

EDITORIAL

What a long winter we seemed to have endured. But hey, Spring is well and truly here now and as if to celebrate it our newsletter is now being professionally printed! It looks smart and hopefully you will enjoy the contents. I always include as much Martlesham based information as I can and Alan Smith has sent me an account of an air/sea rescue by one of our ex-members. I did include this story in a previous newsletter a couple of years ago but make no apology for repeating it because this article is from another book and is more descriptive and has more information than the previous article.

Two ex-Martlesham veterans have written in to respond to previous articles and I have included their fascinating stories in the "Letter Spot". One of them remembers sitting in the BLEU Devon with the windscreen blacked out and a couple of boffins in the back landing the 'plane! How scary is that?

Turn the clock back 65 years and imagine yourself in the middle of the North Atlantic. Now imagine you are a passenger on a ship that has been hit by a torpedo and is sinking fast. Our member Phil Sheaf has sent me a copy of a letter from a lady who survived the sinking of the SS "City Of Benares" in 1940. I include it here to remind folk of those extraordinary and horrifying times so many years ago.

It is now six months since the dedication of Dresden's Frauenkirche baroque Church Of Our Lady and perhaps we should revisit the controversy surrounding the bombing of that city in the latter stages of WW2.

We congratulate Clive Denny, his family and all who were responsible for the successful "Merlins Over Malta" adventure. As a postscript to this Alan Smith has submitted information about the hazardous ferrying of Spitfires to Malta during the siege of that tiny island in WW2.

Finally Bob Dunnett, our vice-chairman, has recently been in hospital for quite a serious operation. I am pleased to report that my friend Bob is well on the way of recovery. I have included a letter from him in the "Letter Spot." He praises the friendship and camaraderie of the members and he's not wrong there.

We look forward to seeing Bob back in circulation as soon as possible. He owes me a pint anyway!

ED

AIR SEA RESCUE FROM MARTLESHAM INVOLVING NOEL LANGDON , A FORMER SOCIETY MEMBER

278 SQUADRON RESCUE A CANADIAN BOMBER CREW

On the night of 15th September 1944, Flt Lt Vic Motherwell and his crew of 420 (Snowy Owl), Squadron RCAF were the standby crew and expecting to have the night off. Due to illness amongst one of the crews planned for the night's

operation against Kiel, Motherwell's crew were added to the battle orders. It was to be his fourteenth operation, but for the rest of his fellow Canadians it was to be their thirteenth.

Halifax NA 629 was airborne from Tholthorpe in Yorkshire just before 10 pm. The aircraft was new and had recently been delivered to the squadron. It had the dubious distinction of being a non-starter on two previous operations due to malfunctions. Shortly after leaving the English coast near Flamborough, all the navigation aids failed and navigator Flying Officer Ian McGown had to resort to dead reckoning. Approaching the Danish coast, searchlights and flak were seen to starboard indicating that the aircraft was on track north of Flensburg and a turn towards Kiel was made.

Just after the bombs were dropped there was a loud bang and the hydraulic pressure dropped to zero. The bomb doors remained open and the wing flaps started to droop. The undercarriage partially lowered, and all this additional drag required an increase in power to enable the bomber to maintain height in the bomber stream. As soon as the enemy coast was cleared, Motherwell started a slow descent in an attempt to conserve fuel.

It soon became apparent that the bomber would not be able to make England and the crew considered the various options open to them. They decided to press on rather than head for Holland and bale out over enemy territory. McGown gave Motherwell a course to steer for Cromer in the hope that they could bale out over the English coast.

At 3,000 feet the fuel tanks were reading empty and the bomber was still 50 miles off the coast. With the undercarriage down and bomb doors open Motherwell knew that he must make a powered approach, so he decided to ditch before the engines cut and he ordered the crew to take up their ditching positions. McGown kept the wireless operator, Flight Sergeant L. Engemoen, updated with the aircraft's position, and Engemoen continued transmitting until it was time to clamp the key down and take up his position.

There was a heavy swell and 20-foot waves as Motherwell landed the Halifax into the strong westerly wind. He got the speed down to 90 knots holding the nose high under power, and the tail hit the crest of a wave and the aircraft rapidly decelerated. He completed a masterful job landing the aircraft on the sea in the most difficult circumstances and all the crew were able to get clear as the fuselage filled with water. The rogue Halifax had just 13 hours' flying time when it finally slipped below the waves.

