

# XV

# SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



**President:** Air Marshal Sir Michael Simmons KCB AFC RAF(Retd)

**Chairman:**

Gp Capt Ivor Evans RAF  
(Retd)

[diandivor@btinternet.com](mailto:diandivor@btinternet.com)

**Vice Chairman:**

Gp Capt Graham Bowerman

RAF (Retd)

[Bowermans@hotmail.com](mailto:Bowermans@hotmail.com)

**Treasurer:**

Mrs Valerie Ford-Jones

[valerie.fordjones@btinternet.com](mailto:valerie.fordjones@btinternet.com)

**Website:**

[www.xvsqnassociation.co.uk](http://www.xvsqnassociation.co.uk)

**Secretary:**

Flt Lt Bill Read  
XV(R) Sqn

RAF Lossiemouth

Moray

IV31 6SD

(01343) 817523

[secretary@xvsqnassociation.co.uk](mailto:secretary@xvsqnassociation.co.uk)

## 2015 ANNUAL NEWSLETTER

### CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE

Sadly, as you will see, this issue of the Newsletter contains many obituaries of our friends who have passed away. However, when you read the diversity of backgrounds, trades and service lives, from World War 2 up to recent times, you realise the breadth of experience in our membership and the importance and companionship of Associations like ours. The loss of Air Cdre David Bywater was, of course, especially sad news - a man who was known to all of our members from all eras. The article on David is the complete eulogy given by Air Cdre Norman Bonner, David's brother-in-law and lifelong service friend, to a fully packed church at the Memorial Service and is a fitting tribute to an outstanding man who was a long term Association member and such a tremendous Chairman for many years.

This 100th Anniversary year has been a very busy, successful and memorable occasion for XV(R) Squadron and, as far as the Association is concerned, the highlight of our year was undoubtedly the

Reunion Dinner at RAF Wittering. We are all indebted to Graham Bowerman, our Vice Chairman, and Bill Read, our Secretary, for the tireless effort they put into the organisation and execution of a fabulous evening, evidenced by the 100+ members who sat down to enjoy the occasion - and the many who stayed late to enjoy the bar. I have to tell you though that the free bar which the Association provided after the Dinner made a very small dent in the fund!! I suppose that's mainly due to subsidised RAF prices but I expect a better effort next time! I am sure you will be delighted to know that we will return to Wittering for the 2016 Dinner, as the Secretary notes later. However, we are unlikely to have this event designated as an official Station function, as it was this year, and will therefore probably not get the same service subsidy as we did in 2015. Finally, as the late November gales whistle round our house, on behalf of the President and the Association Committee, I would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. We all look forward to seeing as many of you as possible again next Summer.

## **XV(R) Squadron Sqn Cdr's Report 2015**



As I sit here with the nights drawing in, the wintery Scottish weather on the hills to the south of Lossiemouth and the mighty Tornado GR4 on the line, I look back on my first 6 months in Command of XV(R) Squadron. It has been a challenging time for the Squadron: the support to Operation SHADER – the air operations over Iraq – demand the Tornado Force's utmost attention. Our crew routinely are ferrying aircraft to and from RAF Akrotiri in Cyprus, and our engineers are supporting the engineering commitment here at RAF Lossiemouth preparing the aircraft, and part of teams performing the major servicing on the aircraft in theatre. I am pleased to report that they do all that is asked of them, and more, to the standards and excellence that anyone would expect from XV(R) Squadron.

For those who were able to make the reunion dinner at the end of May, you will recall I was unable to attend as was leading the Squadron on deployment to Bodo Air Base in Norway. We deployed there primarily to allow the Qualified Weapons Instructors Course (QWIC) to drop inert and live weapons against a variety of targets, and also to give some large force exercise training to crews from IX(B) Squadron. The team did a fantastic job and we achieved all that we had hoped. We are hoping for a similar exercise in the summer next year for

what will be the last Tornado GR QWIC. In July I was privileged to represent the Squadron with my new Officer Commanding Training Flight (Squadron Leader Mark Swinton), the Squadron Warrant Officer (WO Tam McEwan MBE), Chief Technician Guillou, and Sergeants Duns and Hope, at the annual memorial events in Vraux, France. We were hosted incredibly well, as we always are, and laid wreaths on the graves of fallen crews from XV Squadron. It was humbling, not least of all because the community welcomes us as old friends.

We must not forget the effort the Squadron puts in daily to train the crews for the front-line. We have graduated 10 pilots and 14 Weapons Systems Officers, ab-initio and refreshers, all of whom have deployed on Operations since they left us. But it is not all work. The team have had fun as well, and raised nearly £12,000 for the RAF Benevolent Fund – our centenary target is £15,000 by 1 Mar 16! The money has come from sales of prints etc as well as some amazing sponsorship events: SAC(T) Scott and Cpl Zweig completed the Cairngorm to Coast Challenge (they were the only team to finish out of 18 who started!); Flt Lt Law ran a 95 Mile endurance event; a team completed 100 holes of golf in 18 hours; and a few of us ran the Lossiemouth!

As I finish off, we are awaiting the announcement of the Governments Strategic Defence and Security Review. Despite the speculation in the media, it is a nervous time for the Squadron as the future of the Tornado Force will be decided in the review. I look forward to updating you in the near future.

It only remains for me to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a joyous, prosperous and successful New Year.

