

# THE DROPZONE

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## Happy Birthday to Col. Robert W. Fish USAF Retd.

By Ron Clarke

We congratulate our President Col. Robert (Bob) Fish on reaching his 90th. year. He and his wife Jean are enjoying their retirement at San Antonio, where they are coping with the inevitable problems of advancing years.

After completing his degree in Electrical Engineering at Ohio in 1939, he was accepted into the Army Air force Flying Training Programme in June 1940, where he was later presented with the Regalia now displayed in the museum. In May 1941 he was assigned to the 46th. Sqdn. of the 41<sup>st</sup> BG at Tucson, California, where they flew Hudson aircraft on anti-submarine patrols along the west coast of America. Bob and his crew also flew calibration flights for a new Radar detection system.



Col. Robert W. Fish 1944

In mid 1941 the squadron moved to the east coast to counter expected German submarine activity. It was here that Lt. Fish and his fellow pilots were introduced to the Consolidated B24 Liberator bomber that they were to fly throughout their illustrious wartime service under their popular leader Col. Clifford Heflin.

In June 1943 they flew their Liberators to Dunkeswell airfield on the south west coast of England, where their services were needed to counter German submarines in the East Atlantic. Bob Fish was among others who came in contact with German JU88s over the Bay of Biscay - this was the 'sharp end'! The Group now consisted of two anti-submarine squadrons.

In October 1943 the Anti-Submarine group was disbanded, and personnel were posted to East Anglia for 'combat duty'. The job of flying anti-submarine patrols was handed over to the U.S. Navy. Bob now became a major, commanding 36 Sqdn., and Lt. Col. Heflin commanded the 406<sup>th</sup> Sqdn.

In late October 1943 they were told they were to lead a secret project to fly SOE and OSS agents into occupied Europe. The code name would be Operation Carpetbagger. Lt. Col. Heflin would command the unit with Major Fish as Operations Officer.

### INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Col. R.W. Fish	1
Editorial	4
Douglas A-26	4
IWM Duxford	9
Capt. Victor Gough	11
Service Of Remembrance	15

### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

- *A tribute to Col. Fish*
- *A brief history of the Douglas A-26 Invader*
- *Update on IWM Duxford*
- *Remembering Capt. Victor Gough*

Cont. on page 2

The aircraft were modified for their new role and the crews spent a period at RAF Tempsford, where they flew with British airmen who were experts in covert supply operations. Heflin and Fish were deeply involved in formulating the operational procedure of their new Group, the 801st (Provisional) Bomb Group.

After short spells at RAF Stations Alconbury and Watton, they took over the Harrington airfield from the RAF, and this became the base from where Carpetbagger missions flew agents and supplies into German occupied Europe until the end of the war.

Clifford Heflin and Bob Fish led by example, flying regularly on the dangerous low level supply drops as well as running the base. Two additional squadrons soon moved in and the unit received the official designation 492<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Group. When Col. Heflin was transferred back to the United States in September 1944, Bob took over Command of the Group until a new CO from America, Col. Hudson Upham, assumed command of Station 179.

The B24s of the 492<sup>nd</sup>. Bombardment Group were fully occupied from January 1944 to the end of the war in 1945 dropping agents, supplies and Special Forces into Occupied Europe, Eastern Europe, Scandinavia and the Balkans. For ten days in September 1944 they supplied Gen. Patton's Army Group with fuel, and returned to limited night bombing operations in early 1945.

Throughout the entire life of the unit, from Dunkeswell to the end of hostilities the principle link of continuity was Col. Robert Fish. He ran the airfield and operations when Col. Heflin was absent, kept things on an even keel when Col. Upham was on his learning period, and took over when Upham left.

He flew one of the first Carpetbagger missions and the last one, when he flew members of the Danish government in exile to Copenhagen the day before the war ended. When the rest of the personnel flew back to the United States in July, he was transferred to the 384<sup>th</sup> BG at Grafton Underwood to oversee the running down of the base.

Cont. on page 3



Col. Fish at Harrington Aviation Museum in 1999, with his War Medals, Regalia and Uniform, presented on an earlier visit

He then took 384th Group Fortresses to Istre near Marseilles, to fly U.S. servicemen to Casablanca, Africa, on the first leg of their homeward flight.

In November 1945 he returned to the United States where he was assigned to the Tactical Air Command HQ at McDill AFB. He returned to Ohio State University for a degree in Personnel Management in 1946, and in July 1948 attended the Air Command and Staff School at Maxwell AFB Alabama. He was then assigned to Tyndal AFB as an instructor at the Air Tactical School.

In 1951 he was asked to go to Washington to organise a new Carpetbagger force within the U.S. A.F, but declined the offer, preferring to join the Strategic Air Command, that he thought 'would be a major advance in my career'.

Three times a senior officer from the Pentagon visited him at Maxwell but each time he declined. However when his secretary told him she had the Commander in Chief on the line from the Pentagon, he was asked by General Vandenburg to report to Washington, where he was needed to 'Organise an unconventional capability within the United States Air Force' he was also told that if he thought this was affecting his career he was to contact the General!

Within two weeks he was in Washington (wearing the uniform on display in the museum, centre office). He organised and helped to train the Air Re-supply and Communications Wing 8000 personnel. In 1955 he was appointed Air Attaché to the Republic of Nationalist China on Taiwan, which he found to be 'very interesting, as I was the only Attaché assigned to the Chinese nation, who at that time were at war'.

1958 found him back at the Air Staff Headquarters, Unconventional Warfare Section, and in 1963-64 he attended the National War College,

#### Donations

The museum received £300 from Mr Alan Eaton, organiser of the Hollowell Steam Rally. The picture shows Mr Eaton with our Chairman, Ron Clarke and other local organisation representatives. Tens of thousands of pounds were awarded to local charities by Mr Eaton who has developed the Steam Rally into a major fund-raising event.

Notice that Ron already has his hand on the cash!

before attaining a Master's Degree in International Affairs at the George Washington University.

After four years there he was appointed Vice Commander at the Lowry AFB Military Training Centre, and on 1st. February 1970 he finally retired from the Air Force after 30 years of exemplary service.