The dinghy inflated and the crew scrambled aboard. It was an eerie scene, pitch-dark, the wings awash and the red-hot engines cracking with steam rising as the water engulfed them. Motherwell escaped from the top hatch above his cockpit and walked along the top of the fuselage; he was virtually dry when he stepped into the dinghy, which had floated to the tail. The crew cut the line and drifted clear of the aircraft. They were kept busy during the night baling out the dinghy as waves constantly broke over it. By first light, all the crew, except the

Saskatchewan 'landlubber' Engemoen, had been seasick and conversation was limited

Back at Tholthorpe, two Halifaxes were made available for search duties and they took off during the morning. By late afternoon Motherwell and his crew had decided to hoist the sail and accepted that they might drift towards Holland, but shortly afterwards Flight Lieutenant E.S. Heimpal RCAF, pilot of one of the searching Halifaxes, sighted the dinghy and dropped a series of flares. Within a short time other aircraft appeared overhead, including a Hudson that dropped a Lindholme Gear. The crew were able to retrieve the dinghy and supplies, which included dry suits. A Halifax climbed to transmit a position report, and just as it was getting dark a Walrus appeared on the horizon.

Flying the 278 Squadron Walrus was Lieutenant Noel Langdon RNVR with his crewman Leading Airman R. Atkins. After circling the dinghies, Langdon landed on the rough sea and immediately disappeared from the view of the survivors as the Walrus sank into a deep trough. Slowly Langdon taxied to the dinghies where the eight men were taken on board, Motherwell as the captain being last to leave the dinghy in true naval tradition.

With 10 men crammed into the Walrus, it was impossible for Langdon to take off and he started to taxi slowly towards England. After one hour, Lieutenant Don Mackintosh RNVR brought his *RML 512* alongside and all the survivors were transferred to the launch, given dry clothes and the obligatory tot of rum. Last to embark were Langdon and his crewman. The Walrus was taken in tow and the combination headed for Great Yarmouth. However, one of the circling aircraft detected a German E-boat and it was decided to cut the Walrus loose and increase speed towards England. During the early hours of 17 September *512* arrived at Great Yarmouth, where the survivors were checked by a Navy doctor and put to bed.

The following day, the Navy retrieved the Walrus, which had survived the night, and it was towed to Great Yarmouth and beached on a sandbank. Ground crew examined the aircraft and pronounced it fit to fly, a tribute to the strength of that sturdy, unglamorous aircraft. Langdon was taken out to the aircraft by boat and he taxied out to sea, took off and returned to his airfield at Martlesham. The aircraft was soon back in service.

All the crew survived the war. Lieutenant Noel Langdon RNVR was awarded the AFC at the end of the war having completed 65 ASR sorties during which he was responsible for rescuing 19 personnel.

This item was taken from "Shot Down and in the Drink" by Air Commodore Graham Pitchfork published by The National Archives. 2005.

ALAN SMITH

LETTER SPOT

Dear Martyn,

First of all I would like to let you know that I came home from hospital and that after seeing my surgeon on Monday, 3rd April he has told me that the operation was a success and that I am now clear of any cancer there was. You can imagine how relieved Rita and I are.

May I thank all of you for your kind messages, cards, support, visits and true friendship shown to my family and I over the past few weeks. My recovery will be slow but I will always be pleased of a visit to the house for a chat. Perhaps you could just ring to ensure you will not clash with my young, blonde eighteen year old nurse, who I can assure you just nurses me – nothing more. My fire is very low just now! I really cannot thank you all enough for your help through a very difficult period. I will endeavour to get back with you all as soon as I can.

Rita joins me in once again thanking you for your camaraderie and friendship. This is a truly wonderful Society, full of good friends.

Bob, (Dunnett)

The following two letters are from members who were at Martlesham in the BLEU days. **ED**

Dear Alan,

Although I am a committed non-active member of MHAS, nevertheless I do read and enjoy Runway 22.

In the January issue I was intrigued to read about the Blind Landing Experimental Unit in which I played a very small part.

Briefly, to give you the background, originally living in the north, I was called up into the RAF in October, 1946, (before National Service). After initial training I did six months at RAF Hednesford for training as an airframe fitter. Then six months at RAF St Athen for advanced airframe training. Finally, after one month at RAF Manby I was posted to RAF Martlesham BLEU. I was allocated to the ground crew of the De Havilland Dove, (Devon). A beautiful twin engine 10/11 seat passenger aircraft. After a spell at the De Havilland aircraft factory for training on the Dove/Devon airframe it was back to Martlesham for servicing and maintenance of our beloved Dove.

