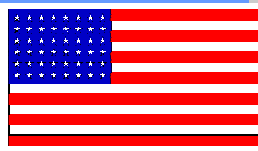


# THE DROPZONE

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## Jubilee Edition

## 60 Glorious Years



## Her Majesty

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### SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST:

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THERE ARE TWO OBITUARIES REMEMBERING THE LIVES OF TWO LADIES WHO SERVED OUR COUNTRY. ONE IN THE FIRST WORLD WAR, THE SECOND IN WWII.

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## Memories of Foxhall Cottages

By Graham West

When I first joined the museum in 1996 I was pleased to see that Foxhall Cottages figured prominently on the Carpetbaggers Memorial. I knew the cottages well, as my Uncle Jack and Aunt Ethel Taylor lived at No.2 with their children William and Dorothy. During the early 1950's my sister and I frequently stayed there during the school holidays and those visits left many lasting memories.

Foxhall was a row of five terraced cottages built for labourers, working either on the local farms or in the surrounding iron ore quarries, the families that lived there were :- the Smiths, Taylors, Burleys, Pestells and Anstys. The men went off to work on motor-bikes or bicycles as no one ran a car then.

My Uncle, who had been gassed in the first World War, bicycled first then got a small motor-bike, to travel to the Kettering Blast furnaces and when they closed to the Corby Steel-works, working 12 hour shifts. When he was on nights Aunt Ethel was always telling us to be quiet in the day whilst he was sleeping. Towards the end of his working life Uncle was caught up with a shunting engine while he was working near the railway line and was dragged along the ground. After recovering from these injuries it seemed to resurrect his lung problems and he suffered with his bronchial tubes for the rest of his life. He was a man who said little, certainly to us kids.

Aunt Ethel ran the home and cleaned for the farmers' wife at Dropshort Lodge. There is a picture of her in the museum taking Dorothy to school on the back of her bike. Aunt looks very drawn as it was a hard life. About once a month Aunt would come into Kettering, where we had moved into a pre-fabricated house with a proper bathroom. After doing her shopping Aunt would come to us and have a bath then catch the last bus back to Harrington and the mile and a half walk back to Foxhall. Fortunately after retirement they moved to a small terraced house in Rothwell where Aunt Ethel got involved with local activities and her life became easier. She was a quiet spoken person with a lovely personality .

When she left school my cousin Dorothy would stand in the back yard and shout to the farmer's daughter at the farm, across what seemed to me to be a huge field. Dorothy worked in a shoe factory in Rothwell and used to bike the 3 miles to work which was all downhill to Rothwell but uphill coming home. Dorothy biked all over the place when she was at Foxhall as buses were few and far between. If she had a night out with her friends in Kettering on a Saturday, afterwards she would share a bed with my sister at our house in Kettering then find her way home on Sunday.

Cousin William we didn't see much of as he spent long hours working on a local farm until he got married and moved to Rothwell.

The cottages at that time had no mains services at all, so lighting was provided by a large brass oil lamp with a tall glass chimney which sat on the scrubbed top of the large kitchen table. Going upstairs at night through the little latch door from the kitchen, you needed a lit candle in a holder. I think it was in the late 1950's that electricity was finally connected to the cottages and Uncle Jack went straight out and brought a television set (TVs were very expensive at the time).

Cooking was done on a paraffin fuelled stove / oven in the small scullery by the back door or on the black range in the kitchen / living room. The kitchen range contained an oven on one side of the fire and when cooking a roast dinner the red -hot embers were poked under it. A fire- blackened kettle was always simmering on the top of the range. I remember, but not the reason why, Aunt Ethel always spread butter on the end of the loaf before she cut off a slice. (This used to be a common practice. Ed.)

The family all sat together around the kitchen table to listen to the radio, which was powered by large acid accumulator and dry batteries, where the "Archers" daily episodes were not to be missed. The front room with its piano and the front door were reserved for special occasions only. All the family life revolved around the warm and homely kitchen, back doors were never locked and I remember that the neighbours just walked in and out. I think the wives got quite lonely.

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Drinking water for all the cottages was obtained from the communal pump sited over a well at the south east end of the row, the pump had to be primed first then vigorous up and down movements of the long handle eventually produced spurts of water to be collected in a bucket which was kept in the scullery.