Aim Sure

# Air Commodore David Bywater

Air Commodore David Bywater RAF Retired, Fellow of the Royal Aeronautical Society, Fellow of the Institute of Management, Liveryman of the Guild of Air Pilots and Navigators, past Vice President of the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association and of the Royal International Air Tattoo, Honorary Member of both the Airport Operators Association and the Cambridge University Air Squadron, a Member of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and of The Air League, past Chairman of the XV Squadron Association, Committee Member of the 104 Cambridge Squadron of the Air Training Corps and Director of the RAF Charitable Trust.

I think that very impressive list summarises David's outstanding career in the Royal Air Force and his major contribution and dedication to so many aspects of British Aviation.

I first met David in 1957 at Cranwell when he was a senior cadet and I was in the junior entry – well I say I met him, he was marching me around with a few others on an extra drill parade which was punishment for some minor misdemeanours – in my case, I think the Flight Sergeant who raised the charge pointed out that “the RAF fits them radiators Mister Bonnor to keep you warm not to dry your socks!”

When he graduated in 1958, David was posted to Gaydon and was the first pilot straight from training to fly the RAF's latest V-Bomber, the Handley Page Victor. He crewed up with Wing Commander David Green who was to be the Commanding Officer of XV Squadron then reforming at Cottesmore.



This was a busy time for those early V-Force squadrons as the nuclear deterrent role was developing at a rapid rate to keep up with the growing Soviet threat. David showed his piloting and technical skills from the start and was involved in developing the scramble start procedures that were demonstrated at the Farnborough Air Shows in 1959 and 1960. Meanwhile, he completed the Intermediate Captain's Course to qualify to fly in the left-hand seat.

We met again in the spring of 1961 when he was selected to be the first straight from training co-pilot to captain his own crew. In typical Bomber Command style, the Gaydon instructors gathered fifteen crew-members in the Officers' Mess bar on the first evening

and said “sort yourselves into three crews by tomorrow morning.” I made a beeline for the one blond-headed chap I recognised and between us we quickly sorted out Pete Armstrong as co-pilot, Noel Belchamber as AEO and Ted Edwards as Nav Plotter.

Over the next two and a half years, we flew over 700 hours together on XV Squadron, working our way through the V-Force classification scheme from Combat, to Combat Star, to Select and finally to the top rating of Select Star; that standard was so demanding that only about 10% of V-Force crews ever achieved it. We flew on many Command and Group Exercises including representing the Squadron in the Command Bombing Competition where we achieved a very creditable second place in combined Bombing and Navigation against crews from all the other V-Force squadrons. We made many flights abroad to Malaya, Germany, Pakistan, Canada and the United States. Here are some memories from such trips.

Early in our tour, we flew out to Malaya in a Britannia of Transport Command to join four other crews practising the deployment and operation of V-Bombers in support of the Far East Air Force. During a Victor flight out of Butterworth, we were enjoying the views from about 50,000ft when a rat appeared on the cockpit coaming; it had clearly come in with our ration boxes but, loose in the cockpit, it was now a hazard as it might chew through some vital cables! David took the decision to de-pressurise the cabin for ten minutes to kill it, so we clamped down our oxygen masks and practised a little pressure breathing. On landing, we reported the problem to the groundcrew, but within an hour they were

driven from the cockpit by the stench of the mammal rotting in the tropical heat. We were not popular as the aircraft was unserviceable for another two days before the wretched thing was located behind a circuit breaker panel.

On a Ranger flight to Karachi, we were put up in the rather plush BOAC Speedbird hotel. Inevitably we looked out of place amongst the smartly dressed airline crews in our rather scruffy pale blue flying suits. David, as Captain, was ushered to a suite, and the rest of us were allocated in pairs to rather small rooms. When he saw the difference, David felt guilty which we, of course, encouraged and, to the receptionist's amazement, he asked to be moved to a similar small room. That was a mistake, as the air conditioning in his new room didn't work, and he had a very hot and uncomfortable night, which gave the rest of us some amusement next morning.

Two years into our tour, Pete Armstrong had qualified in the left-hand seat and David decided Pete should take the first leg of a Western Ranger to Goose Bay. During the climbout at about 35,000ft, the escape hatch above Pete came off and all the loose items in the cockpit were sucked out through the large hole as we suffered an explosive decompression. The initial shock raised all our heart rates a bit, but David calmly took control and commenced an emergency descent. The noise level of rushing air made it impossible to communicate between ourselves or with air traffic control until we were down to about 10,000ft and had slowed to a reasonable speed when I could just make out Pete shouting for someone to put the pins back in his seat; the hatch coming

off was the first stage of his possible ejection! Not surprisingly, the crew chief in the sixth seat had frozen, so I crept forward and made the seat safe and we burned off excess fuel before landing.

On another occasion at the end of a Command Exercise, we descended to find Cottesmore rapidly going out in fog and David couldn't see the runway approach lights at 200 feet, so we climbed out and headed for our weather diversion, Lossiemouth in Scotland! This meant we had been airborne for well over five hours as we descended over the Moray Firth and David called for a priority landing. It was mid-October and dark by the time we settled on the ILS centreline; a Fleet Air Arm Hunter also low on fuel was turned away to let us land first. Later in the Wardroom bar, we met the bearded Lieutenant Commander who asked how much fuel we had when we landed; when David told him 8,000lbs he went ballistic as he didn't have that much when he took off! It took a lot of David's persuasive skills to convince this chap that 8,000lbs across the 21 tanks in a Victor was a critically low fuel state but finally, with a few more whiskeys, relations with the senior service were restored.