Actually on that particular aeroplane all the seats were removed and we fitted several "magic" black boxes, which I assume were early valve type computers. Anyway there was only room for the pilot, co-pilot and three 'boffins' sitting at the back.

The Dove made many blind landings at Woodbridge, often with a ground crew member in the co-pilot's seat. This was to ensure that the ground crew did their job properly!

I too had my share of sitting in the co-pilot's seat and fascinating it was.

Usually the cockpit windows were blacked out and the guys in the back had control of the aircraft. I never understood the technicalities but it worked!

One day we needed a small spare part so the flying officers and I flew to De Havillands in an Avro Anson, (or was it an Oxford?) I was taken along simply to crank the handle to start the engines! Anyway, the De Havilland people were very cross with us for wasting public money collecting a part they could easily have put in the post!

On another occasion, one holiday weekend, I was "volunteered" to tow it in and park it. The pilot signalled that he would taxi on to the parking place to help me out. Unfortunately as I marshalled him in the starboard wing struck a fence. My fault entirely. The pilot, (one, Flt Lt Penfold), was livid! I was mortified! We were on a "charge" and my case was dismissed. Penfold was reprimanded for breaking the rule of not taxiing within 50ft of the hangars. It seemed so unfair because he was trying to help me. Actually Penfold was very unpopular with all the ground crew so the "erks" were delighted when I got off and he didn't! Such was RAF life!

Finally, one more thing. To get to the canteen from the hangars meant crossing the runway. One lunchtime the barriers were down so we all stood and waited for the aircraft to land. It turned out to be the first jet-engined Meteor to be stationed at Martlesham. It came in extremely fast and just managed to stop at the end of the tarmac.

I was demobbed from Martlesham in late 1949. Fifty seven years ago and another world! Happy days!

I must apologise for prattling on!

Best Wishes, **Lewis Robinson.**

Dear Alan

Blind Landing Experimental Unit – RAF Martlesham Heath

I read with interest Alan Smith's article in the current edition of Runway 22, and it brought back memories of my time at Martlesham Heath, and in particular one of my embarrassing moments relative to the Blind Landing Unit.

To start at the beginning - I did 2 years National Service from Dec 1950 to Dec 1952. Having done my Square-Bashing at RAF Melksham, and coming from the Lincoln area, I fully expected to get a posting somewhere in Lincolnshire, which had nearly 30 airfields in WW2.

I explained at great length to fellow recruits, on posting, where Scampton; Waddington; Coningsby; Binbrook Swinderby; Hemswell and many other stations were, but I ended up being the only one posted to RAF St Athen in S.Wales!!! On arrival, I was told that I was 'supernumerary' and spent some time in SHQ work, until I trained to take over control from a civilian who was leaving, for ordering/supplying/costing food for the 6000 airmen at St Athen

and its satellite stations. We had a Budget of 1/1 Ip per day for each person, which had to be fully spent but not overspent - not an easy task.

I digress somewhat, but as soon as I took over full control, I was posted to RAF Martlesham, as Group still had me classed as supernumerary!!! There was nothing the Catering Officer could do to get them to change their minds!!!

On arrival at Martlesham Heath, I was put in charge of P2- nobody really knew what this was, but the easiest way is to think of it as a one man band 'Officer's Orderly Room'. However, part of the job was to do the paper work for the Air Ministry; Boscombe Down and the like, in the event of any incidents, basically on the 'flying side'

My Office was in the front of SHQ, adjacent to the C.O, and I was directly under the Adjutant, Flt Lt Wamer. He was in fact a civilian who had retired with the rank of Group Captain, but had been given his lower ranking for the post, but was of course in uniform. He felt he really outranked the C.O Wing Commander Oldbury (who disagreed and was of course running the Camp), and it is fair to say their relationship was uneasy at times, and I was often the go between for lines of communication. I sat in the Adjutants Office when he was away, which created many embarrassing situations, - but I digress again

My Office looked directly up the runway, and as my role was hardly full time, I spent many hours watching the aircraft. One day I heard a tremendous bang, and looked out of the window and there was a Mark 9 Meteor going up the Runway on the bottom of its jet engines, leaving a trail of sparks about 40 yards long. The Pilot Sqdn Leader Law, a South African decorated in the war, must have pulled back the stick to retrieve the situation, when he realised what was happening, and tried to emulate a V2 rocket. I was expecting an almighty bang, but this didn't happen, and a few minutes later he appeared flying low and slowly, over the Control Tower, with his undercarriage being inspected, through binoculars, by air traffic control staff on the balcony.