Bob and his wife Jean then moved to a house in Zapata, Texas, on the Rio Grande, and in 1987 they moved into Air Force Retirement Village II, where they lived among other retired service families until they moved to their present home.

On his last visit to the museum Bob met the Commanding Officer U.S. Special Operations Command, who came from his base at Mildenhall especially to meet him. As Colonel Kruger the C.O. said at a ceremony at the memorial, 'No other man has done more to develop Air Force Special Operations than Robert W. Fish.

*Footnote by John Harding*

#### **A Heflin Policy.**

Squadron commanders could pick the missions they would fly. They must balance the easy missions with the difficult, the long flights with the short flights. Only one Squadron Commander could fly on any one day. They could not attempt to accomplish all of their missions quickly and be rotated to the U.S.A. They were in the Carpetbagger business for the duration. Their knowledge and experience were essential to the overall mission accomplishment. All the Commanders wanted to fly the Mosquito and A-26 missions. Due to the limited number of these aircraft which were available and the special training required, missions in these aircraft were restricted to a very limited number of specialised pilots. Squadron Commanders need not apply, they had too many other things to do!



**Editorial**  
By  
John Harding

Welcome to our summer edition of The Dropzone.

Whilst it becomes increasingly difficult to find suitable material for each new edition of our magazine, we do hope that you will find items to interest you, and any feedback would be greatly appreciated. Let us have your comments whether they are favourable or not together with any suggestions that might help us to produce something to suit all tastes.

The museum, as you know, opened at the end of March and, so far, attendances seem to be holding up well. A number of groups have visited the museum by special arrangement and future group visits at the time of writing are as follows:

Wed. July 4th Graham Thorpe Group.  
Sun. July 15<sup>th</sup> Classic Car Day  
Fri. July 20th N.I.A. Group.  
Tues. Aug 14th Lubenham Heritage Group  
Sun. Sept.23rd Paramount Hotels Group.

At the last committee meeting held on the 30th April various points of interest were raised. The museum roof has been receiving further attention from our volunteers but it is a constant battle against the elements. We are, as reported previously, not able to accept the high quotes for roof replacement, and repairs are being carried out "as and when". A new TV has been installed and this has improved the quality of the customer viewing of our video. New security fittings have been put in place on the rear exit as well as a new door and fittings for the side exit along with further signage to comply with changes in fire safety legislation.

Last, but by no means least, following a major operation at Kettering General Hospital, to repair damage to her back, Vera is now home and is making slow but sure progress. She would like to be making a speedier recovery but in spite of everything she continues to be her usual cheerful self, making her way up to the museum whenever possible. We wish her all the best.

**The Douglas A-26 Invader**  
By  
Keith Taylor

The A-26 Invader achieved a combat history that no other US planes have or ever will exceed. It had the distinction of serving in the Second World War and later, the Korean War, carrying out not only the first attack, but also the last attack three and a half years later, and was used by the French Air Force in Algeria and Indonesia. In the 1960s, the A-26 Invader was brought out of retirement and used by the US in Vietnam. Apart from its military career, it went on to be used as executive transport and also as a borate bomber dropping fire retardant on forest fires.



Douglas A-26 Invader

The A-26 Invader was born as a result of the Air Corps requirement for an aircraft capable of carrying out the operations of the various light and medium bombers then in service. This resulted in the A-26 having the size and speed of the Martin B-26 Marauder, the firepower and bomb capacity of the B-25 Mitchell and the manoeuvrability of its stable mate, the Douglas A-20 Boston/Havoc.

Douglas designer, E.H. Heinemann, designed three prototypes for three different types of operations, the main differences being the nose area. For the attack bomber, a clear glass nose was fitted and this was designated the XA-26, the X indicating it was an experimental machine. The next version, the AX-26B, was a fighter-bomber with a solid nose containing either six or eight 0.5 calibre machine guns. The third and final version was the XA-26A, fitted with a radar nose and a ventral gun pack containing four 20 mm cannon for night fighting.

Cont. on page 5



This was very similar to the arrangement fitted to the P-70, a night fighter version of the A-20 Havoc/Boston.

The first test flight was on July the 10th 1942 at Douglas's Long Beach airfield in Southern California. The pilot was Ben Howard. The manoeuvrability, speed and ease of handling was evident to Heinemann and the rest of the Douglas staff, and the Air Corps representatives present on that day. The A-26 Invader possessed some rather novel features for the time. The fuselage of semi-monocoque type construction was square shaped with rounded corners, reinforced with aluminium ribs. The various control wires, electrical and hydraulic lines were inside tunnels along the entire length. The wings were of two spar construction, which were formed from long unspliced spar caps that had integral and end fittings. Inside the wing were chordwise stiffeners that provided extra strength, allowing underwing bomb loads to be carried.

The wings employed a new N.A.C.A. low drag and laminar flow airfoil that required a new technique when taking-off or landing. On take off it was important not to raise the nose too high. The aircraft had to be flown off from a fairly flat attitude raising the nose wheel just off the runway, and on landing it could be brought in with the same level attitude, but just keeping the weight off the nose wheel. On similar nose wheel types, the B-25 Mitchell, the A-20 Boston and the B-26 Martin Marauder, it was necessary to keep the nose up in the last few seconds before actual touchdown to kill off speed, and on landing the nose-high attitude helped in breaking, but if this was tried on the A-26 disaster loomed! Among the new features included with the Invader were double slotted electrically operated flaps. These extended outward and downward giving more lift and drag than the types mentioned above and in the final phase of landing, if the nose was raised too high, the wing would stall causing the plane to drop like a stone.

The A-26 was powered by two Pratt and Whitney R-2800 engines giving a maximum speed of 360 mph, nearly 80 mph faster than the B-25 and B-26. The ease with which it could be maintained or repaired, with an engine change being possible within two hours, was a major asset to the planes' serviceability in a war zone. The only major problem experienced during the introduction phase was a weak nose gear that often collapsed, but after tests and modifications this problem was eventually solved.

Unfortunately, because of the time needed to retrain air and ground crews, the A-26 was slow getting into operations. Eventually 2,500 A-26's were produced from the XA-26, XA-26A, XA-26B, A-26B, A-26C, XA-26F, RB-26C, and the B-26K.



