



202 Squadron Association

www.202-sqn-assoc.co.uk

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NEWSLETTER

Gibraltar Revisited

I was one of a very excited group of some forty people of the 202 Squadron Association that boarded the British Airways Flight 6902 on 17 October 2003 en route for a three-day reunion at Gibraltar. As we approached the Rock, all eyes were seeking that first glimpse of the familiar shape to loom out of the cloud. The weather was appropriate to the occasion and familiar to all Coastal Command crews who made landfall after more than eighteen hours of anti-U-boat patrols in mid-Atlantic: ceiling seven hundred feet, and visibility half a mile in heavy rain showers. The only difference was that our flight from Gatwick to Gibraltar lasted only two and a half hours instead of the twelve and a half hours it took in 1943. Our wartime stately procession at 85 knots down the 10 degree line of longitude was designed to keep us well clear of marauding 88's in the Bay of Biscay.

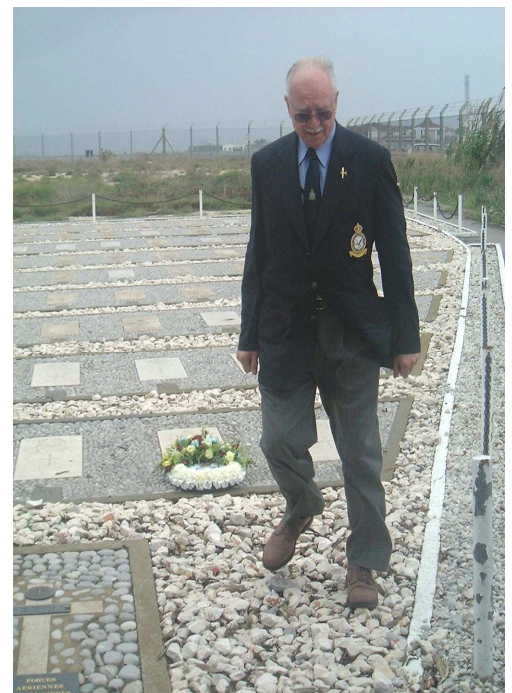
After the formal dinner on Saturday evening when the port had been passed, not once, not twice, but three times, the evening settled down to some serious swapping of experiences. My story of George Foot's glide landings inside the harbour in a Saro London was hard to top.

The next day we assembled in The King's Chapel to attend the service in commemoration of the Battle of Trafalgar and were delighted to find we outnumbered the Royal Navy contingent and were honoured by the Naval Chaplain who spoke of the special role played by 202 squadron in a later war. A moving part of the service was the reading of Nelson's Prayer, written before the battle:

"May the great God whom I worship, grant to my country, and for the benefit of Europe in General, a great and glorious victory; and may no misconduct in anyone tarnish it; and may humanity after victory be the predominant feature of the British Fleet. For myself individually, I commit my life to him who made me, and may his blessing alight on my endeavours for serving my country favourably. To him I resign myself and the just cause which is entrusted to me to defend."

As we listened to those words we recalled our memories of comrades who, like Lord Nelson, gave their lives for a similar just cause. The service concluded with a hymn for those in peril on the sea. A different age, but with so many parallels.

After the Chapel service we gathered at the Gibraltar Cemetery where I was honoured to be asked to lay a wreath on the grave of Corporal Luck, one of our ground crew, who, like many of our comrades, lies at rest on a foreign shore.



As our return flight banked over Algeiras Bay we had our last glimpse of Point Tarifa, our point of departure on so many wartime patrols -- and a fitting conclusion to a memorable weekend.

Alan Robertson

Memories of 202 Squadron (1939-1945)

Prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, 202 Squadron was based at Kalafrana, Malta. It consisted of six Saunders-Roe London flying boats, with a strength of six crews. Each crew had its own aircraft and major overhauls were carried out at the base. In September, when war broke out, the Squadron was moved to Gibraltar, except that the major maintenance remained in Malta. The aircraft were moored inside the harbour and the officers were housed in the commandeered Bristol Hotel at the top of the Rock, and a large Buick ferried pilots to and from Squadron Headquarters.

Normal take-offs and landings were carried out in the Bay of Algeciras, but when the sea was rough take-offs were made toward the harbour entrance. Landings in the harbour were tricky. Turning over North Point, pilots would head west, about fifty to a hundred feet above the houses, speed depending on the remaining fuel load, but as best as I can remember was about seventy to seventy-five knots. A turn to port to face the harbour entrance, and a glide landing was made in that relatively short alighting area. Night landings were always made in the Bay, the flare path consisting of a pinnacle towing three or four lighted buoys.