Subsequently he came in on the runway, having managed to lower his undercarriage, bounced the wheels to see if they had locked, and off again - he did this twice more, and then did a perfect landing.

My immediate reaction, after relief for the pilot, was 'Oh No' not another 10 copies of everything on an old Imperial typewriter!!!! I think I could get about 5 copies each time with carbon paper, (no computers then). Please bear in mind that by achieving 30 words per minute, I was entitled to an extra 30p per day - quite a significant sum at that time

The report was a summary of everything relevant to the incident, from the people who had serviced the plane to me Pilots version of what had happened, to the C.O's recommendation to Group of what disciplinary action (if any) should be taken.

The Meteors on the blind landing runs operated in threes, and came in on Radar beams, doing a 'touch and go' at 150 knots. The Pilots had to record information on a pad on their knee, in addition to actual flying the plane whilst carrying out

the 'touch and go' manoeuvre. Unfortunately whilst Sqdn Ldr Law had selected his undercarriage for touchdown, it didn't lock, so folded up with almost disastrous consequences.

To cut a long story short, the C.O recommended to Group that in view of the extenuating circumstances, he administer a reprimand at Station instead of Group Level. My mammoth job of collating all the relevant information was over and in a few days time I picked up a letter from Group agreeing with the C.O's recommendation. I passed it over with the rest of the mail, and was then summoned into his Office and told to ring Sqdn.Ldr Law and have him attend at 10.30 am in Best Blue.

I rang him at B Flight Office and told him what the C.O wanted, and he said 'what's this all about? - I said I'm sure you know, but I'm not saying anything (Jobsworth?) He laughed as he was well aware what it was all about.

Perhaps I should say that, as the Adjutant was on holiday, I was holding the fort, and was the only person with direct access to the C.O. His door had a glass peephole, covered with a wooden flap, and over this were the words **'Adjutant only - you have been warned'!!!!**

About 10 minutes before the appointed time Sqdn Ldr Law appeared; we had a general chat, and when the appointed time arrived, I said I think you ought to go in - However he read the notice over the peephole, and declined, saying I think you should advise the C.O I'm here. This I duly did and was immediately instructed to **'March him In'** Now as an SAC who had never marched anybody anywhere, or even contemplated it, I felt I had been struck by lightning. I didn't dare refuse, but had no idea what to really do, and to this day it is somewhat of a blur, just what I did, although it would have made any SWO cringe! I subsequently exited the Office, at great speed.

This must have been my most embarrassing moment at Martlesham Heath - although as I had to 'hold the fort' on many occasions for the Adjutant, there were others!!!!

As explained I would often deputise for the Adjutant, but as the C.O. liked to keep his hand in at flying, he was quite often taking the Dakota up for a flight - hence I then deputised for both of them, and had to field all sorts of phone calls.

I answered a call from the Air Ministry, saying that three NATO York Transporters were flying from Ireland to Germany , and would be landing at Martlesham to refuel. We were to make the necessary arrangements. Now the Runways were little more than a mixture of sand and bitumen, laid down over the original grass airfield - hence they were not capable of taking heavy loads, and in fact Venoms were only to land there in the case of emergencies, as they melted a furrow in the runways.

I merely said that perhaps I should mention that the Runways may not be up to the weight of fully loaded Transport aircraft, as I had visions of giving evidence

at some subsequent inquiry!! He asked to whom he was speaking , and I said I was acting in the absence of the Adjutant - to which he said Who are you?? When I said SAC..... he retorted I'm not asking permission, **I'm telling you, and they are on their way NOW.** This ended the call!!!

As I didn't have a Job Description, and don't think if I had, it would have made it clear whether I could carry this responsibility. I decided to get some back up - phoned Air Traffic Control, and asked them to get in touch with the C.O wherever he might be, so passing the buck. He cut short his trip, and fortunately landed in good time.

The Yorks' turned up, landed without going through the Runway, much to my relief.

Whether you consider this suitable for the Newsletter, I leave in your hands Strange how I came back to this area, but it seems difficult to now envisage the airfield as I originally knew it.

Yours sincerely.

JOHN R HOUGHT.

The letter copied here is by a survivor of the sinking of the SS City of Benares in 1940. It is in the possession of our member, Phil Sheaf and he suggested that I should publish it.