Maintenance work on a  
Pratt & Whitney  
R-2800 radial engine

To test the A-26 under combat conditions, 18 planes and their crews were attached to No. 553 Squadron of the 386th Bomb Group. The first mission was on September 6th 1944, and was followed by seven more missions. The Ninth Air Force Headquarters were so impressed that no aircraft were lost on these missions that they decided to re-equip the light and medium bomber units with the A-26, the first group to convert being No. 416 Bomb Group. During a raid on Wersbaden on March 9th 1945, No. 38 B.G. were attacked by no less than 30 BF(ME) 109's. Three A-26's failed to return, but the group claimed seven 109's shot down. In addition to medium bombing and low-level strafing attacks, a number of A-26's were used by No. 69 Tactical Recon. Group, and A-26's pioneered the use of S.H.O.R.A.N. (short range navigation radar) that was used to pinpoint stationary targets such as road junctions, railway junctions and bridges.

Cont. on page 6

The final Ninth Air Force bombing mission took place on May 3rd 1945 by A-26's of Nos. 386, 391, 409, and 416 Bomb Groups, using S.H.O.R. A.N. and this was most probably the last bombing mission of the war in Europe.

### **Operation Red Stocking**

Five A-26's that were based at Watton (Station 376) were assigned to the 492<sup>nd</sup> Bomb Group at Harrington for dropping agents into Eastern Germany. Two of the A-26's were lost during training. These aircraft arrived at Harrington on the 16th of March 1945. These A26's carried a crew of four, so the only place available for the agent was in the bomb bay. The forward section of the bomb bay was fitted with a plywood floor large enough for two agents. The floor was hinged on one side, the other side being connected to the bomb release gear, controlled by the navigator's position in the nose. The agents were dropped at no more than 500 feet above ground level, sometimes much lower.

### **Dam Busting Invaders (?)**

No, not quite, but an A-26 was used for test dropping a bouncing bomb over water. The type of bomb was not the large 'UPKEEP' used so successfully by Lancaster bombers over the Rhur dams, but the smaller 'HIGHBALL', eventually dropped by the Mosquito. The 'HIGHBALL' was designed to be used against Japanese shipping in the Pacific, but constant problems delayed the programme and these problems were not cured before the end of the war. One A-26 and the crew were lost during a test flight when the aircraft released the bomb at too low an altitude. When the bomb bounced it struck the rear fuselage causing the whole tailplane to detach. Surprisingly, the A-26 seemed to fly straight for one to two seconds without the tail, before nosediving into the sea. By the end of the war Invaders had dropped 18,054 tons of bombs, carried out 11,567 sorties with the loss of 67 aircraft, and had confirmed kills of seven enemy aircraft over Europe.

### **The Pacific War**

The only group of the 5<sup>th</sup> Air Force to re-equip with the A-26 was the 3rd Bomb Group, who started the conversion in the early summer of 1945. Back in the United States other groups were converting to the A-26 for operations

against the Japanese. They left Hunter Field, Georgia, in May and after stops at California, Hawaii and various islands, they arrived at Okinawa in July, flying their first mission on July 16th against marshalling yards in Kyushu. The crews continued flying missions, even after the first atom bomb was dropped. On the 12th of August the Group stood down after 20 missions with no losses and only a few aircraft damaged.

### **Post War Service**

After the war, the US Air Force adopted the A-26 Invader as the standard medium bomber. The other light or medium types such as the A-20, B-25 and B-26, were either scrapped or given second-line duties and with the demise of the B-26 Martin Marauder, the designation B-26, was given to the Invader. By 1948, many of the B-26 Invaders had been placed in storage at Davis-Monthan Air Base.

### **The Jet Engined XA- 26F**

Despite the invaders high-speed, it was decided to increase it further by adding a Jet engine. The upper deck aft of the bomb bay was stripped of all its radio and navigation gear, both turrets were removed and the General Electric 1-16 Jet engine fitted in the rear fuselage. A pair of four-bladed Hamilton Standard propellers were fitted to increase its basic power. On June 20th 1946, the XA-26F flew from Wright Field to St Louis and back at an average speed of 413 mph with a 2200 pound load, setting a new world record. It was decided not to go any further with this project as a new generation of Jet Propelled medium bombers were being developed. These included the Martin B-57, and the American Canberra, built under licence by the Martin Aircraft Corporation. This XA-26F was kept as a test aircraft until the early 1950's.

### **The Korean War**

On Sunday June the 25th 1950, North Korea made an attack across the 38th Parallel starting a war that was the last for over three years. B-26 Invaders of No. 3 Bomb Group based in Japan, carried out the first bombing missions of the war on June 28th. After the 1st Marine Division made a successful assault on Inchon, the B-26's were called in to support the advance.

Cont. on page 7

In October a new group arrived from California and started operations almost immediately. They were No. 452 BG who later became No. 17 BG. More B-26 aircraft arrived in Korea and as equipment became available the B-26's were able to extend their night fighting operations. RB-26's were used for reconnaissance, and assessment for intelligence officers. The last bombing mission of the war was carried out by a B-26 of the 3rd Bomb Group.

### Indochina Invaders

The French Air Force was the second largest user of the B-26. Until the arrival of the B-26 Invaders, the French Air Force had been using old Junkers 52 bombers against the Vietnamese since 1946, adding a few Mosquitoes in the late 1940's. The French modified the Invaders by fitting larger gun packs and locking the top turret in the forward facing position. Firing of the guns was linked to the wing and nose guns and controlled by the pilot. After the end of the hostilities, most of the B-26 invaders were returned to the United States, but a few were kept for training purposes.



This A-26 had been modified for VIP transport then converted again to give the exterior its former military style

### Algeria

As the French withdrew from Indochina, trouble erupted in Algeria. Flying day and night operations they sustained only small losses of aircraft for unlike the Vietnamese, the Algerian rebels did not have sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons. Hostilities ended in 1962 and the B-26's were then used as high-speed transports with some being scrapped in the mid-1960s

### B-26 Invaders Into The Late 1950's

When the B-57's started replacing the B-26 Invader in late 1953, the B-26'S were given mostly second-line duties. Many were modified for use as a VIP transports with plush interiors, others became target tugs used by the US Navy. A small number were used to carry Firebee drone launchers. One was used to test various braking parachutes that were designed to be used on the new Jet bombers entering service such as the B-47, B-57, RB-66, and B-45. For testing braking parachutes the Invader had the wings removed and the elevators locked to stop it getting airborne. It raced down the runway to simulate an aircraft that has just landed, then deployed the parachute. They nicknamed it the 'Wingless Wonder'.