The first war casualty involved an airman, who could not swim, falling off a mainplane whilst the aircraft was at buoy in the harbour. He was pulled out as soon as possible, but efforts to resuscitate him were in vain. The second casualty event occurred during a reconnaissance of Casablanca. When France fell, the French Mediterranean Fleet escaped through the Straits of Gibraltar and made for Casablanca. Two Canadians were given the task of reconnoitring Casablanca: Flight Lieutenant McCallum, captain, and Pilot Officer Henderson, second pilot. We did not know at the time that the French air base at Casablanca had opted to join the Vichy Government and thus were hostile. We never heard of Flt Lt McCallum's crew again, and it was considered that they must have been shot down by the renegade French.

The Squadron was commanded by Wing Commander Teddy ("Woof-woof") Blake. Flt Lt Harger was senior pilot, and George Foot was his second dicky. When Harger was promoted in early 1940, he became Squadron Leader (Operations), and George Foot became captain of their aircraft L7038. P/O Johnny Levine was his second pilot. Another senior pilot was Flt Lt Eagleton, who became a BOAC pilot after the war. When France fell, Malta came under German attack, and the maintenance unit for 202 Squadron aircraft had to be abandoned. It was then necessary to fly to the flying-boat base at Plymouth, Devon, for major overhauls. Flt Lt Harger and George Foot started on the first flight, at night, to avoid enemy fighters over the Bay of Biscay. The met. forecast had not predicted a strong inversion caused by a Sirocco blowing from the African desert and the flight was soon abandoned when cylinder-head temperatures reached unacceptable limits. The weather was better the next night and, after twelve hours, they reached Plymouth. Fuel was carried in the overhead tank on top of the hull, and was transferred by hand-operated wobble pump, each member of the crew taking turn.

At the start of the North African campaign, there was no runway at Gibraltar. General Staff Officers would arrive in Royal Navy vessels joining Force H and George Foot ferried many of them to African ports such as Algiers, Bougie, Oran, and (before France fell) to Bizert. Eventually, the construction of the runway at Gibraltar enabled aircraft to stage and bring reinforcements to support the Allies and to secure North Africa paving the way for the invasion of Sicily and Italy.

George Foot

George Foot completed the Specialist Navigation Course in 1942, was promoted to Squadron Leader and served as Chief Instructor at 31 G.R. School, Charlottetown, before returning to 202 Squadron at Lough Erne, where he was Squadron Leader (Operations) from 1944 until June 1945 when the Squadron was disbanded. After the war, George qualified as a Russian interpreter and the early Fifties found him working in intelligence as British Air Attaché in Budapest before returning to flying duties as Commanding Officer of Coastal Command's Gunnery School, Leconfield, where he flew the Lincoln and the Vampire -- the latter his all time favourite aircraft. He returned to intelligence work in 1956/57, serving in Potsdam, and acting as escort to the Russian Delegation to the Farnborough Air Show. He was offered the position of Air Attaché in Moscow, but opted for early retirement in January 1959, with the rank of Group Captain.

Life on 202

It only seems like a couple of weeks since the fantastic if slightly damp reunion in Gibraltar and now we're full steam ahead for the May reunion here at sunny Leconfield.

In the period since the last newsletter, personnel on 202 Squadron continue to be as busy as ever. As always, I will describe some of the more prominent rescues that the Squadron has carried out as well as discussing other detachments and activities in which the Squadron has been involved.

Search and Rescue Incidents

Morecambe Bay tragedy

In co-operation with C Flt 22 Squadron at RAF Valley, E Flt 202 Squadron worked throughout the night during the tragedy that occurred at Morecambe Bay on 5 February 2004.

A Flt Boulmer

One of the incidents of note involving A Flt happened during the recent flooding. A white van containing 2 people had become stuck in a ford. The winchman, Squadron Training Officer Mark Stevens, was filmed by a police helicopter and subsequently shown on television as he was winched out. He balanced himself precariously using his knee and the wing mirror and recovered both casualties via the driver's window.

D Flt Lossiemouth

D Flt at Lossiemouth were recently scrambled to 2 crag fast climbers on Ben Nevis. The survivors were roped together approximately 40 feet apart. The aircraft was very heavy as the crew were scrambled at the beginning of a training sortie and they had to jettison fuel en route to the climber's location. Fort William Police relayed instructions from the crew to the survivors by phone and both climbers were picked up in quick succession. They were delivered safe and well to Fort William MRT at West End Park.

E Flt Leconfield

E Flt had a busy day in early February. During the morning they were scrambled to a person in the River Humber. Arriving on scene in a matter of minutes they quickly located the woman clinging to a pier. Unable to winch out to her exact location, Sgt Rob Linfoot was winched in to the water and remaining attached to the wire swam under the pier to recover the woman and accompany her back to the aircraft safe and well.