On board were 400 people, 100 of whom were children. 600 miles off the west coast of Ireland U-boat U-48 unleashed a torpedo and 175 adults and of the 100 children, only 13 survived.

The Children's Overseas Reception Board had safely evacuated 2664 children, 1532 to Canada, 576 to Australia, 353 to South Africa and 203 to New Zealand and it is believed that another 11,000 children went by private arrangement, over 6 000 to Canada and the remainder to the United States. **ED**

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My Dear May,

I expect you were surprised to hear all that had happened to me lately. I decided to go to Cecil and thought and thought it would be a surprise to write and tell you I had arrived. I expected to go much earlier, but it was pure bad luck I should have sailed on Saturday the 7th Sept, but was transferred to the "City of Benares" to sail on the 12th. I went on board at 9 a.m. but we remained in harbour all night, started on Friday the 13th.

We were convoyed which I now think is a mistake as they travel so slowly. All went well till our convoy left us on Monday. Tuesday night we were torpedoed. I wasn't feeling very well, & laying on the bed but hadn't undressed, so quickly put on my big coat and life belt & with my cabin friend went on deck, to find all the boats had been let down, some with children in and full of water, by the way it was an all black crew of Lascars, if there had only been British sailors many more would have been saved there was no one to help. I don't know where the E.A. got the news that a man gave up his place to

me, it was entirely wrong, the whole piece was feeble. I was lifted onto a rope ladder and climbed down the side of the ship & threw myself awkwardly into a life boat. There were about 15 other people in & 14 Lascars, we pulled away from the ship & she went down 10 minutes after. I was the only elderly woman saved it was a dreadful thing.

We were in that open boat 19 hours, in pouring rain and heavy seas, we had a bottle of brandy, hard biscuits and condensed milk. You can imagine our feelings when at last we sighted a destroyer on the horizon, and wondered will she see us, she was really looking for us, & was 350 miles away when she picked up the S.O.S. Some people hanging on rafts all those hours were terribly bruised. I could see for hours 2 children and a woman clinging to an upturned boat, we could do nothing to help but they were saved. It was a joy when at last the destroyer came to our boat, I was taken off first, a sailor came down and fastened a rope round me and hauled me up. It was a beautiful ship & the crew were marvellous to us, I was taken into a warm room and given a ¼ rum then taken into the Dr's cabin all wet clothes taken off, given a hot bath. I fortunately had all my clothes on, most of them had only pyj. & slippers had to be dressed in sailors' clothes. The officers' wardroom was turned into a bedroom, the sailors beds were put down in rows. The worst cases were given the Officers' cabins. I was so stiff the next morning could scarcely move, we were on board two days and nights, landed at Greenock on the Friday morning, there we had lunch & a rest were then taken to Glasgow to a large hotel where we had dinner and bedrooms. Sat. morning we were given 1st. Class tickets to the different destinations, no one was coming my way and I wasn't well enough to travel to Ipswich alone, and couldn't get in touch with my people. So my cabin partner took me home with her to Gt. Loudstone in Derbyshire. Her brother has the P.O. Exchange so he got through to Bob, after a lot of trouble, those people were marvellous to me. Gwen came up and stayed a few days before coming here. I'm with Peggy, I couldn't think where to go as I couldn't be alone, and didn't want to stay in Ipswich. It was a tiring journey, left Derby at 8, got to Ipswich by 7 30 p.m. Bob drove me out here, I'm feeling very depressed now, but must make the best of it, it seems unbelievable that I came through this, not even a cold, my nerves are not too good, the ship I should have gone on got through safely. I lost everything. Cecil and family are bitterly disappointed they had made such preparations for my arrival.

I've had lots of letters from various people. I often wonder how you are keeping through this terrible time if only we could see a glimmer of light toward an ending.

I thought you would like to know a little about my experience, there is a lot more I can tell you when I see you, my love to both....

LET'S LIGHTEN IT UP A BIT

Now that I'm older (but refuse to grow up) here's what I've discovered:

I started out with nothing and still have most of it
My wild oats have turned into prunes and All Bran
I finally got my head together. Now my body is falling apart
Funny, I don't remember being absent minded...
Funny, I don't remember being absent minded...
All reports are in: life is now officially unfair
If all is not lost, where is it?
It is easier to get older than it is to get wise.

Who remembers the film "The Way To The Stars"? The screenplay was by Terence Rattigan and the film had been commissioned by the Ministry of Information. It was one of the films made towards the end of WW2 to help to improve relations between the Americans based in this country and the civilian population. This poem was featured in the film.

