



# THE WHEEL

**NZ Ex-RAF APPRENTICES ASSOCIATION**

**NEWSLETTER**

**ISSUE 17**

**Sept 2011**

**President** Bill Cowham

**Vice President** Monty Firmin

**Secretary** Ed Austin

## EDITORIAL

As usual, when I started to compile this newsletter I had very little material to work with. I never cease to be amazed how material suddenly appears and how I am faced with the prospect of too much for the available space. I aim to publish all contributed articles so please bear with me if the issue gets a little long at times!

Thank you to all who have contributed this time and please keep them coming. I am sure that there must be many more interesting stories out there.

As I was about to close this issue off, I received details of a recently published book "Safely to the Skies" which is based on Derrick Hubbard's (46<sup>th</sup> Entry) life from his birth through to the present day. It is a very interesting read. Details of the book appear later in this newsletter.

Don't forget that the next reunion will be held in Wellington in 2013. Hopefully the Executive will have details for me by the next issue.

*Gus Smart, Editor*

## Letters to the Editor

The following letter by our president (Bill Cowham) was published in the summer 2011 issue of 'The Haltonian'.

### NEW ZEALAND APPRENTICES ASSOCIATION

On the 25<sup>th</sup> of March we gathered at the Auto Lodge Motor Inn New Plymouth for our Biennial Reunion, in the shadow of Mount Taranaki. Owing to it raining all weekend we did not see the mountain. The Meet & Greet was held in the Lodge but we moved across the road to another hotel for the evening meal where we had a room to ourselves. Saturday morning we went by coach to Hawera to the Tawhiti Museum which depicts the early life in New Zealand. A new section recently opened depicts the trading between Whalers & Maori circa 1820-1840. Everyone was very impressed by this section --It was fantastic. Another section was an impressive display of old Farm Tractors & other machinery.

The next place on the list was a visit to a display of Elvis Presley memorabilia but the owner was not available to open it. Instead we went to a lavender farm where we were given an insight to the extraction of oil

from the lavender & also a display of wood turning. From there it was back to New Plymouth for a "Tiki Tour" around the local interesting sights.

The Reunion Dinner was held at the Cobb & Co restaurant. This was some distance from our accommodation, and as it was raining, Sam West organised a mini bus to transport us there, sorry to say Sam missed out on his quota of beer driving us to and from the venue.

The numbers at the reunion were down this time but five members from Christchurch came & were pleased to be on ground which was not shaking periodically. The dinner was excellent with a wide range of food & for once we were waited on. After dinner there were the usual speeches amid much noise and a vote of thanks to Sam and Doris West for their organisation of the reunion.

There was still much talking going on at breakfast next morning where we said our farewells and pledged to meet at the next reunion, which will be held in Wellington. See you all there.

*Bill Cowham 44<sup>th</sup> Entry*

### Reunion March 25<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup> 2011

My thanks to those who managed to make it to the Reunion in New Plymouth. It was a little disappointing that we did not get more 68<sup>th</sup> Entry there, it being the 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our start, but with old age and health slowly affecting many it is not surprising that we cannot make it to many of these occasions. However I believe that everyone enjoyed their time here. I must acknowledge my sincere thanks to my wife Doris for her support and help in arranging the programme. Especially the Friday Night when at a few minutes notice she had our evening meal set up and in a separate room opposite to our accommodation. All in all a very good weekend, made so by those attending.

*Sam West 68<sup>th</sup> Entry*

Dear Gus,  
Margaret and I would like to take this opportunity to publicly thank Sam and Doris West for such a fabulous weekend in New Plymouth, when we attended the Reunion, which was hosted by them. The whole programme could not have been any more enjoyable than it was and Sam and Doris

must have put so much work and effort into planning and arranging it all! The trip out on the Saturday, despite the unpredicted change, was so nice and allowed us to mingle with and enjoy the company of the other ex-brats and wives, whilst at the same time experiencing the various exhibitions and displays. We all thought that the welcoming cookies in our room were a very nice touch and they certainly went the extra mile with the place mats and T-shirts. The Auto Lodge was very good accommodation and it was superb service having the chauffeur driven mini-bus to and from Cobb & Co, where we had an excellent formal gathering and dinner. Thanks very much for a wonderful weekend, Sam and Doris and you can be justly proud of a job well done!