By December 1963, our tour of duty on XV was complete, and the crew broke up. David had been selected to attend the Empire Test Pilots School which was then still at Farnborough. Although he had some worries about the mathematics that might be involved, he was clearly looking forward to flying the various aircraft types at ETPS including the Hunter and Scimitar. Another of these was the T21 Sedbergh glider that David had flown as a CCF cadet at school; he thought he could get one up



*Norman Bonner & David Bywater*

on the fighter pilots on the course by staying airborne longer than anyone else. He was towed airborne by a Chipmunk and headed for a nearby CuNim to get maximum uplift; unfortunately it was much stronger than he anticipated and he disappeared into the cloud climbing steeply. After much effort, and covered in hail in the open cockpit, he finally escaped but was now well away from the airfield with no chance of getting back against a strong headwind. He spotted a large green patch amongst a forested area and landed across the cricket pitch of the Pyestock Sports Field and ended up making a rather large groove across their immaculate bowling green.

Fortunately, this incident didn't affect his graduation from the course when he won some silverware for his overall performance.

From the course, his posting was to B Squadron at Boscombe Down where he became re-acquainted with the Victor in both the Mk 1 tanker and the Mk 2 reconnaissance and bomber versions. He also experienced the Vulcan for the first time and was able to compare the two V-bombers while flying release to service trials for the Terrain Following Radar which in the end was only fitted to the Vulcan as the Mk2 Victors were destined to replace the Mk1s as tankers.

After attending the RAF Staff College at Andover in 1969, David was posted to Headquarters, RAF Germany as an Operational Plans Staff Officer. His major tasks were to plan for the introduction of the Jaguar as a strike aircraft and the construction of hardened aircraft shelters on the RAF bases of 2 ATAF. He returned to the UK in 1974 to take up the post of Chief Test Pilot at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough where, apart from managing all aspects of experimental flying in what was a rather mixed bunch of ageing prototypes, he was heavily involved with planning and managing the flying display for the Farnborough Air Show.

On promotion to Group Captain in 1981, he returned to Boscombe Down as Superintendent of Flying. I was at A&AEE at that time so he would occasionally call to see if I was free to join him on a training flight in a Jaguar, Hawk or a Gazelle. This was a busy time at Boscombe, particularly during the build-up to operations relating to the Falklands War when emergency clearances were required for some

unusual combinations of systems, weapons and aircraft. In 1985, David moved on to the RAF Staff College, Bracknell as a Group Director where he helped many young officers expand their knowledge and improve their career prospects. It was no surprise that his final appointment would be to return to Boscombe Down as the Commandant on promotion to Air Commodore and he retired from there in 1992 after what can only be described as an extremely successful RAF career.

David's second career began shortly afterwards when he joined Marshall of Cambridge as Airport and Flight Operations Director. Over the next ten years, he was responsible for major improvements to the airport including the construction of a new Air Traffic Control Tower, installation of an area radar, Instrument Landing System and a modernised airfield lighting system. He also maintained his commercial pilot's licence together with a flying instructor's qualification and continued to fly Company aircraft. He amassed a further thousand hours flying time on a variety of civil and military aircraft types bringing his total hours to more than 4,000 on 155 aircraft types; only an enthusiastic test pilot could have achieved that.

David was meticulous in all he did whether it was planning and flying a sortie, managing major updates of operational facilities or checking on tides and currents when sailing in the Solent or along the Brittany coast. I never saw him lose his temper or make a rash decision. He was highly respected and admired by all those who worked with him or were involved with him socially. Many of his appointments had heavy social commitments; in that respect, he could

not have had better support than Shelagh throughout his career.

David was a loving husband, father, father-in-law and grandfather, and a superb friend and brother-in-law; in my case, we had the rather special relationship of being married to sisters. We shall all miss him but we have many very happy memories.



**Norman Bonnor**

**Wellington 1C at Wyton 1940**

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## **GEORGE YULL MACKIE, CBE, DSO, DFC.**

**LORD MACKIE OF BENSHE**

George Yull Mackie was born in Scotland, on 10th July 1919. Following the outbreak of World War Two, during February 1940, the young Scotsman enlisted for aircrew training with the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. He undertook his training at RAF Lossiemouth on Vickers Wellington bombers, the same type of aircraft on which he was to carry out his initial war sorties.

On qualifying as an Observer/Navigator, George Mackie was commissioned in the rank of pilot officer and posted, during February 1941, to No.XV Squadron, based at RAF Wyton. During the period, February to mid-April 1941, P/O Mackie undertook operational sorties with Flying Officer Curry and Sergeant Alington. It was with the latter pilot that George Mackie and the rest of the crew were posted, on 16th April 1941, to No.148 Squadron, based in the Middle East.

Apart from the two aforementioned squadrons, George Mackie also saw service with No.149 Squadron, with whom he flew on Short Stirling bombers, and No. 115 Squadron, with whom he flew on Avro Lancaster bombers; he completed a total of three full operational tours of duty.

On 11th February 1944, whilst serving with No.115 Squadron, the award of Distinguished Service Order was gazetted in the name of Acting Squadron Leader G. Mackie. Eight months later, the award of a Distinguished Flying Cross was gazetted to this same officer, again, whilst still serving with No.115 Squadron. The final part of Squadron Leader Mackie's war was as a member of the Air Staff.