For Johnny

Do not despair
For Johnny-head-in-air;
He sleeps as sound
As Johnny underground.
Fetch out no shroud
For Johnny-in-the-cloud;
And keep your tears
For him in after years.
Better by far
For Johnny-the-bright-star,
To keep your head,
And see his children fed.

John Pudney

MUSEUM NOTES.

During the closed season items have kept coming in to the museum. Amongst them is a ball gown made from a German parachute retrieved in 1944 at Needham Market and loaned by Mrs. Myrtle Racliff and featured in the Evening Star, on ITV, and Radio Suffolk which has created good interest in those visiting the Museum.

This dress led to the donation of a First World War baby's dress from Mrs. Gibbons of Witnesham, both items being on display together with their stories.

Also received are various items and papers from Capt. Robert E Cope of the 356th FG including fabric from his P-51 QI-I which crash landed in France.

Another bumper bundle was received from Mr. B. Hamsley of Inverness with some fascinating photos and documents.

Wing Commander Ron Everson, CO of the Blind Flying Unit at Martlesham has been a mine of information on the unit, including letting me see his log book entries of his time on the Unit.

Various other people have sent in accounts of their time here, donated items for display, or related incidents connected with Martlesham Too many, I am afraid, to name them all here, but our great thanks go out to them all for helping to preserve the memories of the Station and to their help in making the Museum what it is today.

After five years, I have handed over the display work in the Museum to Russell Bailey as I felt a change would bring in new ideas to keep the displays fresh and he has already made some good changes to introduce new items for your interest. .

ALAN SMITH, Archivist.

BLACK PROPAGANDA

In a previous newsletter I wrote an article about the deployment of Black Propaganda in WW2. So called because it attempts to conceal the source of the propaganda being distributed. White Propaganda on the other hand makes no attempt to conceal its origins. The dropping of leaflets from aircraft is an example of white propaganda.

In my previous article I mentioned the production of counterfeit British currency by the Nazis. It is not black propaganda as such but it is certainly a form of black deception. I rather 'skated over' this nefarious ploy by our German enemies but perhaps it is worth looking at it in more detail.

It was known in Germany as "Operation Bernhard, after SS Major Bernhard Kruger, whose idea it was. A team of 142 counterfeiters were involved. Jewish inmates of concentration camps were among those employed and they understandably took part, in the hope of thus being able to survive.

The operation commenced in 1942 and the aim was to create exact copies of British banknotes of various values up to £50. The total value of banknotes subsequently printed was £134,610,810.

Engraving the plates was one thing but to produce paper that had an authentic 'feel' and texture proved extremely difficult. The Bank of England used rag-based paper of a particular type which was extremely difficult to duplicate.

However, the German technicians together with the incarcerated Jews managed to print some of the most perfect forgeries ever produced. The notes were 'aged' to give them a used feel and were sent to neutral countries to pass a test of validity. When this test was passed the German authorities were ready to use them.

I mentioned in my previous reference to this counterfeiting exercise that although the original intention had been to destabilise the British economy by distributing them in England, in fact this was never done. I also said at the time that I did not know why this was, but apparently the answer lies in the following explanation.

From late 1943 about one million notes per month were sent to a former hotel near Merano in northern Italy where it was 'laundered' and used to buy strategic imports for the German economy and war effort. By this time in the war the deutschmark was weak in comparison with the pound sterling. Clearly the neutral countries with which Germany was trading had formed the opinion that Germany was losing the war and they preferred to be paid in anything rather than deutschmarks. The Germans had found a more effective use for the counterfeit sterling.

This was the reason that we were never showered with "pennies from heaven!" Presumably some honest people would have handed the notes in but the Germans assumed, probably correctly, that the majority would keep the money. It is not difficult to see that the British economy could be destabilised in this way if enough money fell from the skies.

ALAN POWELL

THE AGONY OF DRESDEN

It had been the intention of the East German government to leave the ruins of Dresden's Frauenkirche baroque Church Of Our Lady, permanently as a reminder of the horrors of war. However, the decision was reversed after the fall of communism and the magnificent rebuilt sandstone church once more towers above the centre of the city. It has been restored over a period of 11 years and stands now as a symbol of reconciliation. On 31st October 2005 it was re-consecrated and a delegation from Coventry, to whom Dresden is twinned, was present at the ceremony. How fitting that Coventry and Dresden are twin cities. Coventry, after all, received a devastating blitz by the Luftwaffe and Coventry Cathedral was also reduced to ruins.