*David & Margaret Sykes*

Hi Gus, I just want to congratulate you on your fine performance since taking over as editor of 'The Wheel'. It is not an easy task and, with the added pressure of coordinating and organising the efforts of all parties involved in producing and installing the NZ Commemorative Window, I think your efforts have been truly outstanding! I found the last issue of 'The Wheel' (Issue 15) to be extremely interesting and, as usual, of a superb standard. It was good to see the two articles entitled 'The Time of the Auster' and 'The Spell of the Islands' by Roly Oliver and it brings to mind the scale of the responsibilities that were placed on our young shoulders, when newly released into the world of aircraft servicing, after our time at Halton/Cranwell/Locking/Wagga Wagga and Roly outlines what a formative time it was, which most of us faced with much enthusiasm and very little experience. I am sure that many of the readership of 'The Wheel' will recall those days and I would urge those that can, to jot these memories down and send them in for publishing in our newsletter. I'm sure it will be much appreciated! Once more; thanks for your fine efforts, Gus and we are most indebted to you for your services as editor and particularly for your achievement in getting the commemorative Window installed!

Kind Regards,

*David Sykes*

*The above letter missed the dead line for the last Newsletter and Dave has made a special request that I publish it this time.*

Dave Sykes has submitted the following tale from John Winn.

## **Bizarre Weekend**

'Sergeants Brown, Wilson and Winn, report to the Armament Officer.'

'What now?' we wondered.

'You three are doing a bomb disposal weekend. Go over to stores and collect your gear.'

One learns very quickly in the RAF the futility of 'why?' especially, 'why us?' but decided that 'where?' was acceptable.

'Orford Ness this Saturday.'

We learned that Orford Ness was not a television detective but a spit of land jutting out on the extreme East Coast of Suffolk. It was the construction site for a huge radar installation intended to watch for the launch of Russian Ballistic missiles. This very same site had also been used as a bombing range for decades and was the resting place of hundreds of bombs of all sizes, ages and condition.

We were at the time stationed at Stafford in the West Midlands. To get to Orford Ness meant several hours of travel. We three had the necessary security clearances required for the high-security site.

Wondering at the complexity of the Air Force Mind we presented ourselves to stores and received, Boots, Wellington, Large, Quantity one pair: Overalls, Ditto, - and hilariously, a World-War-Two-style Steel Helmet.

It was still in a bemused state of mind that we drove across the middle of England to RAF Bawtry, a decrepit collection of huts at the end of nowhere - 'Drive until you reach the sea then back up a bit' - where the main entertainment for that evening seemed to be an equally decrepit billiard table with missing balls.

However, one of the few permanent residents suggested that we would be welcome at the nearby American Air Force Base, so with nothing to lose, we once again piled into the car and drove through country lanes to USAF Sculthorpe.

We had no trouble getting through the gate and entered the Non-Commissioned Officers' Club. And stopped dead. Here in the middle of sleepy Suffolk was Las Vegas. A large, clangorous, flashing, entrance lobby full of hundreds of one-arm bandits, and all seemed to be in use. Passing through, we entered a glittering night-club. We drank Budweiser straight from the bottle and watched a top-class cabaret show imported from London. Somehow, in the early hours of the morning we found our way back to our own beds.

Too few hours later we were in overalls and boots, self-consciously clutching our tin helmets as we sat in the back of a four-ton truck lurching through misty lanes. We crossed over a bridge and found ourselves in a surreal landscape of massive banks of shingle over which huge yellow earth-moving machines roared in all directions at high speed. In the distance loomed scaffolded-covered shapes of Britain's Four-Minute-Warning.