On returning to civilian life, in 1945, George Mackie returned to his pre-war occupation of farming in Kirriemuir, in the county of Angus; he was to retire from this vocation in 1989. During the same period, he entered politics, including the European Parliamentary elections.

On 1st January 1971, the New Year's Honours List recorded that George Mackie had been appointed a Commander of The Most Excellent Order of the British Empire. Just over three years later, on 10th April 1974, George Mackie, CBE, DSO, DFC, was elevated to a life peerage. Baron Mackie of Benshie died on 17th February 2015, at the age of 95.

# FLYING OFFICER ALAN D. HAYDEN

Alan D. Hayden, a former navigator with No.XV Squadron, passed away at the beginning of 2015. Having enlisted for service with the Royal Air Force, as an air gunner, on 21st November 1941, the Selection Board had other ideas and talked him into undertaking observer/navigator training. Following his training, which took him through I.T.W at RAF Bicester, Elementary Air Navigation School at Eastbourne, Flying Training School at Wigtown, Scotland and No.12 Operation Flying Training Unit at Chipping Warden, Alan Hayden was finally posted to No.XV Squadron, at RAF Mildenhall on 16th July 1941.

Unfortunately, the pilot, Sergeant Alfred Holden, whose crew Alan had joined and with whom he had gone to Mildenhall, was killed twelve days later whilst flying as 2nd pilot on an operational sortie with another crew. After a somewhat shaky start which included being posted No 1657 Conversion Unit, based at RAF Stradishall, Alan Hayden returned to Mildenhall as navigator to Sergeant Alan Amies and his crew. This crew flew a total of fifteen operational sorties before the pilot failed to return from an operation whilst flying with a rookie crew.

For two months, being without a pilot to head the crew, Alan worked with the navigation leader on ground duties. Eventually, Alan Hayden joined a crew led by Flight Lieutenant Walter Bell, with whom he would complete a further three operational sorties.

Unfortunately, whilst undertaking their fourth sortie, an attack against Homburg, their aircraft was attacked and shot down by an enemy night-fighter, piloted by Hauptmann Heinz Schnauer.

Having followed the correct procedure, and following the orders of the pilot, Alan baled out of the stricken aircraft and parachuted into unknown territory. Regaining consciousness, Alan discarded his parachute and made a hurried exit to where he did not know. It became obvious to him, looking at the landscape, that he had landed in Holland but could not find anybody who would help him. Eventually, an elderly couple showed him a safe place to hide overnight. The following morning, assisted by a young Dutch girl, Alan made his way to her home at Den Hout. The Dutch family cared for Alan, fed him, re-clothed him and let him catch-up on some sleep, before arranging for him to move on to another 'safe' location.

After five days of being on-the-run, Alan was captured at Turnhout by German soldiers, whilst travelling on a Dutch tram under the guise of being a French worker. He was taken to Antwerp where he became a guest of the Gestapo for two agonising weeks. Finally Alan was moved by truck, along with many other RAF men, first to Brussels and then on to Dulagluft, the Luftwaffe interrogation centre at Oberursel, in Frankfurt. Finally, having undergone much torment and hardship, Alan Hayden was sent to Belaria, a satellite PoW compound to Stalag Luft III.

Just before dawn on 28th January 1945, what was to become known as 'The Long March' commenced, with Alan and the rest of the camp inmates setting off on foot through the biting cold and



deep snow. During the late afternoon of 3rd February, the half-mile long column of humanity boarded a train which was to take the prisoners of war to Luckenwald; sleep in the over-crowded cattle wagons was impossible.

Between 5th February and 12th April 1945, Alan remained at Luckenwald along with the rest of the prisoners, however, on the latter date they heard they would all be transported south to Munich. Again, the journey was to be made by cattle wagon with approximately 40 men in each truck but, due to the track being blocked, the Germans were forced to move their charges back to the camp at Luckenwald.

On the morning of 21st April, the prisoners found their guards had all disappeared; they also heard that Russian troops, and the battle area front line, were very close to the camp. The following day Russian tanks and lorries entered the camp.

After a period of uncertainty and concern about food, accommodation and the future, allied forces began to arrive and alleviated some of the problems the prisoners faced. Towards the end of May 1945, Flying Officer Alan Hayden was repatriated to England by an American Dakota aircraft. On arrival in the UK, he was debriefed and then sent home on indefinite leave.

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## FLYING OFFICER WILLIAM 'BILL' SIEVERS, RAAF

William "Bill" Sievers was born in Gladstone, Queensland, Australia, on 6th June 1920. When he became eligible, Bill enlisted for service as a pilot with the Royal Australian Air Force. On completion of his training in Australia, he embarked for England and was attached to the Royal Air Force.

On 15th March 1945, shortly after he had arrived with his crew at RAF Mildenhall, Suffolk, Bill was granted a commission in the rank of Flying Officer. Two days later, Flying Officer Sievers flew on his first operational sortie, an attack against Dortmund, as second pilot to Wing Commander Nigel Macfarlane. The latter, as Officer Commanding, No.XV Squadron, made it his policy to fly with every new crew posted to the squadron.

Bill Sievers and his crew went on to undertake operational sorties against Hamm, Bocholt, Altenboge, Kiel, Potsdam, Heligoland and Bremen. He also flew on two 'Manna' operations, when food parcels were dropped to the starving Dutch people and also three 'Exodus' operations; the latter being the repatriation of British prisoners of war from Germany, when twenty-four former prisoners were flown home, 'seated' in the fuselage of each Lancaster bomber.

