

XV SQUADRON ASSOCIATION



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

2011 UPDATE NEWSLETTER

2011 ANNUAL REUNION

This year's annual Reunion will take place on Friday 10th June 2011 at RAF Wyton Officers' Mess. Proceedings will start at 1545 with a presentation from some of our few remaining World War 2 members. This will be a unique opportunity to listen their wartime recollections and the Squadron Historian has outlined full details of the speakers, along with the accompanying display, at the back of this newsletter.

Following the presentation will be the Reunion Dinner, a 3-course, Silver Service meal. This will start at 1900 for 1930 and the dress is Black Tie with medals. With pre-dinner drinks, wine, coffee, port and liqueurs all included, the price agreed with the Mess of £55 offers exceptional value. The menu that has been decided upon is as follows: Smoked Duck with orange sauce for starter, followed by Westminster Lamb (roasted lamb noisette served with a mint & cranberry sauce), and Chocolate Torte for dessert.

There will be accommodation available in the Officers' Messes at RAF Wyton and / or RAF Brampton and rooms will be allocated on a first-come-first-served basis. The cost of the rooms will be approximately £11 and this should be paid prior to departing the Mess. Rooms will be available from 1300 on the Friday and breakfast on the morning of 11th June is included in the price.

RAF Wyton is the home of the Pathfinder Museum and the curator has agreed to open the doors to members of the XV Squadron Association on the morning of Saturday 11th June. It is only a short walk from the Officers' Mess and the visit will provide an opportunity for the Association to present some memorabilia to the Museum. More details can be found at <http://www.raf.mod.uk/rafbramptonwytonhenlow/aboutus/pathfinder.cfm>.

If you wish to attend the 2011 Annual Reunion please return the attached application form, together with a cheque for £55 made payable to "XV Sqn Association", to the Secretary. Alternatively, if you receive this newsletter electronically and have access to internet banking, you can return the completed application form by email and make an electronic payment directly to the Association bank account using the details on the application form (with your full name as a reference).

Please detail any dietary and accommodation requirements you may have on the application form. In order to inform both the Pathfinder Museum and the Officers' Mess of the likely numbers, please also indicate whether you intend to join the visit to the museum and whether you would like to take lunch afterwards, at an approximate cost of £2.50.

This year's reunion, centred around remembering our World War 2 heritage, should be both fascinating and evocative and we are looking forward to seeing as many of you there as possible.

MEMORIES AND ANECDOTES OF XV SQUADRON IN THE 1960s

Air Cdre Norman Bonnor continues to recount some of the lighter moments of XV Sqn on the V-Force.

The “Bywater” crew achieved “Combat Star” rating at the end of June 1962, and we were rewarded with a 4-day “Ranger” sortie to Karachi via Akrotiri. After the Suez Crisis of 1956, this involved flying back westward from Cyprus then over Libya (I wonder if we would do that today) and Sudan to go round “Nasser’s Corner” at 22N/25E to avoid Egyptian airspace. On landing at Karachi,

we were directed to a refuelling point and quickly completed the first-line servicing only to be told that we couldn’t stay parked in that spot. With no suitable tow-bar available, we recalled our experience at Wildenrath and asked for some help to push the aircraft. A gang of locals appeared lead

by an overseer with highly “bulled” boots and with much “2-6 Hopping”, they pushed the 90-ton aircraft some 150 feet to our parking spot. We arrived at the Speedbird Hotel rather hot and sweaty in our blue flying overalls, where the receptionist greeted our Captain (The Chairman) with great reverence and told him which suite was reserved for him; the rest of us were two to a room! After inspecting the accommodation, we persuaded our Captain that Bomber Command would never accept the bill for a suite and, much to the surprise of the receptionist, he asked to be downgraded to a room like ours!



Unfortunately, the aircon didn’t work too well in his new room, and he was none too happy when we smirked about this at breakfast! The hotel had its own outdoor swimming pool, but you had to share it with some rather large black ants that appeared to enjoy swimming. When you looked over the perimeter wall, it brought home the amazing difference in living standards between the jet-setting airline passengers of the 1960s and the local folk living in hovels nearby.

On 12 October 1962, we returned from a “Western Ranger” to Offutt just as the Cuban Missile Crisis was beginning. We flew a training mission on 16 October but didn’t fly again until 7 November. I was still single

and living in the Mess at Cottesmore and remember watching the situation unfold on TV with U2 reconnaissance pictures of IRBM sites being prepared and missiles unloaded. I have recollections that there was a quiet recall of personnel over the weekend of 20/21 October. Apparently, the Prime Minister,

