

# ***XV SQUADRON ASSOCIATION***

President: Air Marshal Sir Michael Simmons RAF



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## **XV SQUADRON ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTE 2007**

### **CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS**

Numbers were a little down on previous years at this year's Reunion Dinner at RAF Cottesmore, but the Officers Mess again produced an excellent meal and looked after us all in their usual welcoming manner. The date of 11<sup>th</sup> May was a earlier than usual due to the Station's other commitments, and may have not been quite so popular as our normal timing, and as you will hear later, we are hoping to revert to either the 13<sup>th</sup> or 20<sup>th</sup> of June in 2008. Unfortunately, due to operational commitments, Cottesmore are having some difficulties in accepting the 2008 Dinner at this time, and we are currently investigating alternative locations in the same general area, which seems to be convenient to most in terms of travel; generally, the Cambridgeshire area. The Secretary will ensure that notice of the Dinner location and exact date goes out as soon as possible, probably early in the new year.

Our Association Secretary, Flt Lt Helen Hillard, leaves us in mid December on her posting to XI Squadron at Marham. However, such are the operational pressures on the Service at the present time, that she will spend two months in Afghanistan before reaching her new Station. Helen has been a splendid

Secretary over the last two years, and has been instrumental in introducing further improvements in the Newsletter, and in organizing our excellent Reunion Dinners at Cottesmore. We wish her a safe and successful detachment to Afghanistan, a happy and satisfying tour at Marham, and we hope to see her at future Association reunions. Our new Secretary is Flt Lt Mark Vaughan, a WSO Instructor on XV Squadron, and we look forward to working with him over the course of the next year.

Unfortunately, you will see elsewhere, we lost one of our previous Committee members during the last year. Frank Diamond was a stalwart supporter of the Association and was the Treasurer for a number of years. Frank was one of our members from the period covering the Second World War up to the Canberra days, and will be sadly missed by us all.

As you will also see, the Squadron and the Association were represented at the annual services in Europe to commemorate the loss of aircraft and aircrew on operations during the Second World War, and we expect to be represented at a further ceremony at Meerlo in Holland in March 2008. I would stress that members of the Association who feel that they can make the journey to the continent are welcome at any of these events.

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Many members may not be aware that an Association web site exists. Unfortunately it has tended to fall into disuse over recent years and is now out of date. Hopefully efforts to revitalize the site will begin shortly and details will be circulated in due course; the Secretary would be delighted to hear of any help that members can give to this endeavour. As we come to the end of another year, it just remains for me to, once again, on behalf of our President and the members of your Committee, to wish you all a very Happy Christmas and a successful and healthy 2008. Next year marks the 90<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the founding of the Royal Air Force, an event we look forward to celebrating in style at the annual Reunion Dinner.

David Bywater  
Chairman

## **ASSOCIATION NEWS**

Firstly, I would like to thank all of you who supported the Association's Annual Dinner in May this year. Hopefully, the earlier date didn't put too many of you and (as you can see) we will hopefully return to a date in June in order to entice more of you to come. You'll also be glad to hear that we will be continuing our quest to keep after dinner speeches to a minimum to ensure everyone has the opportunity to catch up and chat in the bar instead. Next year's annual dinner is beginning to be finalised and while I cannot yet enclose the details in the newsletter, I hope you feel able to join us.

The more astute of you may have noticed that one of the names has changed at the top of this newsletter. I'm coming to the end of my

tour on XV Squadron and am due to be posted to Marham in February, via a short tour in Afghanistan. It has been decided that the Association Secretary can best serve the Association by being a serving member of the Squadron; a view I concur with having seen the role develop over the last two years. To that end, Flight Lieutenant Mark "Frankie" Vaughan will be taking over Secretarial duties for the Association from January and I have included his email at the top of the newsletter so you can contact him with any requests or questions regarding the Association you may have. I would like to thank you all for being so supportive to me during my time as Secretary. I have thoroughly enjoyed the job and meeting the many members of the Association. I have never failed to be intrigued (and often amused!) by the stories and tales they have told me of their time on the Squadron. I look forward to taking a bit more of a backseat role in the Association and seeing you all at the next Annual Dinner.