Each cottage had a huge galvanised barrel outside the back door, which collected rain water from the guttering. This water was drawn off by a tap and used for washing either the person or the clothes or for boiling on the range. All clothes were washed in a large "copper" in the corner of the scullery, this was filled from the water barrel and a fire was then lit under it. When the water boiled the clothes were put in and agitated with a "copper stick", the fire was kept going with slack from the coal shed. The cottages had no bathroom so you washed in the large sink in the scullery or in a bowl on the kitchen table. A bath meant putting a big zinc tub, which normally was hung from a nail by the back door, in front of the kitchen range and filling it from water heated in the "copper" topped up with the kettle on the range

A toilet was provided in a "privy", (a narrow brick building) across the yard and consisted of a large two handled bucket sitting under a wooden shelf with a hole in it. Toilet paper was cut up squares of newspaper hanging on a string from a nail on the wall. The bucket was emptied, when full, by my Uncle, into a hole dug in his vegetable patch at the bottom of the garden, where everything grew very well! This system took some getting used to after having had a flush toilet and I remember practising constipation for as long as I could during my stay there.

My aunt took in the airmens' washing during their time at Harrington and Dorothy remembers the aircraft parked on the hardstandings opposite the cottages with the engines being run up for long periods. There was also a security check point near the cottages where they always had to show a pass even though they were known by the guards. I can remember seeing the Control tower in the distance, there were very few trees then and playing with dinky toys on the concrete hardstanding which was separated from the road by a wire strand fence. This fence was once used as an aerial by a passing cyclist who set up a crystal set to get the cricket scores on the B.B.C. and let us children listen on the head-phones. There was also a Nissen hut further up the road near the old 'Foxhall Inn' site where we used to climb a small tree by the side of the hut and slide down the corrugated sides.



Foxhall Cottages, 1940s/1950s

Life was simple then and one highlight was when the horse and cart operated by Essex Bakery from Rothwell called with bread and then took my sister and I on it to the Hunt's farm where we were dropped off to walk back across the field. Another was when my dad borrowed a car once and took us for a ride along the Harrington to Kelmarsh road when there were still many huts in a field, which we explored and I remember a large green notice board in one hut but not what was on it. I also remember that Uncle Jack had a .410 shotgun for catching rabbits and he let me shoot it once.

We had to walk to Harrington to catch a bus to Kettering and for us children it seemed to take a long time. Along the way we passed the fuel dump and I remember rusty brown tanks and a lot of pipe-work by the side of the road. The nearest shop was in Harrington and the school was at Lodington. To get to either meant walking or bicycling.

In 1955 when Dorothy married Fred, who was an electrician from Birmingham (with an amazing accent to us kids), our family bussed to Rothwell then had a Coopers garage big Austin taxi to travel to Foxhall with us children perched on tip up seats in the back, behind the front seats. After the wedding and back at Foxhall, all the men and boys played football on the road outside, as there was no motor traffic, whilst the wives and girls sat in the front room sorting out the world.

As with many things I wish I could recall more of that period and paid more attention to what was going on around me. All I later remember of the missile site is the glare of the lights all around the area.

Continued on page 4

## Memories of Foxhall cont.

The cottages are now fully modernised and I believe Bernard Tebbutt was involved in installing the septic tanks. New owners have changed five homes into three and the outside of the cottages has changed considerably since those wartime days. However I knew it as it was and I am proud to have had the opportunity to stay there for a time and sample part of its life.



Foxhall Cottages 2012

## OBITUARY

The world's last surviving First World War veteran has died - marking the end of an era in British history.

Florence Green passed away in her sleep at a care home in Norfolk just two weeks before her 111th birthday.

The great-grandmother signed up to the Women's Royal Air Force (WRAF) 94 years ago in September 1918, when she was aged just 17.

She was the last surviving person to have seen active service in WWI following the death of British-born sailor Claude Choules in Australia last year.

During the First World War she worked at Narborough Airfield and RAF Marham, Norfolk, as an Officer's Mess steward.

Mrs Green, who was born in London, lived with her daughter May, 90, in King's Lynn, Norfolk, but moved into Briar House care home shortly before Christmas where she died.

Her proud family paid tribute to the veteran, describing her as "a great woman".

May said: "She so nearly made it to her 111th birthday. It is very sad. We are grateful for all the nice tributes."

Mrs Green's younger daughter June Evetts, from Oundle, Northants., 76, said: "I'm very proud of her and she was very proud of the recognition she received."

Florence spent her war days working "all hours" serving officers breakfast, lunch and dinner and would often spend time wandering the base simply "admiring the pilots".

Before her death she said: "I enjoyed my time in the WRAF. There were plenty of people at the airfields where I worked and they were all very good company.

"I would work every hour God sent but I had dozens of friends on the base and we had a great deal of fun in our spare time. In many ways I had the time of my life."