On completion of his 'tour of duty', which coincided with the end of hostilities, Flying Officer William Sievers was re-attached to the Royal Australia Air Force and sent home.

William "Bill" Sievers died on Friday, 28th August 2015

# Sqn Ldr Barrie Chown

Squadron Leader Barrie Chown died suddenly on 10th December, 2014. Barrie, or “Wings” as he was known to all of the Buccaneer Mafia, was born in India in May, 1943. The son of an RAF engineer, he followed in his father’s footsteps but, wanting to fly, entered as Airman Aircrew and eventually served as an Air Signaller on Blackburn Beverleys during the Aden crisis and withdrawal. Subsequently commissioned at RAF South Cerney, Barrie re-trained as a navigator and was sent on “loan service” to the RN at HMS Fulmar, or as it is now called, RAF Lossiemouth, flying another of Blackburn’s finest – the Buccaneer!. During conversion training on 736 Squadron he was involved in a mid-air collision during a formation flying exercise and ejected successfully, landing in the Moray Firth. Despite this accident, Barrie went on to join 809 Squadron, where he cut his teeth on the new aircraft which, after the TSR2 and F-111 debacle, had been selected as the Canberra replacement by the RAF. It was during this time that Barrie met (and married) Helen, a local lass. On completion of loan service, Barrie joined XV Squadron as it re-formed at Honington and moved to Laarbruch in 1971. It was on XV that the “Wings” legend was truly established. Barrie epitomised the “Fight Hard, Play Hard” school of aviation and his many adventures and exploits, both at Laarbruch and, in particular, Forte’s Village in Sardinia, (involving a non-amphibious golf buggy and the swimming pool) passed into Buccaneer, and indeed, RAF folklore!

His selection as the first RAF Germany Buccaneer Attack Instructor (Navigator) ably reflected Barrie’s skill and experience in the low level role. On completion of his XV tour, Barrie returned to Honington and Maritime Ops with 12 Squadron before becoming an instructor on 237 OCU, the Buccaneer Conversion Unit. Following promotion, Barrie returned to Lossiemouth once more as Sqn Ldr Ops. During this tour, his general health was affected by back problems which stemmed from his earlier ejection and he relinquished his flying category and retired from the RAF. Barrie and Helen remained in Elgin where Barrie became a wine importer, trading under his company name Moray Quality Wines. Never one to rest for too long, Barrie moved from being a wine importer to become a successful restaurateur when he opened the Abbey Court Restaurant in Elgin; good food, great wine... bliss!!! Oh, and just to keep his hand in, he joined the Buccaneer Simulator as an instructor, subsequently transferring to the Tornado Simulator when the former closed down. Eventually however, he finally tired of his Highland home and emigrated to France. The Association offers its sincere condolences to Helen and daughters Melanie, Samantha and their families.

# SERGEANT HARRY FLOWERDAY

Sergeant Harry Flowerday's tour of operational duty was, compared to some, a relatively short one. Harry reported for duty, with XV Squadron, at RAF Bourn, Cambridgeshire, during March 1943; he was an air gunner, flying in the mid-upper turret, on Sergeant W. McLeod's crew.

They commenced flying operationally on 28th March, with an attack against the German occupied port of St. Nazaire, on the French coast, which was followed-up with a second attack on the port on 2nd April. Between 4th and 28th April, Harry and his crew participated in attacks against Kiel, two raids on Duisburg, Frankfurt and a mine-laying operation. During this same period of time, on 14th April, No.XV Squadron redeployed to RAF Mildenhall, where it was to remain until the end of the war. Naturally, Harry and

his crew also made the move to the Suffolk airfield.

During the evening of 4th May, The crew took-off in Stirling bomber, HK658, for an attack against Dortmund. At approximately 1.04am the following morning their aircraft was attacked by a night-fighter piloted by Uffz Karl-Georg Pfeiffer, of 10 Gruppe/ Nachtjagdgeschwader 1 (10./NJG1). As cannon fire ripped through the bomber, the rear gunner was killed, whilst three other crew members sustained injuries, including Harry Flowerday who was wounded in the leg. Although injured, Harry managed to bail out of the stricken aircraft along with all the surviving members of the crew.

1269263 Sergeant Harry Flowerday was captured by the Germans, given the prisoner of war number 1130 and incarcerated in PoW camps L1, L6 and L4.

Harry Flowerday died on Monday, 26th January 2015.



Not a XV Sqn  
Stirling, but an  
excellent

picture - Ed

## **SERGEANT DOUGLAS W. MEPHAM DFM**

Sergeant Douglas Mepham, a flight engineer, reported for duty, along with his crew, with No.XV Squadron, based at RAF Bourn, Cambridgeshire, during the latter half of 1942. His first operational sortie was a mine-laying operation in the Gironde area, with Sgt I. Renner (later Pilot Officer) at the controls of Short Stirling bomber, R9168, code LS-T.

On his third operation, an attack against Mannheim, and his fourth operation, a mine-laying sortie in the Frisian Islands, Douglas Mepham flew with Flying Officer Brian Ordish, a very experienced and highly regarded pilot with XV Squadron. Returning to his regular crew, Sergeant Mepham went on to fly against many of the toughest targets in Germany including, Berlin (3 times), Cologne, Essen (twice), Frankfurt, Hamburg, Munich, Rostock, Stuttgart and Turin, in Italy.