I hope you enjoy reading this edition of the newsletter and catching up with the rest of the Squadron news. And may I take this opportunity to wish you and your families a Merry Christmas and a peaceful 2008.

Elle Hillard  
Sec

## **XV(R) SQN – SQN CDR'S REPORT 2007**

Having now been in the 'hot seat' as Officer Commanding XV(R) Squadron for almost ten months it is with great pleasure (and some relief!!) that I can report back to you all and say, with confidence, that your Squadron is certainly fit for the challenges we face today

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and that we continue to make an extremely valuable contribution, both directly and indirectly, across the world when called to do so. In addition, I would like to take this opportunity to offer my thanks to Wing Commander Iain Chalmers. Jocky handed the Squadron over to me in excellent shape and he will be a hard act to follow. I wish him well in Civilian Street.

Turning first to operations, over this past year, several Squadron personnel (including one of our very youngest SACs) have independently been stationed for up to 4-months on the air base at Basrah in Southern Iraq in support of Operation TELIC. During this time they have had to endure often intense, yet sporadic, mortar and rocket attacks undertaken by Iraq insurgents both day and night. I am sure that many of you will appreciate the special type of courage that our people have shown in carrying out their tasks under this constant and close threat; I am extremely proud of their efforts. Additionally, we supported No 12 and then No 617 Squadron when some of our pilots deployed with them to Qatar to conduct operations over Iraq. These flying sorties reach across most of Iraq and, using air-to-air refuelling, they often last up to 8 hours in duration. They utilise high definition targeting pods, relaying images and information in real-time directly onto the laptops carried by the troops actually on operations and in direct 'contact' with the insurgents on the ground. During these deployments the XV(R) Squadron aircrew were called upon to provide close air support to our troops and were, on occasion, required to deliver ordnance (strafe gunnery and precision bombing) against the insurgents. Already this year I have presented over 10

operational medals to personnel on our Squadron and doubtless I will have the honour to present many more in the near future. I am keen that, where able, XV(R) Squadron continues to provide invaluable direct support to operations and tasks; thus, our personnel will continue to be asked to deploy to areas such as Iraq, Afghanistan and the Falklands for the foreseeable future.

Back here at Lossiemouth, our core business remains the training of high quality Tornado pilots and weapons system operators (navigators to you and me!) to pass on to the seven RAF front-line Tornado GR4 squadrons. This year we have continued to deliver a constant stream of fresh keen young officer aircrew off onto their first operational tours. On many occasions, they can leave my office (having received my 'pep talk' on what lies ahead!!), and then be operational over Iraq within just 2-months; this is actually quite impressive given the complexity and demands of current operations, but it is also, I believe, testament to the high level instruction and training they receive during their time here on XV(R) Squadron and it is indicative of the vital role that we play for the Tornado GR4 Force and the RAF as a whole. By way of recognition of our instructional role, the Squadron was recently awarded the Trenchard Memorial Trophy. This is awarded annually by the Central Flying School (CFS) for "outstanding contributions to the art of flying instruction" and was received on behalf of the Squadron by my then deputy, Wg Cdr Baz Dale, at the CFS Annual Dinner at RAFC Cranwell in July. Of course, none of this is possible without the experience and commitment of my Engineers, Operations Staff, Administration Staff and Aircrew alike

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and, to that end, I congratulate their efforts. I believe morale is good on the Squadron, despite the considerable challenges and degree of change being forced on the Armed Forces today, but it is fragile and therefore remains a key focus of mine. As in years gone by, we ask a lot of our people and as before, they constantly step up to the mark and deliver the goods. I trust this will remain the case.

I am also pleased to report that, once again, it was our absolute privilege and honour to parade the Squadron Standard at Odense, Gellick and Veraux this year. As ever, we were warmly welcomed and hosted in a most magnificent fashion at each venue. We even managed a 4-ship flypast of the Red House at Vreaux, despite the last gasp efforts of French Air Traffic Control to thwart our plans (I guess some things were easier during World War One and Two). Squadron planning for our attendance at these three events in 2008 is already in hand and I am very much looking forward to possibly seeing many of you there again next year.