"I met dozens of pilots and would go on dates. I had the opportunity to go up in one of the planes but I was scared of flying."

"It was a lovely experience and I'm very proud."

### **A lucky B-17 and her crew**

A mid-air collision on February 1, 1943, between a B-17 and a German fighter over the Tunis dock area, became the subject of one of the most famous photographs of World War II. An enemy fighter attacking a 97th Bomb Group formation went out of control, probably with a wounded pilot then continued its crashing descent into the rear of the fuselage of a Fortress named All American, piloted by Lt. Kendrick R. Bragg, of the 414th Bomb Squadron. When it struck, the fighter broke apart, but left some pieces in the B-17.

The left horizontal stabilizer of the Fortress and left elevator were completely torn away. The two right engines were out and one on the left had a serious oil pump leak. The vertical fin and the rudder had been damaged, the fuselage had been cut almost completely through connected only at two small parts of the frame and the radios, electrical and oxygen systems were damaged. There was also a hole in the top that was over 16 feet long and 4 feet wide at its widest and the split in the fuselage went all the way to the top gunners turret.



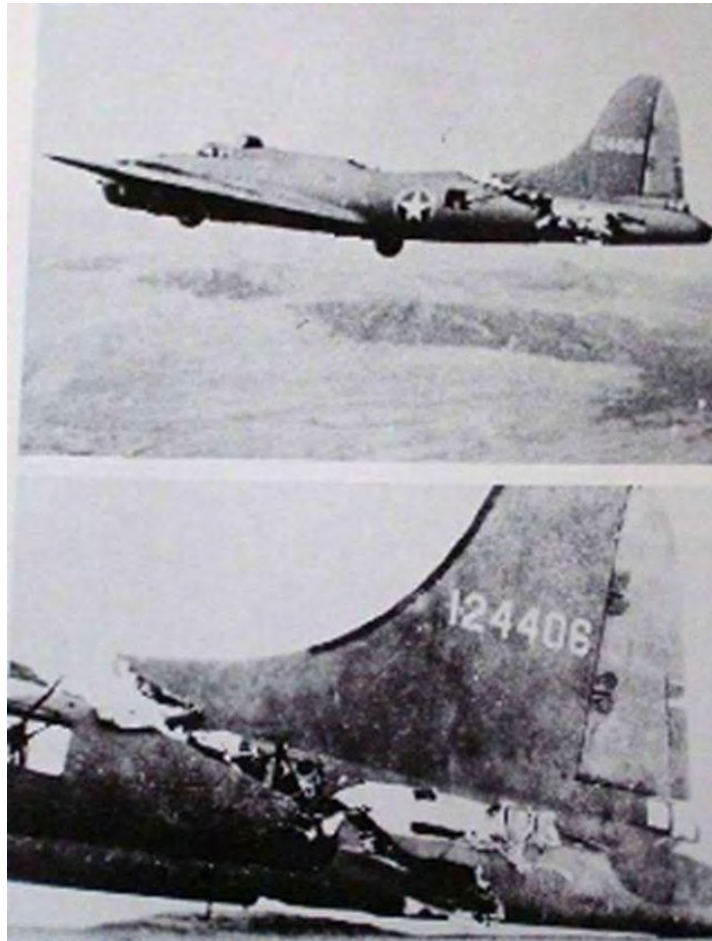
Although the tail actually bounced and swayed in the wind and twisted when the plane turned and all the control cables were severed, except one single elevator cable still worked, and the aircraft still flew - miraculously! The tail gunner was trapped because there was no floor connecting the tail to the rest of the plane. The waist and tail gunners used parts of the German fighter and their own parachute harnesses in an attempt to keep the tail from ripping off and the two sides of the fuselage from splitting apart. While the crew was trying to keep the bomber from coming apart, the pilot continued on his bomb run and released his bombs over the target.

When the bomb bay doors were opened, the wind turbulence was so great that it blew one of the waist gunners into the broken tail section. It took several minutes and four crew members to pass him ropes from parachutes and haul him back into the forward part of the plane. When they tried to do the same for the tail gunner, the tail began flapping so hard that it began to break off. The weight of the gunner was adding some stability to the tail section, so he went back to his position.

Continued on page 6

The turn back toward England had to be very slow to keep the tail from twisting off. They actually covered almost 70 miles to make the turn home. The bomber was so badly damaged that it was losing altitude and speed and was soon alone in the sky. For a brief time, two more Me-109 German fighters attacked the All American. Despite the extensive damage, all of the machine gunners were able to respond to these attacks and soon drove off the fighters. The two waist gunners stood up with their heads sticking out through the hole in the top of the fuselage to aim and fire their machine guns. The tail gunner had to shoot in short bursts because the recoil was actually causing the plane to turn.