On the night of Tuesday 13th February 1945 773 RAF Lancaster bombers raided Dresden, Germany's seventh largest city. The following morning this was followed by an attack by 527 USAAF bombers. Much of the bomb load consisted of incendiaries. The result was to cause massive fires in the largely medieval city. The hot air rising from the fires quickly caused air to rush in and this produced what is described as a firestorm.

Some German reports argue that the death toll was more than 100,000, but recent research suggests that around 35,000 were killed. Whatever the final figure was, the fact remains that the decision to bomb a city, already massively swelled in numbers by people fleeing from the advancing Russian army, was extremely controversial and the western powers have agonised over the decision to attack ever since.

Joseph Goebbels, Hitler's Minister of Propaganda was quick to exploit Dresden's fate. He had spent most of the war deriding claims that Germany could be not hurt by Allied bombs. The Dresden raid caused him to change tactics and he wildly inflated the number of victims. He said that this was terror bombing and what was might be expected if the allies won the war. All the more reason, he claimed, to fight to the end. Nazi newspapers were reporting up to 200,000 dead and Goebbels ensured that this reached the neutral press in Sweden and Switzerland. "A city skyline of perfect harmony had been wiped from the European heavens", lamented Das Reich, Goebbels mouthpiece paper.

At the height of the Cold War communist propagandists in Russia claimed that Dresden was a major war crime committed by the imperialist powers. They conveniently forgot that at the Yalta conference in February, 1945, Stalin had demanded and welcomed such assistance from the western powers.

The Berlin wall collapsed 15 years ago and recently historian Dr David Stafford from Edinburgh University, visited the former communist block to attempt to understand the reasons for the Allied attack on Dresden. Was it an Allied war crime that shamed the very cause for which our parents had fought – and making us, in effect, "no better than the Nazis?"

The manufacturing output from this city had concentrated on cameras, (from the Zeiss-Ikon factory), typewriters and radio equipment. They now produced war weapons. "The work rhythm of Dresden", boasted the city's Chamber of Industry and Commerce in 1941, "is defined by the needs of the army". Three years later, the handbook of the German High Command's Weapon Office recorded 127 factories dispersed around the city and working on war production – and that list was far from complete. In fact Dresden was second only to Breslau in its willing embrace of Nazism.

This was no 'innocent' city devoid of industry. Moreover, the war in the east had made it a key railway junction, with dozens of military trains passing through each day. The German High Command declared it a military strongpoint and had issued orders that the city be destroyed rather than fall into Russian hands.

None of this diminishes the horror of what happened in Dresden, either to the human victims or the historic fabric of the city.

Dr.Stafford also quotes from the diary of Victor Klemperer. According to Klemperer, a Jew married to a German Aryan and therefore protected from deportation, the raid actually saved lives. Most Jews had already been murdered. A remnant of 198 Jews was to report for deportation and certain death, as they well knew. The confusion caused by the raid enabled them to rip off their yellow star and to escape.

Finally we should remind ourselves that Hitler ordered what became to be known as the "Baedeker Raids", in retaliation of the bombing of the German cities of Lubeck and Cologne. Nazi propagandist Baron Gustav Braun von Sturm claimed that the Luftwaffe would work its way through the Baedeker

tourist guide. English cities bombed included Norwich, Bath, Canterbury, Exeter and York. Hardly legitimate strategic targets. Fortunately for us the Nazis had planned for a blitzkrieg war lasting months only. Apart from some early effective raids on England, when we were unprepared, they had not developed an effective bombing capability. Be in no doubt – if they had produced the means to bomb our country they would have done so with complete indifference to human suffering.

The Frauenkirche baroque Church Of Our Lady was rebuilt partly from donations from British citizens, including many from Coventry. Did Dresden contribute to the rebuilding of Coventry Cathedral?

Some of the information in this article has been obtained from the manuscript of Dr David Stafford's BBC programme.

ALAN POWELL

I Am Not There

Do not stand at my grave and weep,

I am not there, I do not sleep.

I am the thousand winds that blow,

I am the diamond glints on snow.

I am the sunlight on ripened grain,

I am the gentle Autumnal rain.

When you wake to the morning Thrush,

I am the soft uplifting rush

Of quiet birds in circled flight.

I am the soft stars that shine at night.