'You see those red flags?' shouted one of our co-travellers, a regular to this job. We now noticed the area dotted with flags on tall poles. 'Each one of those is where we've found an unexploded bomb. The trouble is those mad Irish buggers keep driving their graders over them and burying them again. There must be loads we'll never ever find.'

I made a mental note to never buy any local real estate.

At a remote site beside the sea we saw the next batch of bombs awaiting demolition. A row of rusty cylinders, each 250 or 500 pounder lay innocently. Taped on and around these were slabs of gun-cotton connected by detonator cord. We were told that some of the bombs found were so old and unique that the explosive had been steamed out and the casings sent to the RAF Museum.

The firing party retired to a concrete blockhouse while we in the truck drove to a 'safe' area a good mile distant. While the regulars, who of course had seen it all before, stayed with the vehicle, we three climbed a nearby shingle dune where we could get a good view of the explosion and with mounting excitement, waited..... Seagulls called and in the distance there was the incessant roar of Irishmen burying more red flags.

Eventually there sounded the 'firing imminent' hooter, followed by a very satisfying eruption of smoke and debris. The blast churned up a large area of the sea; flocks of screaming sea birds took to the air. Then the sound reached us: not the roar of explosions as seen on the screen but a body shaking - Thud - ; felt more than heard. Echoes resounded for some seconds.

Then there came a strange rushing noise, a whistling, and jagged lumps of smoking shrapnel began thudding to the ground around us.

We broke the cross-gravel sprinting record as we dived for the only cover available, underneath the truck; where the knowledgeable regulars sat waiting for us, grinning evilly. 'Yeah, that does happen,' said one, 'tin hat anyone?' An occasional clang from above marked the arrival of more shrapnel.

We did nothing else that weekend but pick up shrapnel off the ground. There were not even any more firings. Dragging a hessian sack behind me I pondered ruefully my years of training, experience and my security grading.

We never went back. I never even wore my tin hat. And the multi-million pound early warning system never worked anyway.

*By John Winn 84th Entry*

The following article is from the RAF Halton News 10 August 2010 ..... The Wheel Turns!!!

## Aircraftsman George is put through His Paces



It has been 17 years since the last squadron mascot marched onto the parade square at RAF Halton, but this week saw Aircraftsman George make his first appearance during the parade practice of No. 437 Beckett Intake of the Recruit Training Squadron. George, who is 2-years old, has been adopted by the Recruit Training Squadron as their mascot and will feature in future parades and public engagement ceremonies for the Station.

*'It is a great idea to have George as a symbol for the Squadron', said Flight Lieutenant Katie Rothwell, George's Fight Commander. 'He has been selected from a cast of many and will be something the Squadron can rally behind to increase esprit-de-corps among the recruits'.*

The history behind having goats as mascots at RAF Halton dates back to World War 2 where the Royal Welsh Fusiliers left their goat Lewis with the RAF Apprentices when they were sent to the front. The RAF Apprentices adopted the goat and the history continued until 1993 when the last RAF Apprentice graduation parade was conducted.

George is a Golden Guernsey-Boer Goat cross and was raised at the Bucks Goat Centre. He will have a leading role in future RAF recruit graduation parades and will lead the procession as the Station holds its annual parades through local communities. Squadron Leader Jan De-Vry, the Officer Commanding the Recruit Training Squadron, said *'It is important to remember the history behind our Station, and with George we will continue those traditions that were forged back then and make history for future generations to look back on'.*



George will continue to reside at the Bucks Goat Centre in Stoke Mandeville and will have regular trips to the Station and into the community. Lauren Godfrey, the Farm Manager at the Bucks Goat Centre, said: *'We are pleased to have this connection with RAF Halton. George will become a star within the centre and he will assist in building a permanent relationship between us. I am not surprised that he has fit in as well as he has been raised around people and was a keen competitor on our animal assault course'.*

Editor's note:

I wonder why Halton didn't continue with the Lewis lineage for the goat! I am sure that it would have been seriously considered. Perhaps it was thought that "Lewis" was associated specifically with the Apprentice scheme rather than Halton and wanted to preserve it as such. Anybody know?