Allied P-51 fighters intercepted the All American as it crossed over the Channel and took one of the pictures shown. They also radioed to the base describing that the empennage was waving like a fish tail and that the plane would not make it and to send out boats to rescue the crew when they bailed out. The fighters stayed with the Fortress taking hand signals from Lt. Bragg and relaying them to the base. Lt. Bragg signalled that 5 parachutes and the spare had been "used" so five of the crew could not bail out. He made the decision that if they could not bail out safely, then he would stay with the plane and land it.



Two and a half hours after being hit, the aircraft made its final turn to line up with the runway while it was still over 40 miles away. It descended into an emergency landing and a normal roll-out on its landing gear.

When the ambulance pulled alongside, it was waved off because not a single member of the crew had been injured. No one could believe that the aircraft could still fly in such a condition. The Fortress sat placidly until the crew all exited through the door in the fuselage and the tail gunner had climbed down a ladder, at which time the entire rear section of the aircraft collapsed onto the ground. The rugged old bird had done its job.

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## Museum Visitors

One of the early visitors to the museum was the great nephew of Col. Robert Fish, Nicholas Fish.

Nicholas is undertaking post-graduate studies at St. Andrew's University, Scotland and while visiting relatives in England made the journey to Harrington on the 31st March.

Ron Clarke met Nicholas at Kettering railway station and returned him to Kettering at the close of his visit.



Ron Clarke presenting Nicholas with a disc containing information about Operation Carpetbagger, with great uncle's picture, war medals and regalia in the background.

On the 22nd of May we were pleased to welcome to the museum the four daughters of former Carpetbagger Joseph B. Coll. Cpl Coll was an armoured serving with the 36th/856th Bomb Squadron.

While at Harrington Joseph met his future wife, Betty, who was serving with the Womens' Land Army. Their favourite meeting place was the Coach and Horses in Brixworth, where the sisters and their husbands are staying while visiting Northamptonshire.

They were brought to the museum by their English cousin, David Dickens from Creaton, and his wife, Marguerite.



From the left: Marguerite Dickens, Joey Reiter (eldest daughter) Michael Knight, Susan Knight (daughter), Elizabeth Laube (daughter) Rod Laube, Linda Buckly (daughter) David Dickens (nephew) and Gary ?

## More Visitors

On Saturday July 7th we were privileged to play host to Earle Russell, Mrs Barbara Russell, and their two daughters, Barbara and Brenda.

S/Sgt Earle G. Russell was a rear gunner in the 406th/858th and 859th Bomb Squadrons. He flew as a crew member with 1st Lt Victor H. Hansen.

We commend daughter Brenda for driving from London with only a map and finding her way to Harrington!



Vera greeting Earle on his arrival at the museum.



From left: Hilary, Barbara, Earle, Vera, Brenda and Barbara.



## EDITORIAL

The 2012 season at the museum got off with a good start in March when we opened on the Sunday before the official opening to accommodate 67 visitors! The first group consisting of 43 people arrived at 10 am and stayed for a little over two hours, then we had an hours break before the next group of 24 arrived in the afternoon.

In addition to the above, we have had a further 9 weekday/evening group visits and one War Weekend group. Before the end of July there will be another weekday group, and a War Weekend group on the 29th.

On Saturday 14th and Sunday 15th July Kelmarsh Hall should have hosted the annual English Heritage History Weekend, but this was cancelled at the last minute when the river Ise overflowed and flooded the show ground. This was good for our business as we had 49 visitors on Saturday and another 28 on Sunday. This makes up for some of the low attendances during the European Football Cup matches.

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Our good friend and long-time associate of former Carpetbaggers, John Hunt, has recently given to the museum a generous donation of £60.00. Another member, Craig Stephens from Harrington, has donated to the canteen sufficient supplies to keep it stocked until the end of the season. We are extremely grateful to these two benefactors.

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Ron Clarke lost his footing on the steps leading out of the radio room, fell into the corridor and sustained a wrist fracture. He is recovering quite well, but at the moment he can't drive with his arm in a plaster cast. Get well soon, we need you!

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The museum is now running with what could be described as a skeleton staff. Vera has only one helper in the canteen on Saturday, and one on Sunday. As the canteen helper also works Front of House, at busy times Vera is on her own serving tea and cakes. This is exhausting for her.