On the social front, we recently held an All-Ranks Dining-In Night on the Squadron, in a near-identical fashion to the dinner that many of you experienced and enjoyed on the Squadron 90<sup>th</sup> celebrations; indeed the backdrop was the painting on the hangar door at one end and two Tornado GR4s were positioned at the other end. Over 200 Squadron personnel attended the event and everyone looked absolutely splendid in their uniforms and black bow tie. The 'buzz' amongst the Officers and Airmen alike during the evening was absolutely fantastic, especially afterwards in the Squadron bar - once they had all endured mine and the

Squadron Warrants' speeches. Note to myself – get a microphone next time, this hangar is big!! This whole evening served as a great indicator to me that Squadron morale is alive and well.

The week before the All-Ranks Dinner, it was again my honour and privilege to welcome our Association President Sir Michael Simmons and Lady Jean, along with our indomitable Squadron historian Martyn Ford-Jones and Valerie, as guests at our latest Officers' Dining-In Night held in the Mansfield Hotel in Elgin. I trust they found the Squadron in good spirits and enjoyed their visit; we certainly enjoyed their company. I believe it is important to that we use this type of opportunity to keep the XV(R) Squadron Association in the minds and sight of the current Squadron members.

On a similar thread, I could not let this annual report pass without a brief mention of the supreme effort that Flt Lt Elle Hillard has put in as our Association Secretary. Elle has quite deftly steered me through the early days of my relationship with the Association and for that I am eternally grateful; a new Officer Commanding XV(R) Squadron would not wish to make any great faux pas and then have to spend the rest of his/her tour regretting it!! Elle has an extremely busy job on the Squadron, being both a front seat and rear seat qualified instructor and she has balanced all tasks quite sublimely. She was also unfortunate not to get the opportunity to display the Tornado GR4 around the airshow circuit this season; I know that both she and Flt Lt Mark Swinton would have done a great job. Elle will soon be off out-of-area to Afghanistan, on Operation HERRICK, and then on to IX(B) Sqn at RAF Marham. I wish

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her all the best and hope that the promotion she so justly deserves is not too far away. Now, not wanting to seem eager to get Elle out of the door, I have managed to secure another volunteer from within my Officer cadre to be Association Secretary and you will all soon hopefully get to meet Flt Lt Mark 'Frankie' Vaughan.

Finally, with the Christmas season rapidly approaching, the current members of XV(R) Squadron will be taking some very well deserved Leave amongst their close family and relatives. This has been another demanding year for the Squadron and next year looks as though it promises more of the same. We end the year in good heart and I would wish to take this opportunity, on behalf of the current squadron members and our families to wish all XV(R) Squadron Association Members and your families a very Merry Christmas, a Happy New Year and good health. I leave you with a passing thought that it might be worth remembering the Squadron motto over Christmas...Aim Sure when you are stood under the mistletoe, Aim Sure when putting drinks into your mouth and certainly Aim Sure when buying your wife her Christmas present.

To the past, the present and the future.

Mike Saunders  
OC XV(R) Squadron

## **Association Secretary**

The Association is extremely lucky to have a serving officer as Secretary. Flight Lieutenant Elle Hillard, an instructor on XV Squadron, has held the post for the last two

years. The time for her to move on has come starting with a tour in Afghanistan in the New Year. Members of the Association, particularly those who have attended recent annual reunions, will know that Elle has been a very efficient and dedicated Secretary. In addition to making the arrangements for the annual reunion, Elle has overseen the production of the Newsletter, organized meetings of the Association Committee and written the minutes. All this is over and above her primary job of instructing would-be Tornado pilots. Although her work for the Association may have benefited, it is my personal regret that an MOD decision to have no Tornado flying display crew this year denied her a well-deserved opportunity to be the display pilot. Elle Hillard has been an outstanding Secretary of the Association and I am sure I have the support of all members in thanking her and wishing her well in her new appointment.

Michael Simmons  
President

## **Association Treasurer**

Squadron Leader Chris Snaith is due to retire from the post of Treasurer at the end of this financial year and we are looking for a suitable replacement for him. Should any of you be interested in holding the post of Treasurer, please contact the Association Secretary prior to the end of February and we will make the necessary arrangements.