## NEW ZEALAND – MY FIRST VISIT

by David Sykes 68th

After tidying up her affairs and possessions, just a few years before she died, my mother handed me a bundle of letters which had been sent to her by me during the time I was traveling to New Zealand for the first time. This occurred in 1955 when I was flying in TG608; one of four Hastings aircraft carrying ground-crew, spares and ground equipment to service Valiants WP206 and WP207. The Valiant was the first aircraft to enter service in the newly emerging V-Force of the RAF and these two aircraft were en-route to New Zealand on the first proving flight of any V-Force aircraft. The letter describing this part of the trip was dated Monday 19<sup>th</sup> September 1955 and read, 'At the moment I am somewhere over the Pacific, quite close to Australia and bound for New Zealand. We will be flying over 1200 miles of ocean before we sight New Zealand.' (My geography was obviously a little inaccurate: I should have referred to the Tasman Sea!)



**Southern Alps N.Z**

We had left RAAF Edinburgh Field early in the morning and were en-route for Harewood Airport, Christchurch, where we landed in the late afternoon. Our flight path on the approach to Christchurch took us over the Southern Alps, which looked absolutely stunning. Hastings TG608 belonged to 24 Squadron, RAF and this squadron was often referred to as 'The Commonwealth Squadron' due to the fact that, over a number of years, a significant number of the squadron's aircrew were from various Commonwealth countries. Our particular flight was no exception and our aircrew consisted of a British navigator and air quartermaster, whilst the first and second pilots were Kiwis. Our captain was quite a character and was known as Flt Lt 'Sport' King. On our approach to Harewood we made a few steep banked circuits over a remote hill country farm, which looked just as though it was nestled in a rolling blanket of dark-green velvet. The second pilot was hoping that his family would come running out waving a tablecloth, or something similar, but as this did not happen our 2 pilots pressed on albeit, I suppose, with some disappointment. They need not have worried however, because a large group of family members were waiting for each Kiwi pilot at the side of the aircraft parking area and, as we pulled into our allotted space, I turned to look out of the window on the airfield side and spotted what I now know to be a NZ Frontiersman, standing motionless, in his uniform and wearing a lemon squeezer hat and it was at that moment that I knew we had truly arrived in New Zealand! The pilots evacuated the aircraft at speed once they had parked and it was heart-warming to see them being welcomed and fussed over by their families after being away for some considerable time. There were crowds of onlookers there to see the arrival of the Valiants and the accompanying aircraft and among these was a gleaming VIP Hastings which had conveyed the C-in-C of Bomber Command, Air Marshall Sir George Mills and his wife, Lady Mills. The Air Marshall was greeted by a Guard of Honour consisting of RNZAF personnel, who were assembled at Harewood and it would be interesting to know if any of our members were involved or if anyone has any recollection of this event.



**Receiving C in C RAF Bomber Command**

We visitors seemed to pack a tremendous amount into the few days we were in Christchurch and my first impressions remain with me to this day. In the mess at Wigram I noticed a plethora of sauce bottles, jars of honey and jam in the centre of each table. This was unheard of in the RAF, which worked on very tight budgets as far as provisioning was concerned and I was also very impressed by the amount of meat we were served; but perhaps the cooks felt sorry for us and thought we looked as though we needed feeding up! When walking under the starlit skies to our billets, I became aware of the washing lines outside each block. I don't think the RAF ever supplied outside drying facilities. We also had the arrangement of the 'Dry Canteen' and 'Wet Canteen' explained to us by our RNZAF friends, which was quite different when compared to our NAAFI in the UK. It was explained that the 'Wet Canteen' was there to serve alcohol from 6pm until 10 pm and as it was in the days of the '6 o'clock Swill', when all drinking in bars and hotels finished at 6pm sharp, then this arrangement was a substantial concession for Air Force personnel. It was also explained to us by our RNZAF hosts