There are now only four guides in attendance at weekends; two on Saturday and two on Sunday, so on busy days not every visitor can have a guided tour. We appreciate occasional help from Graham West and Ian Hanson, but we would like to see more of our members coming to lend a hand. Did I mention that only one of the four guides is under 80—just? FW.

## OBITUARY

### Maureen Dunlop 1920—2012

Maureen Dunlop was one of a pioneering group of women pilots who flew the latest fighter and bomber aircraft with the wartime Air Transport Auxiliary (ATA). She achieved national fame as a cover girl when a Picture Post photographer captured her alighting from a Barracuda aircraft.

After the war, Maureen Dunlop qualified as a flying instructor at RAF Luton before returning to Argentina, where she worked as a commercial pilot. She instructed and flew for the Argentine Air Force, as well as having a partnership in an air taxi company, continuing to fly actively until 1969.

Her other great love was horses and she was fascinated by Arab ponies. After the war, she bought her first Arab and later built up a large breeding operation known as Milla Lauquen Stud.

In 1955 Maureen met and married Serban de Popp, a retired Romanian diplomat, and in 1973 they travelled to England where they bought a farm near Norwich.

On the farm the stud grew to more than 50 horses. She worked tirelessly with her animals, carrying out physical work that men much younger than her found exhausting. She built up an outstanding knowledge of Arabian bloodlines.

In 2003 Maureen Dunlop de Popp was one of three female ATA pilots to receive the Guild of Air Pilots and Air Navigators Master Air Pilot Award.



Picture credits The Daily Telegraph

## The late Wing Commander Jack Elkan David Benham.

This article has been compiled by Walter A.H.Kahn MBE, AE

Wing Commander Jack Benham, Royal Auxiliary Air Force, Service No. 90447 was reported missing on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1942. He was flying, not as a member of the crew but probably as an interested observer, returning from a triple SOE operation to Musdide in Belgium (the SOE records show a different spelling connected to Guy Stinglhamber and his underground circuit) in a Whitley V Bomber No.Z6728. They had taken off from RAF Stradishall but on their return trip they suffered engine failure which forced them to ditch twenty miles from the English coast.

The bodies of Pilot Officer Denis Weeks and Sergeant Francis Smith were recovered from the sea, both having died of exposure. They are buried near their respective homes. The names of the rest of the crew and Jack Benham who were presumed drowned are recorded on the Royal Air Force Memorial at Runnymede in Surrey. A dinghy which was thought to have come from their aircraft was washed ashore near Hawkinge, Kent on 10<sup>th</sup> February 1942.

He was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> July 1900 in Paddington, London and given the names Jack Elkan David Benjamin. His father Lionel Benjamin was born in Paddington, London. His occupation is listed in the 1901 Census as 'Cigar Importer'. His Mother's maiden name was Mabel Elkan and she was born in New York, USA. His two older sisters were named Sybil and Eileen. The family surname was changed to Benham sometime during the 1920s.

He was sent to Messrs. Moon and Russell, Wellesley House, a boarding school in Broadstairs, Kent. He entered Haileybury ISC (Thomason House) in 1914 in the Michaelmas term. According to his Housemaster's personal records Benjamin's father Lionel had a nervous breakdown and was in a nursing home during the same period. From this time Mrs. Benjamin took control of Jack's education. The family initially lived at 4, Portman Mansions, Baker Street, W.1. They then appear to have moved to 30, Clarendon Court, Maida Vale and finally settled at 10, Vale Court, Maida Vale.

He played rugby, boxed and was a member of the athletic team for his house. In his last term he was promoted to Lance Corporal in the Haileybury OTC (Officers Training Corps).

His school report stated ".... Academically Benjamin struggled most of the time but his character was certainly a winning one allowing

him to avoid the most damning criticism. Jack's easy going nature did not help his academic progress and his desire to enter the faculty of Engineering at the University of London were dashed by his poor results.

In 1918 Benjamin wanted to join the Air Force attending a selection board and having his medical on 26<sup>th</sup> February 1918 and attended the RNAS (Royal Naval Air Service) at the Hotel Cecil on 14<sup>th</sup> March 1918. Benjamin left Haileybury at the end of the Easter term 1918 to join up, something he had already tried to do on 27<sup>th</sup> November 1915 aged fifteen and four months. Benjamin had run away from Haileybury and attempted to enlist. Mr. Lea, his Housemaster telegraphed his mother and uncle by marriage Mr. Stanley Phillips the next day to bring him back to school.

