

The Old Crusader

Issue 15

The Newsletter of the 14 Squadron RAF Association

Summer 2010

Reunion Details

**Saturday 9 October
at RAF Cottesmore**

Cost £35 a Head

Book Now!



Above - a 14 Squadron Marauder taxiing out for a mission from Blida, North Africa, late 1943 or early 1944

2010 Reunion

Once again the Reunion will be held at RAF Cottesmore on Saturday 9 October at 7.00pm for 7.30pm. The cost of this year's Reunion Dinner will be £35 a head. The Reunion will be held in the Officers' Mess by kind permission of the PMC, but we must stress that the Reunion is open to **all** members irrespective of former (or current!) service rank. Once again the format of the event will be based on an informal curry buffet and we expect to pretty much have the run of the Mess to ourselves, as we have had for the last four years.

Accommodation

There is limited accommodation available in the Mess at RAF Cottesmore. We have reserved a number of rooms for those attending the Reunion - please book them through the Hon Secretary, not directly with the Mess! The cost of accommodation (including breakfast on the Sunday morning) will be £12 per person, and rooms will be available on a first come-first served basis. If you're coming "solo" please indicate if you'd be prepared to share a room - obviously if people are prepared to share a twin room with someone else, then we can make the accommodation stretch a bit further! That said, no-one has yet had to share a room in the last four years! There are also a number of hotels in the local area and the Hon Sec can provide you with details if you wish (but you'll have to book your own accommodation if you're off base!).

What You Need To Do!

If you wish to attend the Reunion please let me know in writing by 1st October 2010 and enclose a cheque for

£35 (or £47 if you want accommodation at Cottesmore) per person payable to "14 Squadron Association" Please could you also include your car registration number (required for access/security purposes) and indicate if you're willing (or not!) to share a room if necessary. My address is: Mike Napier, Lowesmoor, Great Rollright, CHIPPING NORTON, Oxfordshire OX7 5RR. I will acknowledge your letter as soon as I get it, and I'll also provide a briefing sheet with all the information you need nearer the time.

AGM

As in previous years, we'll hold a very brief AGM after the meal to approve the Finances and appoint a Hon Treasurer. The incumbent, Dougie Potter is happy to continue for another tour of duty, but if anyone else has a burning desire to do the job, please contact the Hon Sec. Any papers necessary for the AGM will be distributed with the final brief for those attending.

Centenary Project Update

The Centenary Project is progressing well and there is now a three part plan to get 14 Squadron's history published. I hope that two pieces of research will bear fruit and be published in 2011.

Centenary Project Part 1 is a World War 1 history of 14 Squadron which I've written up in co-operation with Mike O'Connor, a former Concorde pilot and expert on World War 1 aviation. Mike kindly let me have access to his many files and photographs and the result is, I believe the definitive history of the unit during WW1.

I'm hoping that this will be published by the First World War Aviation Historical Society in their Journal "Cross and Cockade" sometime next year. I'll put a posting on the Association Website when I have more specific details

Centenary Project Part 2 is a book covering the Squadron's WW2 history, and possibly also covering the Inter-War period. This will be a well detailed and illustrated history which will represent a significant update and improvement on "*Winged Promises*." I have found a publisher, Dalrymple & Verdun, who is very interested in publishing the work with a projected publication date of November 2011. There is a minor drawback in that I will have to share the risk with the publisher to the tune of approximately £4,000 so I am keen for pre-orders of the book and/or a bulk buy of some copies by the Association. I'll also try to see if I can get any sponsorship to help cover this cost. I anticipate that the book will cost around £25, but I should be able to offer some sort of discount on that price for advance orders. Further details as I have them!

Centenary Project Part 3 following from the above book project is to produce a book in time for the Centenary covering the Squadron's history from 1945 to the present. If the first book goes well I anticipate that Dalrymple & Verdun will be keen to continue with the project. For my part I will continue to collect photos and memoirs and conduct research so that I can start writing in 2012 (having finished off the WW2 book!) aiming to publish at the end of 2014 in time for the Centenary in February 2015.

Website in conjunction with the book projects above I continue to collect photos etc for display on the 14

Squadron Association website www.14sqn-association.org.uk. The idea eventually is to produce some sort of "virtual museum" of words and pictures. It does take time to get round to updating the website, so please be patient if you send any material in!

Shoreham Museum. I hope to include a short article in the next newsletter about the 14 Squadron display at the Museum at Shoreham Airport. Our contact there is Tim Hogben who is keen to collect any items relating to 14 Squadron history. Shoreham is, of course, the birthplace of 14 Squadron so it is a particularly appropriate place to have a small museum devoted to 14 Squadron!