**Wigram Descent (G. Eves 68<sup>th</sup>)**

that there was a set of rules to be observed when attending a Dance. We were told that single blokes outnumbered the available women by quite a margin and that the girls expected, therefore, to be treated with great respect and so you had to be on your best behaviour. It was said that when a girl agreed to dance, then you were to escort her to and from the floor with your arm around her waist and, if there was any suspicion that you had been drinking alcohol, then your request for a dance would be firmly denied. There was a Dance and Buffet, held in the evening of the day that we arrived, to welcome us to the Base and it was all very enjoyable. I can remember a group of young nurses proudly introducing me to their Maori colleague so that I would be aware of the Maori people. She was beautiful and serene.

The following night I teamed up with one of the Transport Command guys who thought it would be a good idea to go into Christchurch to attend a local dance. As we were about to leave camp, a couple of RNZAF airmen hailed us and introduced themselves as 'Ex-Poms'. "Come to the Wet Canteen and have a drink on us!" they urged. "No thanks!" we said firmly. "We are going to a dance and we will have no show if we have been drinking!" "You will be OK with just one drink!" they said emphatically. "No!" we replied, but they kept insisting so much that eventually we gave way and went with them into the Wet Canteen where we spotted a host of familiar faces. Now I only occasionally drink alcohol and hardly ever touched a drop in those days, so it was something of a shock to see these guys in action. Everyone was sitting around a number of small tables, which were crowded out with jugs of beer and, as soon as a jug was emptied, another one was rushed in as a matter of urgency and after we joined a table we were urged to drink our beer so that yet another jug could be brought in. It then became something of a race against time and you felt you just had to drink up quickly so that you didn't let the side down! The next thing we knew it was just a few minutes before 10pm; the dance being long forgotten! Then the pace stepped up to a fever pitch as everyone frantically cleared space on the table for more jugs, which were delivered in handfuls by our straining and heavily perspiring mates as they struggled with the jugs to fill our beer swilled table again before the clock struck 10!. What an education! I kept well clear of Wet Canteens after that and concentrated on making excursions, in my free time, into the surrounding district to ensure that I saw as much of each location as possible!

### Ohakea Static Display

Our official programme had been well advertised before our arrival and the Valiants gave a flying display over Christchurch before landing. It was the norm for schoolchildren and local people to gather outside to see the display and the aircraft followed an itinerary to give as many people as possible the opportunity to see the flights. The aircraft usually did a low level pass with flaps and landing gear down and with their bomb bays open and then they would gain height and do a high speed run with everything closed and retracted, showing a very fast, streamlined profile and giving the streaking Valiant the appearance of a fighter rather than a bomber. The aircraft were on static display to the general public at Harewood on 20<sup>th</sup> September and the next day they flew off at low level to Ohakea. They flew via Wellington, where a flying display was scheduled, however low cloud affected the pass and the demonstration was therefore modified accordingly. Wing Commander Brabyn RNZAF was carried as a passenger in WP206. Graham Eves (68<sup>th</sup>) took the opportunity to take photographs of the aircraft and activities whilst they were located in Christchurch and he told me recently that he had expected to make his fortune selling prints at two shillings a pop! He didn't quite make the Bahamas and so he still lives in Christchurch!