The Royal Air Force was formed on 1<sup>st</sup> April 1918 by the amalgamation of the Royal Flying Corps with the Royal Naval Air Service. Benjamin joined the RAF, his service number was 178306. The record shows that on 10.6.1918 he was passed fit as Pilot (A) and posted to No. 3 Cadet Wing, School of Aeronautics, the ground training depot (Aboukir, Egypt), then a week after the Armistice he went from there to the Armament School and thence to 18 Training Depot Station (Moascar) where he actually started flying training but was taken off flying after about six weeks. His rank was Flight Cadet, aircrew in training.

In March 1919 he moved to 17 TDS (El Firdan) and was then demobilised. On 20<sup>th</sup> July 1920 he was granted the honorary commission in the rank of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant, back dated to the date of his release. Note RAF ranks now in use were not introduced until 1919.

To continue his RAF career, he joined No.600 Squadron (City of London) Auxiliary Air Force on 27<sup>th</sup> October 1930. He is listed in the 1930 Air Force List as 90447 Pilot Officer (GD/Pilot) in 600 Squadron. At the time they were based at RAF Hendon and flew Avro Tutors. The Squadron's officers were mainly employed by financial companies in the City of London. He resigned his commission on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1932 and his last entry as a member of the Squadron is in the Air Force list as that date.

He must have been taught to fly on joining the squadron as a portrait of him by Eric Kennington shows Benham wearing RAF wings

(and two first world war medal ribbons almost certainly the British War Medal and the Victory Medal commonly called 'Squeak and Wilfrid'). There is no record of his learning to fly as a civilian as he is not shown in the Royal Aero Club list of pilots. Curiously on the form he completed on his posting to IRB (SOE) he states that he had not flown since 1931.

On 5<sup>th</sup> July 1938 he is granted a Commission as a Flying Officer, AAF.

Then follow these entries –

March 1939 records him in 908 County of Essex (Balloon Squadron) AAF

Jun 1939 records him as Flight Lieutenant AAF with seniority 06.02.39

July 1939 records him as Squadron Leader (B) AAF with seniority 28.08.39

Dec 1940 records him as Squadron Leader (B)

Yet on 4<sup>th</sup> July 1940 he is posted as Chief Instructor to the newly formed Central Landing School at Ringway Airfield (now Manchester Airport). In early 1940 the Prime Minister Winston Churchill decreed that Britain must have Parachute and Glider troops to match the Germans who had just had a spectacular success with these forces in Belgium. In great haste a unit was created with the remarkable WWI flying ace, Louis Strange DSO, MC, DFC and bar as its first Commanding Officer. Benham headed the instructing staff which included a Chief Flying Instructor, the Chief Landing Instructor and a Chief Ground Instructor.

Their brief was to teach the newly formed Commando Units, the Parachute Regiment and SOE Agents how to parachute jump and to perfect the equipment and adapt the aircraft which would be used. It is recorded that on the 22<sup>nd</sup> July 1940 the first life drop was made by Squadron Leader Strange, Squadron Leader Benham, two RAF Instructors, five Army Officers and six other ranks.

In the unpublished memoir entitled 'More recollections of an airman' (the original book, is a classic account of air battles in the first world war written by Lt. Colonel Louis Strange, titled "Recollections of an airman" first published by John Hamilton in 1933), the following is on page 74 "... a list of a few who helped so much at Ringway.. these included and most of all perhaps, Squadron Leader Benham for writing the whole of the parachute training manual in his spare time, over and above doing the duty of Chief Ground Instructor, only a year or two younger than I was (in fact Strange was nine years older than Benham), he has made over fifty parachute descents.....".

The records show that only Benham and two others had any previous parachute experience,

he is described as having carried out many parachute jumps, some experimental and operational sorties. The 'Flight' magazine issue of 27<sup>th</sup> June 1935 has a report about the 'Insurance Flying Club's' Party held at Hanworth Park. ....*'The programme (of events), which was of just the right length also included a parachute jump by Mr. J.E.Benham, who, it is said, recently found life rather dull after his previous experiences and so took up parachute jumping as a means of making life a little more interesting. We have always held the view that this form of demonstration should be confined to practical work in connection with the sales of parachutes and not extended to stunt entertainment, but we hope that Mr. Benham will have no cause to regret his step.'*

Apart from the Parachute training, glider flying was also a vital part of the CLS. From the start members of the pre war civilian gliding movement were involved and developed what was to become the Glider Pilot Regiment.