So, the usual plea for any memoirs, anecdotes, photographs, memorabilia from your time with 14 Squadron please! I have access to numerous official documents etc, but it is only through personal memoirs etc that the real story can be told!

That's all for now, Folks

Mike

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Obituary

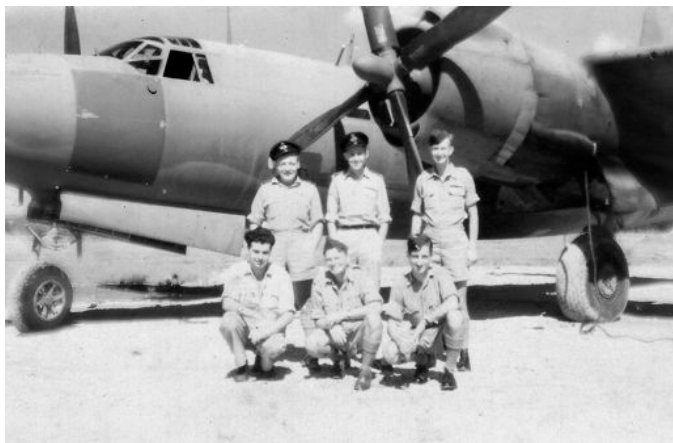


Brian Dutton DFC, seen left in 1945 and right in 2007, passed away on 23rd March at the age of 89. He was a great supporter of the annual reunions and his charming company will be greatly missed. Brian served with the Squadron as a Blenheim navigator in 1942; he later went on to fly in Wellingtons and Lancasters and transferred to the Air Traffic Control Branch after the war

U BOAT U407

By John Robertson

John Robertson who died last year wrote this article back in 2006, about his experiences hunting a U-boat in the Adriatic Sea. This is published as a tribute to him.



Above - John Robertson's Marauder Crew at Grottaglie, Italy in September 1944. Standing L-R: F/O Ingham (gunner), F/O John Robertson, W/O Ivor Duffel (Second Pilot), kneeling: W/O Hanks (nav), P/O Harris (gunner), F/Sgt Murray (Wireless Op).

In August 1944 "B" Flight at Alghero in Sardinia was busy flying patrols associated with the pending invasion of Southern France. This aspect of the Squadron's history is covered in some detail in *Winged Promises*, but of "A" Flight's activities that month there is only this brief paragraph in *Winged Promises*:

"A" Flight at Foggia continued with its two sorties a day with the Squadron now averaging six sorties a day. On 5th August Flying Officer Johnson sighted a U-boat despite the fact that the Squadron had no special search equipment. However it crash dived and managed to escape.

This is the only reference to the fact that half of the Squadron transferred to Foggia in the heel of Italy in late July in order to fly anti-submarine patrols along the Albanian coast between Ulcin and Corfu. We were briefed that the only operational German submarine in the Adriatic had left its base in Pola and now MACAF (Mediterranean Area Coastal Air Force) had to try to find it. In our normal low level anti-shiping reconnaissance role, our aircraft carried only an extra fuel tank in the bomb bay, but now we were to be loaded with four 250-lb Depth Charges. These had to be dropped from 50 feet by the pilot operating a single release button mounted on the control handle - i.e. not a release of a stick of four but rather four individual presses of the button. Our Squadron armourers worked like Trojans to get the system in place.

Also, much to our dismay, instead of flying at our usual height of 50 feet when near the enemy coastline, we were to carry

out box patrols at 4,000 feet in daylight so as to have a larger area of sea in sight. I might add that we were also aware that the Germans had a fighter base at Tirane, only a few minutes flying time away from our designated patrol areas. In fact on 5th August Sabe Lantinga's Marauder went to the rescue of a Wellington being attacked by two ME 109s off Corfu.

My own log book entries for the period show the following:

Aug 2 Marauder HD508 A/Sub Patrol Corfu Area no sighting
6h 50min
Aug 4 Marauder FB503 A/Sub Patrol Corfu Area no sighting
6h 55min
Aug 6 Marauder HD457 A/Sub Patrol Albanian Coast and Corfu
area Sub periscope sighted 3957N 1938E Course 005 Sp 5kts.
Attacked with 4 DCs. No visible result apart from small oil patch. Oil
patch and bubbles sighted by Spit one hour later. 7.00 hrs
Aug 8 Marauder HD487 A/Sub Patrol Albanian Coast and Corfu
area Suspicious surface streak investigated in Posn 3948N 1920E -
no conclusion adopted. 7.00 hrs

As quoted above, a submarine was sighted on 5th August on the surface on the Albanian coastline near a place called Valona, by Flying Officer Lance Johnson and his mainly Australian crew. The submarine crashed dived before Johnson could attack, but remember that he had to get down from 4,000 feet to 50 feet in order to attack. This was over a glassy sea which was mainly the sea condition at that time, especially if you were on the morning patrol.