Harold Macmillan, had asked the C-in-C, Sir “Bing” Cross, to bring the V-Force squadrons to maximum readiness with the least publicity as he didn’t want to alarm the general public. The engineers began to generate all available aircraft, including those in deep servicing, and load them with live weapons. As aircraft became available over the next few days, aircrews scramble-checked them and went on alert at RS15. From the normal one crew on QRA on the Monday morning, we had built up to seven by the end of the week; there was only one XV Squadron aircraft that was not recovered from the hangar before the

crisis ended. 10 Squadron was in a similar state by Friday, 26 October as were all the V-Force squadrons in 1 and 3 Groups. 59 of the 60 available Thor missiles were in a similar or higher state of readiness. The political situation came to a head on Saturday, 27th during which we were called to cockpit readiness RS05 for an hour or so. Krushchev backed down that afternoon; we, and the rest of the World who were in the know, breathed a sign of relief that WWII had been averted. In the aftermath of the crisis, High Wycombe introduced monthly no-notice exercises such as “Mick” and “Mickey Finn”. These usually lasted up to a week and culminated in 4-aircraft scrambles at Cottesmore and at least one of our dispersal bases such as St Mawgan or Bedford.



In the early 60s, the tactic for penetrating Soviet early warning and surveillance systems was still based on a large wave of aircraft at high altitudes covering its approach with high-power, broadcast jamming on radar and communications frequencies. The Valiant and some early Mk1 Victors and Vulcans had not been fully equipped with this ECM kit so regular exercises such as “Spellbound” were flown to test the capability of the Force to fly in a large wave, up to 100 aircraft, with the jammers above and around the non-jammers to protect them. Clearly, this had to be tested away from main areas of population so a facility was set up at Stornoway against which we could prove how well the jamming covered these big waves of aircraft. Clearly, we didn’t have a station keeping capability, so the positioning of individual aircraft in the wave relied

entirely on the navigation accuracy of the NBS on-board each aircraft. These exercises were often flown at night so, the first time we did one in daylight, it came as a bit of a shock to the pilots who could see many aircraft and contrails rather close by. When the run against Stornoway was complete, the jammers would be switched off and the wave would split up and complete other

planned training as individual aircraft or return to base. On one such exercise, the AEO of one of our aircraft could not switch off one of the Red Shrimp jammers and flew down the UK from Glasgow wiping out

all the TV relays systems, but fortunately the press didn’t find out who caused the black-out of Coronation Street that night. The jamming finally turned off when the weight-on-wheels switch operated on landing. The other tactical change that had taken place was in bombing; up to now, straight in attacks were made using radar (Type 2) from an IP some 50 or 60 miles away; however, the Soviet deployment of SA1 around Moscow and SA2 around some other major cities meant that high-flying aircraft could be vulnerable to these missile systems even at 50,000ft and above. To defeat the prediction capability of these systems, we changed our bombing tactic to a weaving approach (Type 2A) never remaining on heading for more than a minute or so; this made accurate bombing far more difficult as sensible corrections could only be made in the brief periods when straight and level.

The next excerpt will include how we achieved ‘Select Star Rating’, the most difficult classification on the V-Force.

WORLD WAR II PRESENTATION SPEAKERS

It is intended, at this year's Reunion Dinner, to start the proceedings on Friday afternoon, with a presentation of recollections by veteran members of XV Squadron, who served during World War Two.

Warrant Officer Robert "Bob" Kendall, was a wireless operator who flew with Flying Officer Norman Overend. Bob was posted to No.XV Squadron on 18th June 1944, but was shot down nearly three months later on 12th September, whilst undertaking his 19th operational sortie. Bob, who was captured immediately, will tell the story of his last mission.

Warrant Officer George Thomson was the navigator on the same crew as Bob Kendall. Together, they shared the same experiences of an operational tour, up to the fateful night they lost their pilot and mid-upper gunner. However, having parachuted to safety, George eluded the German forces searching for him for eight days before being captured.

Due to the fact George Thomson has had to withdraw from attending the Reunion Dinner, his experiences whilst on the run will be related by Martyn R. Ford-Jones.

Warrant Officer Stan Franks was a flight engineer who completed a tour of operations with Flying Officer Norman Burns, who named his Lancaster "Burns Bomber Boys". Stan will relate the experiences of an attack made against Saarbrucken, on 13th January 1945.

Flying Officer Tom Payne, who joined XV Squadron during the summer of 1945, will have a small archive of personal memories available for perusal.

A small collection of original artworks by aviation artist Ivan Berryman, depicting some operations undertaken by XV Squadron aircraft will be on display during the presentation.

Please try and support the veterans on this occasion, before joining them in the bar after the presentation.



XV SQN SILK TIES

Thanks to very generous donations from two members of the Association a new batch of XV Sqn silk ties has been produced and are on sale at the incredibly low price of £9.50. They are available in either Navy Blue or Maroon and if you wish to make a purchase send a cheque, made payable to "Service Funds RAF Lossiemouth", to the Secretary.

XV SQUADRON MEMORIAL EVENTS

Please note the following 2011 Memorial Events in your diary:

- Odense - Wed 4 May
- Gellik - Sat 7 May
- Vraux - Thur 14 July

Further details may be obtained from the Secretary.