On 6<sup>th</sup> September 1940 22 Group RAF nominated Benham as "Air Staff Officer, Flying" on the reorganisation of the CLS. On 17<sup>th</sup> May 1941 he assumed command of the Parachute Training Squadron from Wing Commander Louis Strange. On 11<sup>th</sup> July 1941 Sqdn/Ldr. Newnham takes over command from Benham.

Benham was posted to India as a Wing Commander to train parachutist but failed the medical as unfit for a tropical posting. A fascinating letter in his RAF records file is a plea to post him as a "valuable, utterly reliable and totally security discreet officer" to the IRB (SOE) as a link who fully understands the Ringway operation, the RAF Squadron (138) carrying out the drops into enemy territory and the SOE. It is also requested that Benham should be promoted to Wing Commander in order to carry out these new duties. The return letter from the Air Commodore at IRB reads "....he will be paid by this organisation so his promotion would not make any material difference to Air Force funds.....".

In point of fact he was promoted Acting Wing Commander with no increase in his pay! In the form he completed on his posting, he is described as 6 foot 2 ¾ inches tall with brown eyes and black hair going grey. He lists the countries he has visited as : France, Switzerland, Spain, Italy, Austria, Hungary, Czechoslovakia, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Estonia, Germany, Egypt, USA, Cuba, Canada.

The reasons he gives for these journeys are – Egypt, 1 year RAF Service, business visits to USA and Cuba, and

the remainder on pleasure. In answer to a set of questions he stated that he can drive a car, a lorry and ride a motor bike. He can swim, shoot, bicycle, fly (but not since 1931), box, sketch and read a map.

He lists his Directorship in Hunters Ltd (1919 – 1939) and declares a private income which includes a very handsome dividend from Hunters. He lists his next of kin as his Mother Mabel, his father being deceased, and his religion as Church of England.

In August 1941 he was posted to A.I 10, M. Section as Dispatch Officer, Tempsford Aerodrome (the new home of the SOE squadrons 138 and 161, much to the chagrin of Air Marshal 'Bomber' Harris who claimed that he could ill afford to lose these two squadrons from his main Bomber Command activities) and on 19<sup>th</sup> November is promoted to acting Wing Commander.



Wing Commander Jack Benham

The International Research Bureau was the RAF cover name for the SOE, the Special Operations Executive, sometimes jocularly called 'The Baker Street Irregulars'. The SOE was charged with '...Setting Europe ablaze..' to quote Winston Churchill.

They recruited, trained and inserted agents into enemy territory. The RAF provided the transport to fly the agents and their equipment operating single-engined Westland Lyanders, the twin-engined Armstrong-Whitworth Whitley and later four engined Handley Page Halifax bombers.

The letter in his RAF file states that he is reported as 'missing' and a letter to his Mother suggests that there is not much hope. He is still shown in the RAF List until July 1947 before officially declared deceased.

In the 138 Squadron Operational log he is not included in the crew list on the fateful flight although the Bomber Command Losses List does include his name. The last letter in his RAF Record is a recommendation for an award and he is shown as receiving a posthumous 'Mention in Despatches'.

His career in the Cigar Importing trade started when he joined Messrs. John Hunters, Morris & Elkan Ltd in 1919. Jack Benham was made a Director on 26<sup>th</sup> June 1930. He was the nephew by marriage of Stanley Phillips who succeeded Alexander Elkan as Chairman and Managing Director of the company.

It was alleged that Benham designed the 'trim', the cigar trade description for the labels which adorn the boxes, for the Monte Cristo brand of Havana cigars when Hunters secured the agency for what became one of the most famous brand in the world. He is listed as a passenger in a liner from sailing from Southampton on route for New York in 1937 presumably on his way to visit Cuba.

Jack Benham's connection with the various family members in Hunters is not at all clear. His father Lionel, born 1858, place of birth stated as Paddington, London, described in the 1901 census as Cigar Importer married Mabel Elkan, born 1875 in New York, USA. Their two daughters and son Jack are all born in Paddington, London. Their address is shown as 158 Sutherland Avenue, Maida Vale. They are shown to have two nurses, one cook and a housemaid.

In the 1901 census there are two Alexander Elkans listed. The first, born 1849, in Holborn, London, described as 'Importer of Havana cigars was married to Amelia, born 1854 in New York City, USA. Their only child was Eloise, born 1882, in New Jersey USA. The household is at 53 Portsdown Road, Paddington and employed two Swedish domestic servants.

The other Alexander E.Elkan, born 1859 in St. Botolph, London, described as Cigar Merchant and Tobacco importer was married to Bertha, born 1854, in Germany. They had three daughters and one son called Jack who was born 1885. The household at 158 Alexandra Road, Hampstead employed a cook, a housemaid and a nurse.