### Vietnam Operations

In late 1961 four RB-26's were sent to Vietnam under the 'Farm Gate' programme to provide valuable reconnaissance work for South Vietnamese forces. When the war heated up more invaders were sent in. Two B-26's were shot down by the Vietcong, and two more lost their wings during bomb runs. This was caused by the aircraft taxiing over uneven tracks and runways when fitted with under-wing bombs. The extra stress caused cracks in the main spars when the wings flexed. This problem led to a decision to withdraw the Invaders from service during the spring of 1964. But this was not the end of the Invaders for two years previously, in 1962, the On Mark Engineering Company, after gaining experience converting B-26's to civilian status started converting twenty six B-26 Invaders for use as counter-insurgency aircraft. The contract was increased to 40 aircraft that became known as the B-26K. The modifications were extensive. The wings were rebuilt and strengthened, the spar was re-placed by a ring spar, the tail was enlarged and the fuselage re-manufactured. New Pratt & Whitney R-2800-103W engines, with reversible propellers, were fitted and larger fuel tanks and wing tip tanks were added. The last of these aircraft was retired in late in 1972 and was handed over to the National Air and Space Museum.

Cont. on page 8

## Foreign Service

France Largest foreign user of the A-26. Purchased 85, last one retired 1968.

Brazil Third largest user of the A-26. Purchased 36, some of which were modified to B-26K standard by Hamilton Aircraft Ltd, Tucson. Last one retired 1976.

Chile Thirty four B-26C and four B-26B purchased. Last two as VIP transport. Retired 1976.

Biafra Purchased two during The Fight for Independence. Nothing further known.

China An unknown number of B-26/RB-26 purchased. Nothing further known.

Colombia Nineteen B-26B/C purchased 1954, of which eight modified to B-26K. Retired 1980.

Congolese Republic During the fighting in the Belgian Congo in the early 1960's a number of B-26K with C.I.A. crews were used to support the U.S. backed government. These formed No. 211 Sqdn. comprising of 9 aircraft.

Cuba Eighteen B-26B/C and a TB-26C were purchased. When Fidel Castro came to power, the remaining Invaders were transferred to Fuerza Aerea Revolucionaria.

Cuban Rebel Air Force This unit, backed by the C.I.A., used seventeen B-26B/C's.

Dominican Republic Purchased nine A-26's, upgraded to B-26K late 1960's.

Guatemala Purchased eight B-26B and one B-26C in 1960. Retired early 1970's.

Indonesia Unknown number of B-26B. Last one retired 1976.

Laos C.I.A.-sponsored operation using U.S.A. F. personnel.

Honduras Purchased only one B-26B. In service for only a short time.

Mexico Ten B-26's were purchased in early 1960's. Retired mid-1970's.

Nicaragua Had one B-26 in 1958, then purchased four B-26B's. Retired 1979.

Peru Sixteen B-26's purchased in mid-1950. Replaced by Canberras. Retired late 1960's.

Portugal Twenty B-26 purchased 1966. Only seven received, the remainder were held by customs.

R.A.F. Britain purchased three A-26 in 1944 and then placed an order for 140 more. However, they were allocated to U.S.A.A.F. squadrons, so only two were delivered. These and the evaluation aircraft were later returned to the U.S.A.

Saudi Arabia Nine B-26B purchased in 1955. Lack of training and spare parts limited use.

Turkey Twenty eight B-26B/C were purchased in 1948. Retired in 1959.

Vietnam Unknown number purchased in the early 1960's. They bore South Vietnamese markings and were originally flown by U.S.A.F. crews. A number of clandestine missions, backed by the C.I.A., were flown in the Caribbean (Haiti) and Asia.

By 1980 all foreign operators of the B-26's finally withdrew them from active service, but quite a few are still flown on the Air Show Circuit.

## Civilian Invaders

After the end of the Second World War, a few Invaders were sold to the civilian market. One was acquired by millionaire Milton Reynolds who used it to beat Howard Hughes's around-the-world flying record. Named the 'Reynolds Bombshell', it was flown by Bill Alderman who reduced Hughes's time of 91 hours 41 minutes, to 73 hours 5 minutes. A number of firms were involved in converting A-26's to civilian standard, the modifications varying from small alterations to large-scale assembly lines that completely remanufactured the aircraft.

One such manufacturer was the On Mark Engineering Company that sold four different versions: the On Mark Marksman, A, B, and C models, and the On Mark Marketeer. Many of these were used on the Racing Circuit. Another company involved in remanufacturing the Invader was Lockheed Aero Services, an off-shoot of the famous Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, who produced the one and only Lockheed Air Service Super 26.

Cont. on page 9



Rhodes Aircraft Co. produced the Rhodes Berry Silver 60 that had a very deep fuselage, with a loading ramp similar to that of the C130 Hercules, but of course much smaller.



The On Mark Marksman

The Smith Aircraft Co. made the Smith Tempo II, a very sleek looking machine, and a number of companies modified B-26's for carrying water or chemical fire retardants ('borate bombers') to help fight forest fires. One such company, the Rock Island Oil And Refining Company of Wichita, Kansas, began developing its conversion of the B-26 Invader in 1958 and no effort or expense was spared to produce the best possible corporate aircraft. They produced three machines and named them Monarch 26. One machine, N8392H was delivered to Dean Stahmann, owner of Stahmann Farms in Las Cruces. When he wasn't carrying farm equipment and spraying his pecan crops, he used it to transport political associates, including future US President Gerald Ford. It was retired in 1984 and sold to the Scandinavian Historical Flight in 1987, where it was returned to a military configuration (externally). It then joined the air show circuit and can usually be seen at the annual Flying Legends air show at Duxford, Cambridge-shire.



Smith Tempo II

One of the fire-fighting aircraft appeared in the film 'Always', starring Richard Dreyfus and John Goodman, a rather silly film where the ghost of Richard Dreyfus's character is killed and comes back in ghost form to instruct his wife, also a pilot, on how to safely fly her B-26 back to base when things go wrong.