On 22<sup>nd</sup> September the aircraft were on static display at Ohakea and the Australian High Commissioner to New Zealand took the opportunity to visit and see them. Several of us were fortunate enough to be taken on a day trip to Wellington, where we spent a very enjoyable day. We stopped at a Takeaway shop around Mana (Which is still there to this day) to buy lunch and it was my first taste of whitebait; a big ball of it cooked inside deep fried batter. Fantastic! We also had the usual dance and buffet whilst at Ohakea and the crayfish, which the women tore to pieces as soon as the buffet was served, were truly delicious! Most of us visitors ended up taking a busload of nurses back, after the dance, to Wanganui Hospital. We all left the hospital by taxi about 4am to return to Ohakea and we were dropped off at a remote dairy to rendezvous with a newspaper delivery bus. We arrived back at Ohakea about 6.30am; just in time to grab breakfast and go to work on the Valiants!

Our next stop was Auckland (Whenuapai) but we were billeted at Hobsonville Base. The Valiants flew over all the major towns in the North Island and WP207 gave a display over Wellington. The aircraft were on static display at Whenuapai over the weekend of 24<sup>th</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> September and on the Saturday I had time off to go and visit the Lewis family, who lived in Onehunga at that time. I arrived by bus and got off at Auckland Railway Station and wandered over to the tram-stop to catch the tram which would take me on a very long ride to Onehunga. Because the trams were running on weekend service I decided to fill in the long waiting time by having a coffee in a café that I could see across the road but, when I tried the door, I found it locked and this was my first introduction to Saturday Trading (or lack of it) NZ style, which was the norm in those days.

When I arrived at the Lewis's address I found that they were not at home and when I made enquiries next door I was invited in for a cup of tea. I became aware of the large amount of timber on show in the house; not the least being the lovely polished rimu floors. As I sat chatting to the neighbour and drinking tea, I noticed a wooden fruit-bowl on the table which was full of

strange greenish-brown, furry objects. I asked if they were sweet potatoes. I was told that they were Chinese Gooseberries. (They were yet to be named Kiwi-fruit and I don't believe there was an export trade at that time.) The lady offered me one to try and I told her that it was the most delicious fruit I had ever tasted. After I met my wife Margaret I was always waxing lyrical about these fruit and she must have got very tired of hearing me going on about them; however it was not too long before she was able to taste them for herself and then she found out what I was talking about!

Eventually the Lewis's returned home and they seemed very pleased to see me. I had been asked to visit them by a neighbour in my hometown of Cardiff. Gwynne and Anne Lewis and their 2 girls, Judith and Margaret, had travelled from NZ a few years earlier and had stayed with our neighbour for about a year. During that time Gwynne was working for the local Royal Ordnance Factory as a medic, a profession in which he was well versed due to the fact that he served on HMNZS Achilles during the Battle of the River Plate. During the battle he had many casualties to cope with whilst under fire, but like most heroes he never spoke openly about his experiences. Judith eventually married an Auckland builder and Margaret became a TV producer and, just like her father, developed a very strong sense of humour. She produced the very famous Toyota "Bugger!" ad and a few others that were always enjoyable to watch. I met the family in downtown Auckland the following day and they took me on a tour of Mount Eden, One Tree Hill and the Museum, which I thought was absolutely magnificent. Gwynne dropped me off that night in the city centre, where I waited for the bus to Hobsonville. Graham Pratt, from my 68<sup>th</sup> Entry, was also waiting after being on leave for the weekend at his home in Auckland. I thought it was amazing to meet Graham in his home environment and could never have imagined a moment like this when we were both brats at Halton.

During my whistle-stop tour of New Zealand I met most of my fellow 68<sup>th</sup> Entry members, who were the first apprentices to be sent over by the New Zealand Government and who all performed extremely well and were a credit to their country. During my brief stay I was able to take an enjoyable and impressive sample of New Zealand life and I felt that I really needed more of the same and, fulfilling that dream, Margaret and I arrived with our 3 children in September 1973. We became citizens 3 years later. **David Sykes 68<sup>th</sup>**

## **BRITAIN'S SECRET JET CRASH 'COLD WAR' COUP**

Phil Spencer of the 90<sup>th</sup> writes "I heard you cry for input for "The Wheel" and wondered if you'd be interested in the following little anecdote. All true as far as my memory goes after 45 years!"