However, Johnson's sighting certainly spurred us on. On the 6th August my crew was briefed to concentrate on the area just north of Corfu and from memory it was a warm sunny day with a smooth sea surface and a very light haze. Both my Second Pilot, Ivor Duffell and I sighted what appeared to be a smoke flare on the surface, and after telling our gunners to keep it in sight, we proceeded to lose height. Much to our amazement the smoke float appeared to be moving and was producing a small wake. We then realised that it was a periscope and we manoeuvred to attack, but at sea level the haze made it difficult to keep the periscope in sight. The optimum angle of attack on a submarine is diagonally across the track, forward of the conning tower. As we were running in behind the object at 180 knots at attack height, I realised we were paralleling its track, so instinctively I ruddered the aircraft's nose across to cut a diagonal path. As I pressed the release button I realised the aircraft was still skidding, throwing the Depth Charges off target. At the time of attack the tail gunner had been instructed to throw out an aluminium marker. I realised I had only dropped three of the four Depth Charges so circling around with no target now in evidence I chucked the remaining Depth Charge in on a presumed track heading from the marker. Unfortunately there was no evidence that we had made a kill or caused any serious damage.

As a sighting report had been sent we circled around at a respectable height. Across from the Italian mainland, probably from Otranto, came five destroyers at 40 knots. They stooed around fussily until we came off patrol. There were reports of oil on the surface but after debriefing, we were never told of the details of any post-mortems.

As mentioned before, the Squadron was not specially equipped for an anti-submarine role. We had no radar: only keen eyesight and the appropriate conditions were our

weapons. We did not know at that stage about schnorkel-equipped submarines, as that equipment was not in use when I undertook my anti-submarine training at an OTU in the Bahamas. Certainly we were not briefed on this aspect.



A pair of Marauders operating at a more accustomed height close to the coast

Why was this submarine in this area? It was close by Brindisi, Otranto and not that far from Taranto where there were great assemblies of ships preparing for the forthcoming invasion of Southern France. On 9th August I was tasked to undertake a photographic flight over Taranto Harbour in HD457; the photographs to be taken at 7000, 4000, 1000 and 250 feet. I was assured at briefing that the ships with anti-aircraft balloons would be instructed to have them reeled in below 250 feet and that we wouldn't be fired on. There was a vast assemblage of cargo and troopships as well as a variety of naval types: a veritable feast for an errant submarine. Maybe our sightings disrupted his plans.

Now with the hindsight bestowed by various references contained in reputable war histories, and access to the internet, some of the background can be filled in. What started me off on the trail of U-boat 407 was the reading of that magnificent book on submarine warfare *Business In*

Great Waters by John Terraine. In it there is a reference to the last operational U-boat in the Eastern Mediterranean, U407, being sunk to the north of Crete on 19th September 1944. Terraine states that:

U407 was betrayed by a wisp of smoke which proved to be a Schnorchel funnel, sighted at a distance of 8 miles, by the Polish-manned destroyer *Garland* - a remarkable piece of alert observation.

Internet search revealed that in January 1944 U407 was based on Pola, probably being fitted up with the schnorchel. It was the last operational submarine in our area as described in our briefings. I have found a further reference stating that its commander was changed on 9th September so obviously it got back to base.

Anyway, I am still of opinion that it was the U407 that I missed. Sixty-two years on, who worries, but it may be of interest as a part of 14 Squadron history.

John Robertson 20 June 2006

Postscript.

In editing and checking John's article I have determined that the U-boat in question was actually U596 which left Pula on 29th July 1944 under command of Oberleutnant zur Zee Hans Kolbus. U596's route puts it in the right place for the sighting by Johnson and the subsequent attack by Robertson. The vessel docked at Salamis, near Athens on 1st September. It was scuttled off Salamis on 24th September after being attacked by US aircraft. In the mean time, Kolbus had taken command of U407 which left Salamis on 10th September and was sunk nine days later, as John describes (Kolbus survived the sinking and was taken prisoner).

Mike Napier 17 July 2010



And now for something completely different...

Left - Sooties hard at work at Bruggen changing an engine on a Phantom in the early seventies. Mick (I've lost his surname) on the left and Les Hall on the right.

(Photo - Les Hall)