Many of the old Invaders were replaced by more modern machines in the late 1980's and early 1990's, but there are a few still out there working hard.

References: A-26 Invader In Action Parts 1 & 2  
Nos. 37 & 134 By Jim Mesko

Bombing Twins—Allied Medium Bombers  
By Michael O'Leary

Picture credits: Bombing Twins by Michael O'Leary

## A VISIT TO THE IMPERIAL WAR MUSEUM AT DUXFORD

By  
John Harding

This visit to Duxford was something out of the ordinary. The main purpose was to spend most of the day at a seminar followed by a walk around the aircraft exhibits. Since my last visit in 2006, the main hangar has been greatly enlarged and now contains some of the larger aircraft which had previously been exposed to the elements. Those that had been outside have now been given new paint schemes (the Hastings is a good example) and quite a few are now suspended from the roof.

Two of the four speakers were ex-test pilots and the 'star' of the show, in my opinion, was Captain Eric Brown R.N. who, despite his 87 years, gave an amazing lecture that was a privilege to hear. So, a few words about Eric (Winkle) Brown:

He had a 31 year career in the Royal Navy and is the Fleet Air Arm's most decorated pilot. After a distinguished operational tour flying from Britain's first escort carrier, he was selected as a test pilot in 1942 and then served at the A&AEE (Aircraft & Armament Experimental Establishment) at Boscombe Down before being appointed Chief Naval Test Pilot at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough where he remained for six years.

Cont. on page 10

During that time he commanded the Enemy Aircraft Flight and test flew such diverse aircraft as the twin-jet Me 262, the rocket powered Me 163 and the six engine German flying boat the BV 222 (to name just a few). He also commanded the High Speed Flight and finally the prestigious Aerodynamics Flight at Farnborough. During the Korean war he served as a test pilot at the U.S. Naval Air Test Center at Patuxent River for two years. While in his appointment as Head of British Naval Air Mission to Germany from 1957 – 60 he was seconded to the Focke-Wulf Co. for a spell as their test pilot.

In his test flying career he has flown a world record 487 basic types of aircraft and made a world record 2,407 aircraft carrier landings in fixed wing aircraft including the first carrier landing by a jet aircraft (a Vampire). He is past president of the Royal Aeronautical Society, an Honorary Fellow of the Society of Experimental Test Pilots and a Master Pilot of Russia. In 1995 he was inducted into the U.S. Navy's Carrier Test Pilot Hall of Honor, the only non-American to have received this accolade.

The second test pilot to speak to us was John Farley OBE, AFC, C Eng, Hon D Tech. John did his engineering training as an apprentice at the Royal Aircraft Establishment Farnborough before joining the RAF for pilot training in 1955. After flying Hunters with 4 Squadron, based in Germany, he was a flying instructor at the RAF College Cranwell before joining the Empire Test Pilot's School course in 1963. Following a distinguished pass at the ETPS he became a test pilot on the RAE Aerodynamics Research Flight at Bedford. During this tour he flew all the UK research aircraft then flying.

As RAE project pilot on the Hawker P1127 prototype in 1964, he started what was to become 19 years of Harrier test flying, moving from the RAE to join the Hawker team at Dunsfold from where he retired as Chief Test Pilot. As the Harrier programme progressed, he became increasingly involved in overseas ventures especially with the U.S. and various navies, particularly enjoying 1982 when he managed 2 hours gliding in an AV-8B Harrier not noted for its soaring performance!

John Farley has flown over 80 different aircraft types, both fixed and rotary wing.

Cont. on page 11



The main hangar IWM Duxford 2007



In 1990 he became the first Western test pilot invited by the Russians to fly the MIG-29 and more recently, participated with Lockheed as a JSF (Joint Strike Fighter) Red Team member. He retired from test piloting in 1999 but continues to consult on flight test programmes..

I believe that there are some 140 aircraft at Duxford, many of them in flying condition and these “flyers” are all housed in the three WW1 hangars (now listed buildings). Such exotic types on rebuild include the Bristol Blenheim, a Bristol Beaufighter (which has been on rebuild for 12 years and is not expected to fly for another 10 years) and a new one for Duxford is the Fiat CR42, an Italian bi-plane fighter. Another “new” type which was particularly interesting was a new-build Focke-Wulf Fw 190, probably the best German fighter of WW2. This type has been recently built in small numbers in the US and is an exact replica (except for the engine). It could possibly fly her, but only with CAA approval.



Focke-Wulf Fw190

### Donations

The last issue of The Dropzone featured an article about Lt. Albert Habeney, formerly a Bombardier with 36 Bomb Sqn, 492nd BG, and gave some detail of his service with The Carpetbaggers.

Shortly after the publication, we received a very nice letter from Albert’s daughter Cheryl to say how thrilled the whole family were with the article.

A few weeks later we were very pleased to receive a donation of over \$500 from Cheryl and the family. This donation will be used to purchase new display cabinets for the museum exhibits.

We send Very Best Wishes to Cheryl and family.

## CAPTAIN VICTOR GOUGH

By  
Colin Burbidge

Sadly, I never met my Uncle Vic; he was murdered in Erlich forest near Gaggenau on or about 25<sup>th</sup> November 1944. This is his story.

Victor Gough was a Captain in the Somerset Light Infantry, and had previously been a member of the shadowy “Auxiliaries”, groups of trained and armed men who, had Hitler invaded, would have led resistance in Britain. In 1943 he volunteered for the Training Branch of SOE. He transferred to the operational branch in autumn 1943 and became part of SOE’s “Jedburgh” project.



Capt. Gough

This was a plan to send teams of 3 men behind enemy lines after D-Day to liaise and direct French Resistance groups .The “Jeds” as they were known, would be dropped in uniform, and would be mixed teams, for example Victor Gough’s team, codename “Jacob”, consisted of a French officer Lt. Baraud, and an English wireless operator Sgt. Seymour. There were only just over 100 “Jed” teams, of which “Jacob” was the twenty-sixth.