Following completion of his 'Operational Tour of Duty', 573933 Sergeant Douglas Walter Mepham was recommended for the non-immediate award of a Distinguished Flying Medal. The recommendation, which was made on 15th May 1943, was based on Douglas Mepham's skill and devotion to duty, which were recorded as being of a high order and keenness. The award was approved and was gazetted on 13th July 1943. At the time the recommendation was made, Sergeant Mepham had completed a total of 29 operational sorties and had accumulated a total of 180 hours 48 minutes flying hours.

His duty done, Douglas W. Mepham, DFM, died on 13th January 2015

## **AIRMAN GEOFFREY H. VENABLES**

Airman Geoffrey H. Venables, a National Serviceman, was a clerk with the Admin Section, when No.XV Squadron was equipped with Avro Lincoln bombers. He reported for duty at RAF Wyton on 19th July 1949.

Unfortunately, as with most of those who served with No.XV during their period of National Service, very little is known about Geoffrey Venables. He remained with the squadron for his allotted two year period and was de-mobbed on 13th July 1951.

Airman Geoffrey H. Venables died on 21st March 2015.

## **SERGEANT STANLEY "STAN" G. WATSON, DFC**

Stanley, known to all as "Stan", was posted, from No.1651 Conversion Unit to No.620 Squadron, at RAF Chedburgh, on 2nd September 1943. His stay at the latter was very short as he was soon posted to No.1657 Conversion Unit, based at RAF Stradishall. On 4th November, Sergeant Stan Watson was posted to No.XV Squadron, at RAF Mildenhall, as wireless operator/air gunner, with Alan Amies, his pilot, and the rest of his crew.

November, December 1943, and the first two weeks of January 1944, were spent converting to Avro Lancaster bombers, with which No.XV Squadron had re-equipped a month prior to Christmas. The crew's first operational sortie on the new aircraft occurred on the night of 14th January, when they attacked Brunswick.

Between 14th January and 22nd April, during which time Stan was promoted to the rank of flight sergeant, he flew a total of 14 operational sorties with Alan Amies and his crew. On the night of the latter date, 22nd April, another pilot on the squadron, F/L Oliver Brooks, lost two of his crew members due to the a heavy flak shell exploding immediately underneath his aircraft; this tragedy was soon to play a part in Stan's future.

On the night of 11th May, F/L Alan Amies was detailed to fly with a "rookie" crew who, for whatever reason, were without their pilot. Unfortunately, both the aircraft and its crew failed to return. For just over a month, Stan Watson, and the other members of his now pilotless crew, filled in time at RAF Mildenhall with non-flying duties, until the 19th May, when he joined Oliver Brooks' crew as a replacement wireless operator.

Stan Watson flew a total of thirteen operational sorties with Oliver Brooks, before the latter was declared 'Tour expired'. Although Stan had completed a total of 27 operational sorties and only had three more to complete his own 'Tour', he opted fly a further seven operations with Squadron Leader Pat Carden. During September/October 1944, Stan was commissioned in the rank of pilot officer, and posted away from No.XV Squadron. Following a period during which Stan undertook training duties, he was posted to No.75 (New Zealand) Squadron with whom he flew further operational sorties. During the summer of 1945, Stan was recommended for the award of a Distinguished Flying Cross, the recommendation was approved and the award was gazetted on 26th October 1945.

Pilot Officer Stanley "Stan" G. Fisher, DFC, died on 29th October 2014.

## **LEADING AIRCRAFTMAN GODFREY DAVIES**

Godfrey Davies served with No.XV Squadron, at RAF Coningsby, during his period of National Service, between 1951 and 1953. Holding the rank of Leading Aircraftman, he was an instrument mechanic, with specialist knowledge of navigation systems. Godfrey's quiet manner and demeanour hid the depth of that knowledge, but he would explain to anyone who had an interest in the subject, in his own quiet way; by comparison he was never known to talk about himself.

Godfrey attended many of the reunions and would, more often than not, turn up on his own; the fact he was, as far as is known, the only representative of the Washington aircraft era to attend reunions, never deterred him from attending. Unfortunately, not a lot is known about this quiet former member of XV Squadron. We do know, though, that he passed away, in West Malling, Kent, on 2nd August 2015.

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## **DONALD INGLIS**

Sergeant Donald Inglis, an air gunner, was posted to RAF Mildenhall, along with his pilot and crew on 26th September 1944. Between 5th October 1944 and 15th January 1945, Donald Inglis completed a total of 29 operational sorties as well as one early return. The targets he and his crew attacked included Bottrop, Cologne x 3, Dortmund, Duisburg, Essen, Enkerschwick, Fulda, Gelsenkirchen, Heinsberg, Homberg x 4, Koblenze, Krefeld, Ludwigshaven, a Mine-Laying operation (Konigsberg), Nurnberg, Oberhausen, Saarbrucken, Siegen, Solingen x 2, Trier x 3, Vohwinkel and Wilhelmshaven.

Don Inglis passed away, aged 90 years on Saturday, 22nd August 2015

## **RON CATESBY**

### **ARMOURER**

Although little, or nothing, is known about Ron Catesby's service with the Royal Air Force, he was a fascinating man to converse with. Ron is known to have served with No.XV Squadron, as an armourer (possibly) during the early part of the Second World War. He is also known to have served, in the same capacity, with No.44 Squadron, later in the war.