Do not stand at my grave and cry

I am not there – I did not die.

This beautiful little poem appears in a book "The Poems We Wrote", an anthology of Air Force poems compiled and edited by Eddy A Coward. In his book he states that the poem is attributed to a British soldier in Northern Ireland. It had been put to music and sung by lovely Katherine Jenkins on her CD "Living a Dream".

Actually the author is not known for sure but was probably an American woman, Mary E Frye and written around 1932.

I have spoken to Eddie Coward and he concedes that his information was probably incorrect – but nobody knows for sure.....

ALAN POWELL

MONTHLY MEETINGS ROUNDUP

Our first meeting of 2006 was extremely well attended and an audience of more than 100 were entertained by a speaker who had travelled with his wife from the south coast. The talk was entitled "Test Flying and Other Stories" and was given by Mr Tony Blackman.

Tony is now retired but was a former chief test pilot for AV Roe and Co, the aircraft manufacturers. He recounted experiences developing the Avro Vulcan, which was one of our three "V" bombers of the post war era. Tony Blackman rolled the huge delta wing Vulcan on more than one occasion. In fact his wife was aboard once when this manoeuvre was executed.

One of the last aircraft to be involved with trials at Martlesham was the Avro 748. This was developed as a successor to the famous Dakota and was intended to be used from rough runways. A strip of land next to the runway at Martlesham was ploughed up so that the Avro 748 could do experimental touch and go trials. Some success was achieved by this aircraft but it will be remembered more as the RAF Andover and its employment on the Queen's Flight.

A fascinating evening illustrated by both slides and video. In fact he showed video of the American recluse billionaire, Howard Hughes, when he visited this country in the seventies. Tony Blackman piloted the aircraft that Hughes flew in.

Our February meeting was hastily re-arranged when I scheduled speaker was taken ill. One of our members, Roger Cook, is a keen aviation museum buff and has a great selection of aircraft slides. He was able to entertain us with pictures of aeroplanes from several of the many aviation museums in the country. Our knowledgeable audience were able to recognise many of the obscure types and it became an exercise in 'plane spotting and filled the evening admirably! A vote of thanks was given by Alan Smith.

March and we had a record attendance in the region of 170 members and friends to listen to an illustrated talk about the recent "Merlins Over Malta" venture.

Clive Denny was accompanied by his wife, Linda and Howard Cook, to give us a debrief on the September 2005 historic return to Malta of a Spitfire and a Hurricane for the first time in more than 50 years.

Just over two years ago Clive, who runs an aircraft restoration business, visited us and said that he was considering attempting to fly a Spitfire and a Hurricane down to Malta, the island they defended in 1942/43. At that meeting the members of MHAS collected the first of many donations that were needed to fund such an ambitious project. Clive Denny has always appreciated that we were the first to put our hands in our pockets.

The aircraft belong to the Historic Aircraft Collection at Duxford. The Spitfire was built in 1942 and the Hurricane in 1943.

Clive flew the Hurricane and Charlie Brown, of the Historic Aircraft Collection, flew the Spitfire. They were routed through France, Italy and Sicily and

encountered unseasonably poor weather on the way. Their arrival, low over the magnificent Grand Harbour at Valetta was a sight cheered by many Maltese. The island was one of the most heavily bombed targets during WW2.

The talk, which was illustrated by video film projected on the digital projector that we obtained thanks to a lottery grant, "Awards For All", was enthusiastically received. Howard Cook, who accompanied the support team in a twin engine Cessna is also a pilot and had put together the video presentation.

It was an enormous undertaking and the cost of keeping each of those vintage aircraft in the air is approximately £2500 per hour for each aircraft. Due to a sponsor backing out at the last minute they are still raising funds to cover the cost. Once again our members responded with a massive total of £650. This was obtained thanks to the combination of a collection and proceeds from "Merlins to Malta" memorabilia.

Our April meeting was the occasion of our annual AGM. Our chairman, Martyn Cook was able to reflect on another highly successful year. Membership is 179 members and we often have an audience at the monthly meetings well in excess of 100. Gordon Kinsey, our life President, proposed that the executive committee be re-elected en-block and this was unanimously approved.

After the break the annual "Holly Hall" photographic competition was held. This was won by Roger Cook and Barry Newson was runner-up.

ED

Last but not least...

We welcome the following members who have joined since 1st April.

Philip Argent, Keith Bloomfield, Hedley Molland, John Mutimer and Terence Smith.

With apologies for any names inadvertently missed.