Cont. on page 12

Team "Jacob" was to be dropped on the night of 12<sup>th</sup>/13<sup>th</sup> August 1944 in the Vosges area of France. Their mission was to arm and direct up to 7000 resistance fighters in an area that had not previously been able to accept daylight arms drops because of a substantial German presence. Team "Jacob" was to be parachuted in along with SAS Team "Loyton" with whom they were to liaise and plan joint operations.

The drop did not go well. Sgt. Seymour badly damaged his ankle and broke or dislocated a big toe, and the wireless set was broken. This meant that Captain Gough was reliant for the time being on using the SAS wireless, entailing a 5 mile trek for each transmission. Within 3 days Lt. Baraud was killed and Sgt Seymour captured following a German ambush on a steep heavily wooded mountain trail. Victor Gough's short radio message tells the tale.

*"Skye (Seymour's codename) captured 17<sup>th</sup> August. Reported shot as reprisal on 20<sup>th</sup>*

*Please check with Red Cross. Connaught (Baraud's codename) killed. I am now sole member of team Jacob. 100 maquis killed, 100 captured in same battle. Rest dispersed."*

Seymour was not killed but survived in captivity which was contrary to the fate of virtually all other SOE and SAS parachutists. By September 16<sup>th</sup> Captain Gough was in trouble. The last message he sent to Special Forces HQ said in part.

*"Great difficulty working alone. Have contacted 800 maquis under Marlier. Can't come up on regular skeds. Send more money and arms"*.

Special Forces HQ continued to send messages to Captain Gough until 28<sup>th</sup> September, but they would not hear from him again, sometime in those 12 days he was captured.

What became of my uncle Vic was revealed in a very unusual way, from the eyewitness testimony of a German officer. Captain Gough and a number of SAS Team Loyton had been captured over several days after 16<sup>th</sup> September 1944. They were all taken to the Sicherungs camp at Schirmeck la Broque and housed in the 'Block' in effect a prison within a prison, with individual cells. A number of them including Gough, Major Reynolds and Lt. Dill, both SAS, were taken to Strasbourg for violent interrogation by the Gestapo.

Also in the 'Block' were 2 American flyers Pipcock and Jacoby, and 2 French priests, Abbé Roth and Father Pennerath.

On the 19<sup>th</sup> September, the 'Block' had a new inmate Captain Werner Helfen of the German Military Police. He had been sentenced to death by the SS at Vittel on 26<sup>th</sup> August. Captain Helfen had been in command of a company whose main task had been guarding buildings and installations. On the 16<sup>th</sup> August he and his company were ordered to withdraw eastwards, as the Allies advanced deeper into France. They were also ordered to hand in their normal weapons, for use in the front line fighting. These weapons were replaced by sawn-off shotguns.

When Helfen's company reached Chalon-sur-Marne, he ordered his men to throw their shotguns into the river. His reasoning was that such weapons were outlawed under the Hague Convention and had they been taken captive, they would have lost their POW status. Thus the charge of "wilful destruction of government property" led to the death sentence pronounced in the Police Court at Vittel.

Helfen's arrival at the 'Block' was a blessing to the British paratroopers, for with his influence on the German guards; he was able to get medical attention for the 2 injured American flyers, extra food rations for Captain Gough and the SAS men and was very useful in the preparation of an escape plan. Helfen was appointed a "helper" by the Germans, and was able to move about "the Block" with ease, and had entry to individual cells. Escape plans had advanced to the making of a wooden folding ladder, to be used to scale the outer wire.

Helfen became close friends with Victor Gough, Lt. Dill (SAS) and Abbé Roth in particular. Lt. Dill had taught Werner the arcane skills of poker. The Allied advance through France was plain to hear, for each day the bombing raids crept closer and closer to Schirmeck camp. The prisoners assumed it would be a matter of a few days before they were liberated and so they put their escape plan on hold.

Ironically the swift Allied advance was to seal the fate of this small band of brave men. According to Helfen's testimony Captain Gough read out the names of all the prisoners in the 'Block' and thanked Werner for all his kindnesses to them. In appreciation Gough gave his SOE silk escape map to Werner as a token of gratitude. The last lorry left at 5 am on the 23rd November. Helfen was in that truck.

As they passed through Strasbourg Helfen jumped from the vehicle, made his way on foot to his home in Offenburg where he hid until he was captured by French troops, and would later give evidence to Major Barkworth of 2 SAS for his War Crimes investigation.

Cont. on page 13

Helfen also learned that his Nazi death sentence had been reduced to 10 years hard labour.

For his efforts to help the Allied prisoners, Werner Helfen was given a letter of commendation signed by Major Barkworth.

The rest of the small convoy was making its way to a camp at Gaggenau, further east from Schirmeck. The Allied prisoners had thought it would be a normal Stalag camp, but they were not to know that 14 of them were already condemned to death. Near the cemetery at Gaggenau, was the Erlich forest. It was here that the trucks stopped and the prisoners including Captain Gough, all his SAS comrades and the 2 French priests were taken to a bomb crater and murdered.

Major Barkworth's investigation led to the capture and prosecution of the main culprits in these murders, but it should be noted that this was not an isolated incident.



Capt. Gough's Grave



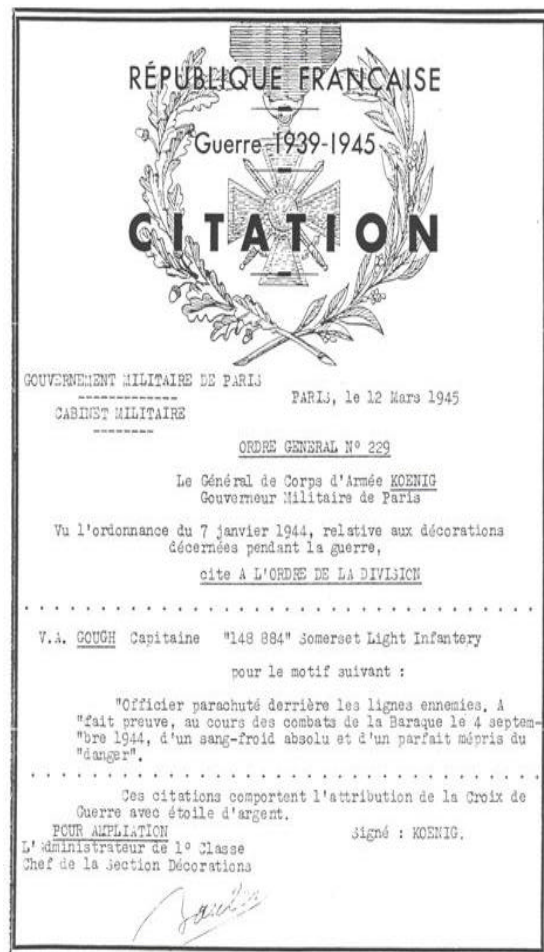
Capt. Verner Helfen

Nazi policy on SAS and SOE uniformed parachutists was severe and there were sadly many other instances of murders of POW's captured behind enemy lines.