## **We Remember Them**

It is with great regret that since the last issue of the newsletter in December 2006, we have

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learnt of the passing of the following members of the Association.

LESLIE BENTLEY, DFM - Bomb Aimer

Leslie Bentley was posted to XV Squadron, as a member of Sergeant Joseph Russell's crew, during August 1943. On the night of 3rd/4th October 1943, Leslie's aircraft was seriously damaged following an attack by an enemy night-fighter. Such was the ferocity of the attack, the mid-upper gunner of the crew, Sergeant Reg Rose, lost his right arm as a result of a cannon shell severing the limb. The aircraft remained airborne and Leslie assisted his pilot in keeping control of the Stirling bomber, which enabled them to reach the safety of English shores. For his courage and devotion to duty, Leslie was granted the immediate award of the Distinguished Flying Medal, whilst his pilot, was awarded the Conspicuous Gallantry Medal. Leslie Bentley and his crew converted to Lancaster bombers, along with the rest of XV Squadron, during December 1943. On the night of 20th/21st February 1944, during an attack on Stuttgart, his aircraft was shot down and five of the crew were killed. Leslie was captured, made a Prisoner-of-War and incarcerated in in Staglags L6 and 357, before being liberated in 1945 following a forced March across Europe. Leslie was a quiet, modest man and the news of his passing, in mid-October 2007, was received with great sadness by many.

FRANK G. DIAMOND, DFC - Navigator

Frank Diamond was posted to XV Squadron, along with Flight Lieutenant Hugh Wilkie and

his crew, on 3rd March 1943. On the night of 11th/12th June 1943, the Stirling bomber on which Frank was flying lost the port outer propeller, after a gunner on another Stirling flying close by opened fire at Frank's aircraft. The 'prop' flew off and disappeared into the night sky over Dusseldorf, leaving the GEE navigational aid without power. Due to the thoroughness of his training, Frank Diamond navigated the aircraft home by use of the stars. Although this feat did not earn him a Decoration, he was granted a commission in the rank of Pilot Officer, exactly one month after the incident. On 7th September 1943, having completed a total of twenty-two operational sorties, Frank was deemed 'Tour Expired' and sent to No.28 Operational Training Unit as a navigational instructor. However, he later returned to operations as navigator with a Mosquito squadron, with whom he completed a second tour for which he was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross. The news of Frank's passing, in mid July 2007, came as a complete shock to all who knew him.

ALEX V. WOOD - Pilot

Alex Wood volunteered for service with the Fleet Air Arm in February 1941, but was rejected following interviews, tests and a medical examination. Not to be discouraged, he then applied to the Royal Air Force and, following the same procedure as the FAA, was accepted. Having completed his basic training, Alex was shipped out to the USA, via Canada, for Initial and Elementary Flying Training Courses. The courses having been successfully completed, Alex Wood returned to England for the Advanced Training

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Courses, before attending an Operational Training Unit and a Heavy Conversion Unit. Following completion of the course at HCU, Alex was posted to No.90 Squadron, where he undertook his first operational sortie, an attack against Hamburg. On 2nd August 1943, he was posted to XV Squadron at RAF Mildenhall, with whom he was to complete a further 11 operational sorties. Apart from the mine-laying operations he undertook, Alex also participated in attacks against Hanover, Nuremberg, Turin, Boulogne and Kassel. It was on the night of 2nd/3rd October 1943, whilst attacking his target that his aircraft was shot down. Although four of the crew were taken prisoners of war, two were listed as killed in action, whilst another was listed as missing in action. As a PoW, Alex Wood was sent to Stalag Luft III. He returned home, courtesy of the Royal Air Force on 16th May 1945. The news of his passing, earlier this year, was received with sadness by all who knew him.