At a reunion many years ago, Ron unfurled a long roll of paper on which was written details of all his ancestors, complete names, dates and (where applicable) Coats of Arms. Tracing his finger down the ranks of names, he stopped at one and announced that it was the name of Robert Catesby, the Mastermind of the Gunpowder Plot. Another of his ancestors was reputed to be another Catesby, the man who tried to acquire a horse for King Richard III, during the Battle of Bosworth Field.

Unfortunately the date of Ron Catesby's passing is not known, but notification of his demise was received during February 2015.



Lincoln armament 1947

## **SERGEANT**

### **T. A. SKINGSLEY**

Sergeant T.A. Skingsley was posted to No.XV during August 1940, in the unenviable position of an air gunner, flying on Bristol Blenheim twin-engine bombers.

Although they record the names of pilots, the official records are very sparse for this early period of the war, with regard to naming other members of aircrew. However, Sergeant T.A. Skingsley is known to have flown on four occasions, operationally, with Squadron Leader Stansfield, on two occasions, operationally, with Sergeant Chipling and on one occasion, operationally, with Flight Lieutenant W. Morris.

On 1st November 1940, No.XV Squadron converted to the Vickers Wellington bomber, and the name of Sergeant Skingsley was shown as being a member of 'A' Flight. The whole of this month was given over not only to learning how to fly and manage the new aircraft in flight but, for the pilots especially, to come to terms with the fact they were now in command of five-man crews instead of the three-man crew they were used to on Blenheims.

Sergeant Skingsley is known to have flown with Pilot Officer Bagguley on at least five operational sorties, before having been posted to the Middle East, as part of Sergeant Tricklebank's crew, on 16th April 1941.

T.A. Skingsley died on 21st December 2014.

# DOUGLAS R. WEBBER, GROUND CREW

Douglas R. Webber, to use the terminology he and his former wartime colleagues would use about themselves, “*Was only ground crew*”. It is as a result of this almost self-criticism that not much is known about Douglas. He chose not to attend the reunions, especially those held at RAF Mildenhall as, in his words, “*I would rather remember it as it was in those days, and the friends I knew and lost*”.

One of those friends that Douglas Webber lost was Flight Lieutenant Alan Amies, who was killed on the night of 11th/12th May 1944, whilst taking a new crew on their first operational sortie.

Douglas, who had been preparing the aircraft, Avro Lancaster bomber LL752, during the day ready for its night-time operation, waved the aircraft off at 10.36 pm that night. He watched the bomber climb into the darkened sky and disappeared from view; that was the last he saw of the Lancaster and its crew.

Although as a member of ground crew Douglas knew the loss of an aircraft was something to be expected, he was so moved by the loss of this particular aircraft and crew, he immortalised their memory on canvas. The image, which he called, ‘*Evening at*

*Dispersal*’, depicts the crew and others with their aircraft, at dispersal, shortly before take-off on the evening of 11th May 1944. Douglas wrote, “*The faces [of the crew] in the painting are blurred out of respect for their next of kin*”.

Apart from the original artwork, copies of the painting were known to be displayed in the XV Squadron crew room and at an Air Museum in Sussex, near the home of Alan Amies.

Although Douglas did not attend the reunions, back in the late 1980s when the XV Squadron historian was writing his first book based on the reminiscences of former air and ground crew, Douglas assisted by submitting eighteen, hand-written pages of memories; some were one-liners and some extended to a whole page or more.

Unfortunately the Squadron was not made aware of when Douglas Webber actually passed away and, as is the case with all former members, it would not like this sad occurrence to go unrecorded. Douglas may have left us, but his hand-written notes are still in the archive to remind us of his time as a highly regarded member of XV Squadron ground crew.



XV Sqn  
B Flight  
1944/5

# Wg Cdr Gerald Newton

*The following is based on the eulogy given by Ted Edwards at Gerry's funeral*

I met Gerry (as he was almost universally known) in the early 1950s around the time that Bing Crosby had a hit single with 'Straight Down the Middle'. The song was all about hitting that evasive little white ball... 'Le Golf'.. to coin a phrase. That song fitted Gerry's ethos 'to a tee' – he lived his life 'straight down the middle'!

Gerry began his very long career in the RAF as a drill instructor; a fearsome species of humanity, trained and programmed to knock new recruits into shape, distilling discipline, dedication, devotion to duty, fitness, obedience, smartness, all the very characteristics of a 'straight down the middle' Gerry the Pacemaker!

When I was posted to 617 Sqn at Binbrook on Canberras in mid-1954, Gerry was already on 617 Sqn. I think he had been flying Canberras for about two years by then. In 1955 we were sent to RAF Butterworth in Malaya to attack Chin Peng and his Chinese communist forces in the jungle camps; night and day sorties only hitting and killing chickens! Gerry and I firmed our friendship out there and on the route home, through Calcutta, Karachi, into Iraq, where we were grounded. The Chinese had infiltrated RAF Butterworth, polluted our fuel storage tanks, which ruined the filters in our jet engines. You really get to know who your friends are in situations like that!

Gerry was always a very proud man (justly so with all that he achieved), he was an excellent navigator, accurate, speedy and sure. His charts were an example to us all. He became a successful 'Boss' as a Squadron Leader, then Wing Commander. He gained respect in the Fighter Control role in the defence of our shores.