But this is not quite the end of the story.

Following a regional TV documentary in the West of England about some of these wartime murders of SAS men, Werner Helfen was traced and found to be in retirement having continued his police career after the war. After some correspondence, my Mother, Victor Gough's sister, received a package.

In it was the SOE silk escape map that Captain Gough had given to Captain Helfen at Schirmeck on November 22<sup>nd</sup> 1945.



Cont. on page 14



767

VOL. 4 JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER 1944      JEBBURGERS

Operations, Team Jacob (Cont'd)

receiver you sent both broken on arrival. Think can manage by using SAS set. Chins up."

18 September From Jacob (641)

"Have contacted 800 maquis under Marlier. Sent message with SAS yesterday for arms drop. Gave ground. SAS will liaise with you. Great difficulty working alone. Can't come up on regular skeds. Will come up on emergency when can. Please have your message ready for me on this channel. Have not had money yet. SAS having personnel drop to team here tomorrow. Please send money addressed to me with one of their officers."

19 September From SFHQ to Jacob (642)

"Sending 100,000 Francs through SAS Loyton tonight. Acknowledge reception. Keep us posted on location and activities."

23 September From SFHQ to Jacob (643)

"Urgent you give us soonest possible details death Skye and Connaught. Give details action with place dates. Must have information for Red Cross and families. Did you receive francs from Loyton. Have you contact with Maximum and Loyton. Keep us informed your position. Request you give us tactical information Quadrilateral, Strasbourg, Mulhouse, Belfort, Epinal. Realize your difficulties but you are most valuable in present area."

27 September From SFHQ to Jacob (644)

"Please give us news of yourself. For Maximum-Jed Alastair now in area Epinal. Sends following instructions: one, recruit 50 men capable of guiding Allies armies to German border; two, split group into two units of 25; three, they must not attack until ordered to do so."

28 September From SFHQ to Jacob (645)

"For Maximum. Planete wishes urgently Maximum, Cervelet, Reciproque to send in immediately grounds and conventions so that mission sent by General Montsabert in command 2nd Corps can contact them. Can you give us news of Reciproque. Did you receive money."

(This is the last contact had with Captain Gough, the only remaining member of team Jacob.)

Record of messages, Team Jacob



Former Capt. Verner Helfen at Capt. Gough's Grave

Readers are reminded that there is a display in the museum featuring Capt. Gough which has been put together by Clive Bassett.

### Authors Surprise Visit to Museum

On Friday 8th June we had three unexpected visitors to the museum. Two well known authors of aviation books, Martin Bowman and David H Kibble-White, were accompanied by a friend from Belgium, Claudy Winant. David and Claudy have recently used the museum's research facilities, but it was Martin's first visit since his last visit in 1993. Copies of books written by David and Martin are on sale in the museum's book shop.



Pictured L to R: David, Fred, Martin, Roy and Claudy

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Wer'e on the Web!  
[www.harringtonmuseum.org.uk](http://www.harringtonmuseum.org.uk)



**A Service of Remembrance**

On Friday 18th May 2007 a number of members from Harrington Aviation Museum Society attended a Service Of Remembrance at The Church of St Botolph in the village of Stoke Albany. A commemorative plaque was presented by Mrs Christine Bertram, daughter of Flt Sgt. G Bradley RAFVR that listed the names of all crew members who lost their lives when Boeing Fortress Mk 1 AN534, crashed near the village on the 28th July 1941.

The aircraft was on a test flight from 90 Sqn. Royal Air Force, Polebrook, and carried an American Air Force Officer.

The crew members were:

<b>Flt Sgt. Reginald C Bradley RAFVR</b>	<b>aged 28</b>
<b>Flt Sgt. Hubert CG Brook RAFVR</b>	<b>aged 25</b>
<b>Sgt. Robert Henderson RAFVR</b>	<b>aged 23</b>
<b>1st Lt. Laird W Hendricks USAAC</b>	<b>aged 25</b>
<b>Flt Sgt. Ronald CA Muir RAF</b>	<b>aged 21</b>
<b>Sgt. Philip S Pugh RAFVR</b>	<b>aged 23</b>
<b>Sgt. Roy Smith RAFVR</b>	<b>aged 28</b>