## GILBERT 'Gil' MARSH - Pilot

Gil Marsh enlisted for service with the RAF in early 1941. Following his basic training in England, he was posted to South Africa for Initial Flying Training at Bulawayo, followed by a course with No.26 Elementary Flying Training School at Guinea Fowl. Returning to England he completed his advanced flying training before being posted to 'C' Flight, XV Squadron, RAF Mildenhall, on 30th June 1943. On 10th August 1943, when 'C' Flight was re-formed as No.622 Squadron, Gil Marsh, along with his crew, were absorbed into the new squadron. By this time he had completed a total of 7 operational

sorties with XV Squadron. On the night of 23rd August 1943, during an attack against Berlin, his Stirling bomber was attacked by two Ju.88 night-fighters at the same time. Gil was severely wounded, to the extent that his bomb aimer flew the aircraft back to RAF Mildenhall. Remaining in hospital until June 1944, Gil Marsh eventually returned to Mildenhall, walking with the aid of two sticks and a caliper on his right leg. He never flew operationally again, but remained at Mildenhall, taking on duties as Link Trainer Instructor. Gilbert Marsh eventually got rid of the caliper and the walking sticks. He walked tall amongst his peers and was very much respected by all who knew him. He died on 27th March 2007.

## LANCASTER BOMBER, LM465, LS-U.

On the night of 12th June 1944, Lancaster bomber, LM465, LS-U, took-off from RAF Mildenhall for an attack against Gelsenkirchen in Germany. The aircraft was piloted by Pilot Officer Carlton 'Carl' Thompson, who was born in Michigan, USA. Although he was an American, Carlton Thompson, who had been declared medically unfit for service with the United States Army Air Force due to a leg disability, joined the Royal Canadian Air Force. The rest of his crew consisted of W/O Roderick McMillan, RCAF, navigator, F/S Jack Trend, RAFVR, Wireless Operator, W/O Ronald Lemky, RCAF, bomb aimer, Sgt Thomas Stubbs, RAFVR, air gunner, Sgt Richard Mobbs, RAFVR, air gunner and Sgt Maurice Pelham, RAFVR, Flight Engineer. At approximately 01.15 hours, on the morning of 13th June, the Lancaster bomber

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was shot down. It crashed 2 kms south-west of Meerlo, between Venray and Venlo, approximately 40 miles from the Dutch/German border. All the crew, with the exception of Jack Trend, were killed. Flight Sergeant Trend, having baled out, managed to evade capture. Sixty-four years later, it is proposed that a permanent memorial be erected at the site in Holland, in memory of those who perished in the crash. Necessary advances are being made to the local authority, and the current owner has given full consent for the memorial to be erected on his land. Designs for the memorial are being discussed, as are methods of funding the structure. It is hoped that a formal dedication of the memorial will take place in March 2008, on a date still yet to be decided. Any members of the XV Squadron Association, whether of the Lancaster era or not, are invited to be present. For further updates, please contact either Martyn R. Ford-Jones or the Association Secretary.

## **ASSOCIATE MEMBERSHIP**

Your XV Sqn Association Committee continues to offer the status of Associate Member to close relatives of former members of XV Sqn such as spouse or children and also to individuals who provided a strong supporting role to the Sqn, such as Army GLOs. We have had several people take us up on this offer so far and are looking to expand the membership this year. Anyone interested in becoming an Associate Member of the XV Sqn Association is encouraged to contact the Secretary for details (postal or email applications will be accepted). Below,

for your information, is a list of current members of the Association whether they be Full or Associate members.

## **CALLING ALL TORNADO AIRCREW**

Aces High Aviation Gallery at Wendover, near RAF Halton in Buckinghamshire, hold regular signing sessions where members of World War Two aircrew meet the Gallery's patrons and sign books and posters etc. I believe that a donation is made at each event, from the proceeds, to the RAF Benevolent Fund or other worthy RAF related causes. During a meeting at the Gallery this morning, Colin Hudson, one of the Directors discussed with me the possibility of being holding an event made up of Tornado aircrew, past and present, preferably with overseas operational experience (although not totally necessary), for a one/two day event at the Aces High Gallery. He is looking for four/six people who might be interested in attending. Anyone who is interested, can obtain further details by telephoning Colin on 01296 625681.

## **FINAL NOTES**

I hope you have enjoyed this edition of the newsletter. I would like to thank those who have contributed articles, especially Martyn Ford Jones for his continuing assistance. If anyone would like to write an article for next year's Newsletter, please let me know - contributions are always gratefully received! Best Wishes, Fly Safe, Aim Sure.

*Elle Hillard*  
Sec