Later that night, they were scrambled again in fog to a ferry carrying a passenger with a suspected spinal injury. Using the Sea King to its full potential, the crew let down to the vessel using the internal radar and automatic transition equipment, eventually locating the vessel, the Duke of Scandinavia, using Night Vision Goggles. The conditions were so foggy that whilst hovering over the back of the vessel to deploy the winchman, only the rear half of the ship was visible. The casualty was taken to hospital and expected to make a full recovery.

202 Sqn Longsar

Personnel from Lossiemouth and Boulmer have visited units in Canada and America respectively and plans are in place for Leconfield crews to visit SAR units in Italy and Norway this summer. Long Sar is a chance for UK SAR crews to exchange ideas and techniques with other military SAR agencies. Of particular interest was the visit by Lossiemouth personnel to Comax in Canada. Comax is the home of the Cormorant OCU, the SAR version of the Merlin. As a potential successor to the Sea King it was very interesting for RAF aircrew to be given the chance to fly in the Cormorant and witness at first hand the benefits and drawbacks of operating such a large helicopter in the SAR role. They also visited the Rescue Coordination Centre in Vancouver.

Project Constant Endeavour Dedication Service – 16 Mar 04

A Service of Dedication for Project CONSTANT ENDEAVOUR took place on the 16 March 2004, at Westminster Abbey. Her Majesty the Queen accompanied by His Royal Highness Prince Phillip unveiled the coastal command memorial, before a short service led by the Bishop to the Armed Forces. As one of 7 active Squadrons with a Coastal Command background, the 202 Squadron standard was pre-positioned in the Abbey and OC 202 Squadron, Wg Cdr Garden attended the service.

May Reunion

That is all for now, I hope this short article has provided an insight into what Squadron personnel have been up to during the last few months. I look forward to seeing you all at the May reunion.

Tim Brookes

[Tim has also provided an insight to what happens on the Falkland Islands detachments; I have held it over to the next issue. Ed.]



The original caption on this was: "National Take Your Child to Work Day". Any better ideas?

202 SQUADRON RAF HISTORY PROJECT

At the 202 Squadron Association Reunion held at Gibraltar in October 2003 it was suggested that I compile an anecdotal history of the Squadron from the time of its inception in 1918 until the present -- a kind of collective memory. A working title might be "Fear not sea rising, nor sky clouding." I see the book as having five sections with headings such as:

The Naval Legacy
The Flying Boat years
Convoys and U-Boats
The Weather Men
The Rotary Wing Era

I should be glad to receive contributions from those who served with 202, or from relatives who may have letters or photographs. Please do not send original documents, but I should be glad to receive copies, either by e-mail or by postal service to:

FINANCE CORNER-----££££££££

The 202 Squadron Association Bank Account has, as at 1 March 2004, a balance of £4561.

After all the accounts were settled the Gibraltar Reunion Account had a credit balance of £454. The Committee decided to make a donation of £100 to Project 'Constant Endeavour'--the Coastal Command Tribute. The remaining £354 has been put towards the costs of the 2004 Reunion at Leconfield.

18 Mar 04

Brian Tanner

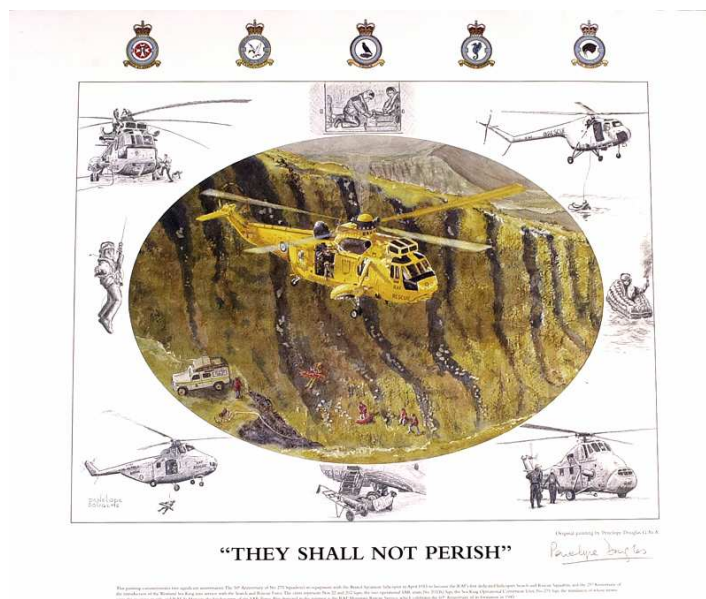
Deaths

We regret that we have heard of the deaths of two members in the past period:

John McCubbin died on 6th December from a heart attack. Although he was on medication, it was sudden and he was in no pain.