Laurence Stanley Phillips, born 1876, Maida Vale, London, described as Havana Cigar Importer was married to Blanche born 1878, in New York, USA. They lived at 7, Minster Road, Hampstead and employed a cook and a housemaid.



There are still a number of unexplained vital aspects of his life.

1. Why was he allowed to fly on the fateful operation. Being a senior liaison officer between the RAF and SOE, if shot down over enemy territory and captured, his specialist knowledge if divulged under torture would be of great value to the enemy.
2. The relationship of the various families in Messrs. Hunters, i.e. Elkan, Phillips and Benjamin (Benham) and his precise duties in the company need further investigating.

Jack Benham's cigar company was a competitor of my family firm. When young I was always told stories about Hunters' great RAF hero. When I retired in 1991 our two companies combined and now are the only Havana cigar shipper in the UK.

## Thomas L. Ensminger



It came as a great shock to all to learn that Tom Ensminger died suddenly on the 3rd May 2012.

Thomas L. Ensminger was the winner of the 2001 OSS Alexander MacDonald Intelligence Research

Award for his book – Spies, Supplies and Moonlit Skies, Volume I. A lifetime Civil Servant, he began his Department of Defense career with the Army two days after graduation from High School in 1965. After active duty, he worked first for the Army at Tooele Army Depot on a temporary appointment and next at Hill Air Force Base, Utah for 18 years, transferring his military duties to the Air Force Reserves while there.

He transferred to Wright-Patterson's Air Force Logistics Command HQ in 1984 as a specialist in Main Frame Computer Installations. After his work at the five Air Logistics Centers installing the first component of AFMCs Stock Control and Distribution System, he headed up the only civilian-developed documentation effort of the AFMC modernization program, saving the Air Force an estimated \$13 million dollars in program costs.

Completing 36.5 years of Federal Service on his 55th birthday, he retired to devote his efforts full time to historical recovery for the 801st/492nd BG and the USAF Academy. Using his well-developed analysis skills, Tom produced a volume of unique value to the remaining survivors of the group and

to present and future students of the art of clandestine warfare and resistance.

Readers will be aware of Tom's magnificent website on the Carpetbaggers, previously <http://www.801492.org/index.html> this website is however not working at the moment.

Bill Becker, Secretary of the 801<sup>st</sup>/492<sup>nd</sup> BG Association, tells us that they are working with Tom's daughter to transfer his website, so the website will continue.

Right now, things are in transition. Once all the details are straightened out, we will continue to move forward with the site maintenance. Our intention is that the site and the work continue with a high level of integrity and that we continue to give it the place in history it deserves. We are hoping that it won't be much longer.

The majority of the Carpetbagger Museum's digital archives on the OSS and the 801<sup>st</sup> / 492<sup>nd</sup> Bombardment Group would not have been available without Tom's valued assistance, he will therefore be greatly missed.

His late father, T/Sgt. Leo J. Ensminger (1924-1977), was a Carpetbagger who was badly wounded on his 18th mission in August of 1944.

Later that month, he received the Oak Leaf Cluster to his Air Medal and was also awarded the Purple Heart.

To commemorate the 50th anniversary of the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 2012, Roy has put together a very comprehensive information board that is on display in the museum. It gives a day-by-day account of how this drama unfolded and how at the last minute World War Three was averted.

This year is the seventieth anniversary of Operation Anthropoid when two SOE agents Jan Kubis and Joseph Gabcik who were both Czechoslovakian, assassinated SS General Reinhard Heydrich at Lidice.

There is a commemorative display in the museum, compiled by Ron Clayton, in honour of the bravery of these two agents who sacrificed their lives on this mission.

The German High Command's response to the death of General Heydrich was to execute a total of 329 civilians (men, women and children) and completely demolish and bulldoze the town of Lidice, wiping it off the map.

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**org.uk**



Since March, the weather in Britain has been very unkind; cold and with lots of rain.

Let's hope that there is a change to warm sunshine soon so that all our readers can enjoy a happy summer holiday.

We will be back with the next issue in December and if you have any interesting stories, please send them to me before the end of October.

Best Wishes,

Fred.



Just to remind everyone what a sunny morning looks like, I took this picture in March 2012.

Can you believe that this was once the main road running from the Kelmarsh road, past the Admin Site, to the Technical Site and beyond?



More sunshine. And now it's goodbye from me, and goodbye from Ginger.