Gerry and I served together again in the 1960s, this time on XV Squadron, flying Victor Mk1s. we were Navigator Plotters, responsible for teaming up with our partners – the Radar Navigators – for bringing the 'Great White Bird' over designated targets to drop their devastating nuclear weapons. This was the flight we hoped would never be made – if the deterrent of 'the bomb' worked successfully.

In retirement, Gerry maintained a military connection. He joined the team of guides at the Imperial War Museum outpost at RAF Cosford, just down the road from his home in Telford. There is a section of the museum dealing specifically with the 'Cold War' and, of course, 'The Deterrent'; right up his street!

Last but not least, mention should be made of his successful efforts to fight for experimental operations for his 'Lady through Life', Jo, to help her with her breathing difficulties for a few years. He was very involved with an organisation called 'Breath Easy' – groups of people joining together, all suffering various problems with their ability to breathe – he was the leader of their pack, locally. Lets not forget either, his care for his unruly, difficult, but devoted offspring – their father saw them right, one and all.

Goodbye Gerry, rest easy now.





The Squadron sent two aircraft to RAF Fairford for RIAT in July 2015, one of which was covered in vinyls to commemorate the 35<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the formation of the Tornado tri-national Training Establishment. The photo shows the British, German and Italian Tornado crews with the RIAT director and a celebratory cake. Unfortunately, the vinyls were not cleared for flight and were removed before the aircraft left for home.



XH 593 waiting to start engines with Crew Chief Bob Groves plugged in, Gordon Stringer is on the extreme left.

## Gordon Stringer writes:



In July 1959 XV Squadron 'A' Flight sent XA941 and XH588 to Sea Island Airbase in Vancouver Canada to attend a Flying Display to celebrate 50 Years of Powered Flight in Canada.

I was one of the lucky ones to be selected as part of the servicing team to support our attendance. We were flown out ahead of the two Victors and prior to leaving we were bussed to Innsworth in Gloucester to be kitted out with tropical Uniforms.

Here we are standing in front of the Comet from Transport Command before departing from Cottesmore to Goose Bay; stopping en route at Keflavik in Iceland to refuel.

On approach to Goose Bay we were intercepted by a Northrop Scorpion from the US base also at Goose and escorted to the airfield the aircraft flying in formation off our starboard wing.

We serviced our two Victors when they arrived, stopped overnight and then flew on to Vancouver via Winnipeg where we refuelled. Our Victors arrived soon after.

Our return to the UK was 'interesting'; after stopping at Ottawa and staying overnight and leaving for the UK, the Comet developed engine trouble and we diverted to Goose where we had a 5/7 day stopover whilst a replacement engine was flown out from the UK and fitted.

I recall seeing Avro C100,s of the RCAF at Goose, also Delta Daggers, Scorpions and KC 135 Tankers and Mitchells at Winnipeg.

Also displaying at the show itself were the RCAF Golden Hawks in their Sabres and a two seat Starfighter from the US Air Force and a Delta Dagger.

There was a bit of an anti American feeling going round as this all took place quite soon after the Canadian Government cancelled the order for their own designed new Fighter , the CF 105 Arrow which was to be replaced by the Starfighter.

## From the Secretary

Please send in any interesting stories from your time on XV Squadron, especially amusing stories that will help to balance the obituaries that have sadly rather taken up most of this newsletter.

At the 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Reunion, Tony Britton served notice that he had decided to step down from the Committee after 25 years service. Tony has been the Canberra rep and has asked to remain as the Canberra era contact for the Association. Thank you Tony for your dedication and your stories.

**XV Squadron Reunion Dinner**  
**Officers Mess**  
**RAF Wittering**  
**Stamford**  
**Lincolnshire**

**3 June 2016**

Full details and a booking form will appear in the update newsletter in the Spring. Gp Capt Graham Bowerman has very kindly offered to organise the event for the Association once again. The cost of the dinner is likely to be slightly higher than in 2015 (when the cost of the dinner was subsidised by the Service), but we are hopeful that any increase can be kept to a minimum. Please keep an eye on the Association website for the latest news.

As there is almost no spare accommodation at Wittering (largely due to the University Air Sqns now based there), please **do not** attempt to book rooms in the Mess. A block booking has been made of rooms at the Days Inn, Peterborough (J17 [A1/A604]). Cost £47 / £55 with 2 breakfasts, the same price as 2015. A coach will be laid on to take diners to/from RAF Wittering. At this early stage we are unable to confirm if there will be a cost associated with the coach.

## XV SQN ASSOCIATION CONTACTS

### Pre-Canberra:

Martyn Ford-Jones

[Mfj\\_xvhistorian@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:Mfj_xvhistorian@hotmail.co.uk)

### Canberra:

Tony Britton

[jambritton@virginmedia.com](mailto:jambritton@virginmedia.com)

### Victor:

Peter Roberts

[peterandpatr@aol.com](mailto:peterandpatr@aol.com)

### Buccaneer:

Vic Blackwood

[vicblackwood@btinternet.com](mailto:vicblackwood@btinternet.com)

### Tornado:

Flt Lt Bill Read

[secretary@xvsqnassociation.co.uk](mailto:secretary@xvsqnassociation.co.uk)



Washington WF497 in night markings at Coningsby



The Crew of a Douglas B66 visiting from Alconbury with a Victor Crew.

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## Stop press

As this issue closed for printing we learned the sad news that 'Monty' Montague passed away at the end of November. We extend our sympathies to Ruth.