Arthur Cross died peacefully at home on 4th January after suffering from cancer for a number of years.

“THEY SHALL NOT PERISH”



In April 1953, No 275 Squadron became the first dedicated Search and Rescue squadron in the UK armed forces. Equipped with the Bristol Sycamore helicopter, the squadron opened what has since become a proud and distinguished chapter in the history of the Royal Air Force.

Another event in the history of Search and Rescue took place in 1977, with the introduction to service of the Westland Sea King helicopter. The Sea King has now served with distinction for 25 years and the air and ground crews that fly and support the aircraft have made an outstanding contribution to arguably the most significant element of the current national Search and Rescue effort.

It was considered by the SAR Force Executives that a commemorative painting would be a fitting way to mark both these events, and to that end Miss Penelope Douglas was commissioned to paint a Sea King undertaking a rescue. 22 Sqn A Flt provided an aircraft and the exercise was carried out with the co-operation of St Athan Mountain Rescue Team. Inclusion of the MRT also acknowledged the 60th Anniversary of the RAF Mountain Rescue Service that will be celebrated in November 2003. To complete the painting, Penelope included pencil sketches around the border to depict the four types of SAR helicopter used over the years, and everyday scenes from the day-to-day life of a SAR Flight.

The original painting now hangs in the anteroom of the St Mawgan Officers' Mess. However a number of prints were acquired and are now available for sale at a cost of £12.50 including postage and packing.

Chairman's Report.

When I was a young boy, I remember my father telling me that as I got older time would seem to fly by. I also remember thinking he was bound to be wrong – after all, each hour still had 60 minutes and each day 24 hours.....

Well, fathers are always right! It seems a very short time since many of us were experiencing the hospitality of Gibraltar's hostilities and the welcome of 'Four Corners' Mess and yet here we are, arranging this year's reunion at Leconfield already!

Before looking forward to this year's function, I'd like to look back on Gibraltar and pay tribute to ALL those who worked tirelessly behind the scenes to make the event to success it was; thank you all.

Now for this year. The PMC of the Officers Mess has once again graciously allowed us to use his Mess facilities to have what is fast becoming an Association tradition of the 'country house weekend' (This year, however, be aware that there are some 'living-in' officers in the Mess so unlike earlier years we may not have the Mess to ourselves). We start on the evening of Friday 30 April with a 'meet and greet' over a beer or two in the bar – blotting paper in the shape of a curry will be provided!

Saturday will be our AGM, a visit to the Flight, possibly a visit to a local attraction, followed by our formal dinner (Black Tie). After a leisurely breakfast on Sunday we disperse for another year!

Finally, a simple request which will make life so much easier for your committee – *Please* return your reunion booking forms ASAP; we may become limited for space at the dinner so first come, first served!

Notes from the Sec

The membership is still on the increase with new members being referred on a regular basis either through word of mouth or through our website.

The payment of Subs is starting to cause a concern with some members forgetting to part with the dosh (some 30%) – could I ask that all members pay within the year that it is due so that the administration is made earlier – from now on – no payment – no membership benefits.

At the back of the newsletter, you will find details of the British Veterans Recognition Card. They will give 10% of any fees received back to the Association just by you entering our unique Referral Code of "AF/202/1" on the bottom right hand side of the form.

Remember to let me know if any of your details have changed (including emails) as I get quite a few letters and emails returned undeliverable.

See you at Leconfield.

Letters and items for publication are very welcome—in fact they are really wanted. If you don't want to write it, just let me have your idea and I'll do it myself or (more likely) farm it out. Because we use photo-copying for the "hard copy" versions of the Newsletter, photographs can be disappointing. Items from the Squadron's recent (helicopter) history will be particularly welcome.

The Flight Shop

The A Flight Shop has a lot of very attractive items of Squadron Memorabilia that are available to Association members.

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| 202 Squadron Plaque | £24.00 * |
| 202 Squadron Embroidered Badge | £4.00 |
| Sea King Enamel Badge | £3.00 |
| Large Sea King Print | £2.00 |
| Sea King Mountains Print | £1.00 |
| Sea King Postcard Print | £0.25 |
| Tankard | £15.00* |
| Pen | £0.40 |
| Key Ring | £1.00 |
| 202 Squadron Sticker | £0.50 |
| RAF Crest – Enamel Badge | £3.00 |
| Bookmark | £1.00 |
| 202 Squadron Crest Enamel Badge | £3.00 |
| Sea King Sticker | £0.50 |
| Sea King Embroidered Badge | £4.00 |
| T Shirt (all sizes) | £8.50 |
| Polo Shirt (all sizes) | £14.00 |
| Tie | £7.50 |
| Cummerbund | £20.00 |

* To order