in the convoy in 11 columns, escorted by 12 corvettes and sloops. The convoy proceeded without incident until 0910 in position 35^{o} 55'N-10^{o} 14'W steaming at 7 knots when two merchant vessels SS Grange Park (5132 tonnes) and SS Prins Harold were hit by
torpedoes from a U-boat (U263). The U-boat had fired a total of four torpedoes: the first was caught in the nets of one of the convoy ships and exploded without damage. At 0907 the second one struck the SS Prins Harold, the third torpedo missed and the fourth hit the SS Grange Park at 0910.

Twenty minutes before the U-boat attack Robert's Catalina had reached the convoy and was circling at a range of two miles. The last minutes of the Catalina were graphically reported by an eye witness, Pilot Officer D. R. Higgin of 32 (F) Squadron who watched the incident from one of the escort corvettes, HMS Fowey:

HMS Fowey
21 November 1942

DESTRUCTION OF CATALINA FLYING BOAT

At 0850 approx. on 20.11.42 an aircraft identified by me as a Catalina, approached the convoy at a height of about 1000', and proceeded to orbit at a range of about 2 miles. At 0910 when the first of 2 ships was torpedoed, the aircraft was astern of the convoy. It turned to starboard, and flew on the same course as the convoy, approaching to within a mile of the left hand edge. A corvette positioned astern and to the left of the convoy, threw out depth charges causing spouts of water. The aircraft at once changed course, passed over or near the corvette, and headed for the left hand edge of the convoy losing height to about 700'. As it crossed the first ships, turning away to port, a cannon or Oerlikon in the centre opened fire. Immediately, a barrage of light and heavy flak was sent up by all the ships in the vicinity. The Catalina was hit at once, the port motor streaming vapour. Making a fairly rapid turn to starboard and signalling violently with lamp, the aircraft closed motors and attempted to glide to the rear of the convoy. Hit repeatedly by continuous and very heavy fire, it burst into full flames before spinning into the sea from about 2-300 feet. Striking the water the Catalina disintegrated in heavy explosion. A few pieces of small wreckage, two deflated dinghies, and an oxygen bottle was all that remained. There were no survivors. Note: At no time was the flying boat fired upon by an vessel of the Royal Navy.

D. R. Higgin (signed)
Pilot Officer 128368 R.A.F
32 (F) Squadron

It is interesting to note that eyewitness made it clear that it was the Merchant Navy and not the Royal Navy who were responsible for the destruction of the Catalina. The Senior Officer on HMS Fowey Lieutenant Commander R. M. Aubrey issued the following report condemning the action of the merchant navy as "pathetic":

The Master of Grange Park stated that the ship was struck in No. 5 hold and waste flooded from the engine room aft. All the crew were saved and unhurt with the exception of four who were presumed killed by the explosion. No torpedo tracks were seen. All Confidential Books were destroyed before leaving. Immediately after the torpedoing, a Catalina Flying boat flew within 1500 years of the convoy and was promptly shot down in flames and exploded on hitting the water. There were no survivors. An eye-witness account prepared by Pilot Officer D. R. Higgin R.A.F, who watched this episode throughout is attached. The volume of fire produced by the merchant ships was most formidable, and it is pathetic that their alertness and good marksmanship should have met with such a tragic result.
When Fowey was passing through the columns to regain station one merchant ship asked "Was it bombs or torpedoes?" I am convinced many
ships though that the casualties had been caused by bombs from the Catalina which to them was just an aircraft.

X marks the spot where Robert's Catalina was shot down

The Commanding Officer of HMS Black Swan in his report was only mildly critical of the Merchant Navy:

Loss of Catalina

At the convoy conference the masters had been impressed with the need of offensive action as an alternative to premature abandonment and this produced a remarkable effect. Our sweeps through and in this vicinity of the convoy were enlivened by Oerlikon fire in all directions and blasts and ricochets from merchant ships' heavy calibre. Fortunately no surface vessel was hit, but when the escorting Catalina nosed in close and Lunnenburg's depth charges exploded under her, she was promptly shot down in flames by very accurate A.A. fire from the convoy. She exploded on hitting the surface and to our deep regret there were no survivors. The A.A. gunnery was a great credit to HMS staff but it appears that instruction in recognition is inadequate.

Instead he reserved his wrath for the lack of good drill by HMS Campion:

The A/S equipment disposition had done all that could be asked of them in that the U boat was detected and classified by Campion in good time before it fired it's torpedoes. It was due to bad drill in Campion and the commanding Officer's deplorable lack of decision that the U-boat was able to break through and complete its attack before being interfered with.

The U-boat was first detected at about 0900. Non-sub echoes are not uncommon in this area, and some delay in classification was to be expected, but after the decision to attack had been made, the run in completed, Campion was guilty of a disastrous breakdown in drill when she failed to get her pattern off. What is incomprehensible, however, is that, having failed to fire at the correct moment, Campion did not get her charges off as soon as possible afterwards in order to provide some hindrance to a U-boat now only a few hundred yards form the advancing convoy; instead she ran out to 1500 yards and embarked upon a deliberate "copybook" attack, which had finally to be broken off to avoid collision with the first torpedoed ship.

The Merchant Navy and Campion were not the only target for criticism. The Master of Grange Park which was sunk in the attack, concluded his report:

> There were 53 ships in this convoy all capable of making 10 knots or over with the exception of two ships which could only do 7 knots. Consequently the speed of the whole convoy was kept at 7 knots. I do not consider that the convoy should have been made to slow down to 7 knots on account of these two slow ships.

The Squadron record book shows that another Catalina from 202 Squadron was in the vicinity and saw the destruction of K202: 20th/11 Catalina T/210 (F/L Driffield, F/L Blake) a/c on a/s sweep to West. At 1025 two M/Vs of Convoy KMS3 were seen to 0754 blow up in position 3601N1038W and immediately afterwards Catalina K/202 was seen to fall into the sea in flames after being hit by A/A fire from MVs. A/c joined in hunt for U/boat but nothing sighted. alg 1720.

0740 Catalina K/202 (F/O O'Connor, P/O Campbell, P/O Macarthur, F/O Pollock) a/c on a/s escort to Convoy KMS3. Personnel lost. See above.
The Malta Memorial, Malta

Robert Laverty's name on the Malta Memorial. His crew member, Flt. Sgt. R. A. Tiffen can also be seen top right.

Robert Laverty's name on the war memorial in the village square, Moy, Co. Tyrone. The memorial was located in front of his home which was later destroyed in an IRA bombing in the 1970s.

Robert Anthony Laverty remembered on grave of his parents in the Roman Catholic parish church, Moy, Co. Tyrone. The inscription gives his age as 19 but he was killed aged 18.

The perished crew of Catalina K202 was:
F/O WB O'Connor (Captain)
P/O AL Campbell
F/O HK Pollock
P/O DA MacArthur
Flt. Sgt. AF Fletcher
Flt. Sgt. IW Drywood
Flt. Sgt. RA Laverty
Flt. Sgt. J Sanderson
Flt. Sgt. RA Tiffen
Flt. Sgt. JL O'Rorke

Robert Laverty and his crew members are remembered on the 202 Squadron Roll of Honour Board and on the Malta Memorial. Robert Laverty is also mentioned on the grave of his parents and on the war memorial both of which are in his home village of Moy. Co. Tyrone. His medals were the 1939/45 Star, Atlantic Star and War Medal.

The U-boat involved in the attack, U263, survived the events of the 20 November 1942 to be sunk by a mine in the Bay of Biscay on 20 January 1944.

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