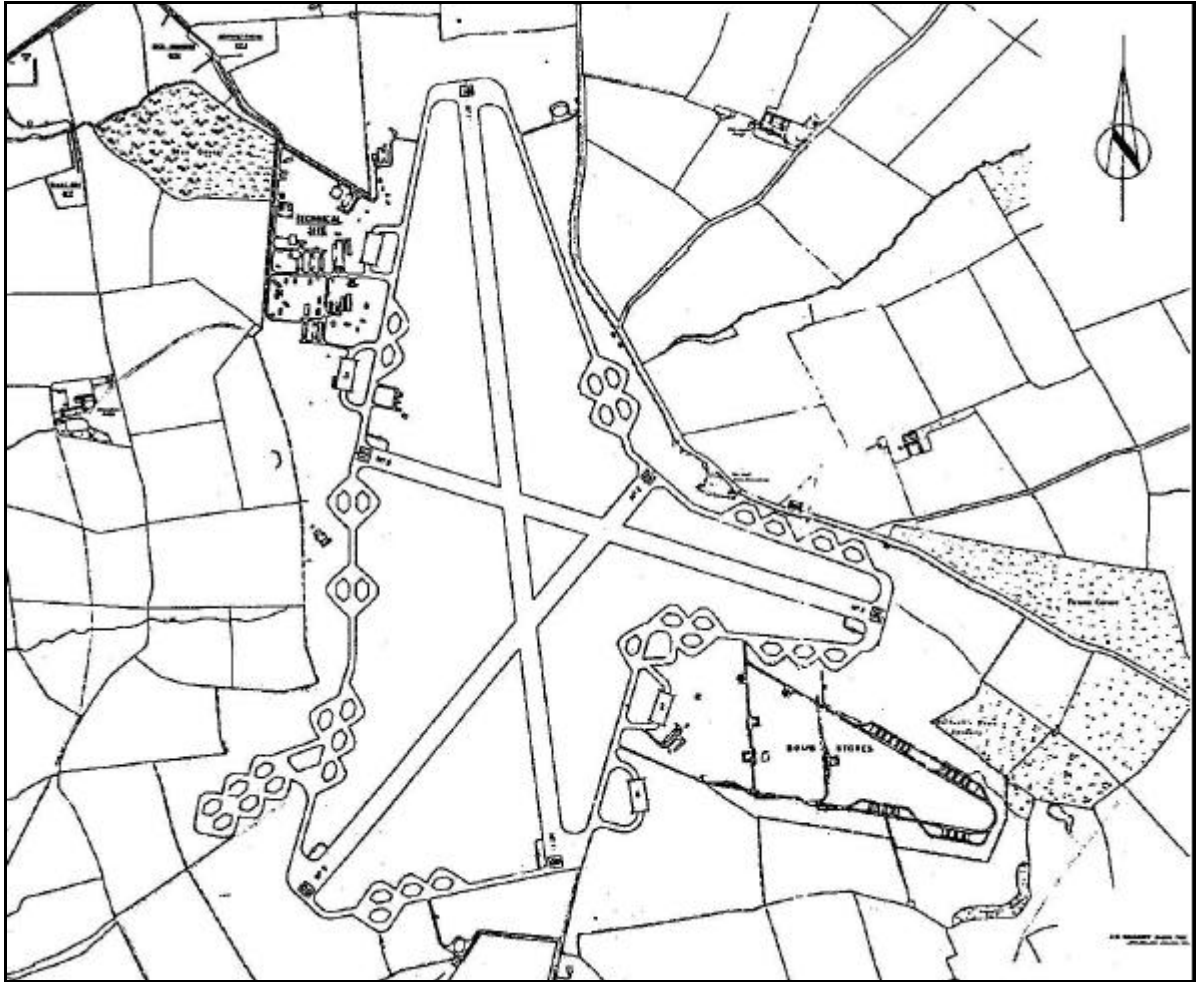
Also in attendance were representatives of the United States Air Force, the Royal Air Force and the British Legion.

Just prior to the ceremony, there was a fly-past by aircraft from RAF Wittering

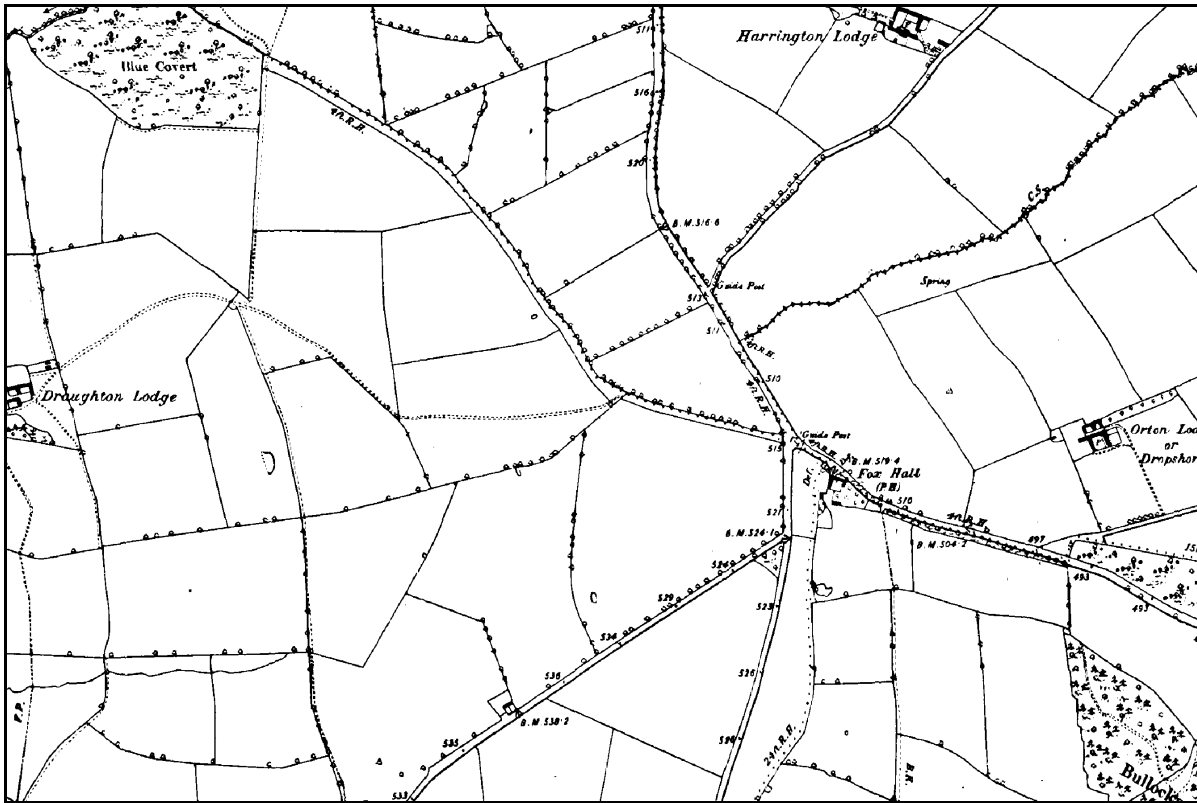
Our Chairman, Ron Clarke, prepared a pictorial display featuring aircraft from 90 Sqn, and added two artifacts from the Fortress that are on display in the museum. These items, along with the plaque, were on view in the Village Hall after the ceremony.



The Honour Guard and Mrs Christine Bertram with the Plaque in front of the church after the dedication ceremony.



Station 179 Airfield layout at Harrington in 1945



Site of Harrington airfield at the turn of the 19th Century