"I was recently having a chat with a German guy I work with and wound up telling him about a visit I made to Berlin during my time in the RAF. It involved a "Training Flight" in a Varsity (Pig) from RAF Oakington that was, in reality, an excuse to obtain wine for the Officer's Mess ball. I went along as ground crew/engineer.

After a couple of days getting up to mischief in the city came the morning of departure. We were ready for "chocks away" when a message came to delay take-off and wait for an urgent consignment. Eventually a Landrover drove up and unloaded two wooden tea chests along with a fellow wearing a chief techs uniform. After take-off we tried to pump our passenger for details of our cargo. He said it was some restricted gear left over from a recent V-Bomber exercise.

We didn't believe him for a minute, mainly because he obviously wasn't RAF; He didn't speak the lingo, wrong haircut and seemed evasive. Maybe we were smuggling a spy out with his belongings? So as we flogged slowly along the air corridor out of Berlin over Russian controlled Germany we were somewhat nervous about the possibility of a couple of Migs appearing and forcing us to land (or worse).

After a release of tension as we left Russian airspace a radio message came through ordering us to divert to Hendon but our pilots pretended not to understand it, blamed poor reception. After all they had all the wine to get chilled for the ball that evening. Later as we crossed the Dutch coast the diversion was again ordered but by then they could claim to be too low on fuel and we continued to Oakington. Upon landing, snoops met us on the tarmac, took the boxes and passenger and held them in the guardroom until a special courier vehicle arrived to take them to London? This left us intrigued but none the wiser.

A few days later I bumped into our pilot and asked him if he had found any more about our mystery man and his boxes. He replied that he'd been told that a Russian Yak photo-reconnaissance had crashed into a lake in the British sector of Berlin. He had bought the cameras from it back to see what the Russians had thought worth photographing.

This seemed a plausible explanation to me and for the next 45 years I seldom thought much about it, that is until my recent conversation made me wonder if there'd be anything on the internet about the crash. So I googled "Russian Jet crashes in Berlin lake". What popped up on the screen somewhat gob-smacked me."

**Britain's secret jet crash Cold War coup** The Cold War was at its peak when on April 6, 1966, a top secret Soviet fighter aircraft crashed into the Havelsee, a lake straddling the British and Russian sectors of Berlin. The British immediately mounted a salvage operation, promising to return the aircraft and the bodies of its two pilots to the Russians. *Continued next page*

But as a barge and a crane were set up on the lake's surface to recover the aircraft, beneath the surface a very different operation was in train - to take its top-secret technology back to Britain where it could be examined. Now details of one of the most important intelligence operations of the Cold War are to be revealed in a television programme about the British Military Mission to the Soviet Zone of Germany, Brixmis.

The first the British knew of the Havelsee incident was when radio operators at Berlin's RAF Gatow picked up a message from the aircraft's controllers ordering the pilot to try to land in the lake, but inside the Soviet sector. Despite a valiant attempt, he failed, his aircraft falling short and inside the British zone. Brig David Wilson, then head of Brixmis, was playing squash when the aircraft came down. A quarter of an hour later, still in his shorts, he was already co-coordinating one of the most astonishing espionage coups of the Cold War. British military police cordoned off the scene and a Brixmis interpreter was sent to the lakeside, where Russian troops commanded by Gen Vladimir Bulanov were trying to force their way through.

They watched as Sqn Ldr Maurice Taylor, who unknown to them was the Brixmis operations officer, rowed to the wreckage to take photographs. The top-secret fighter was later identified as a Yak-28, Nato codename Firebar, with what was already clearly a unique radar capability. Britain and America were desperate to know what made it so good. Now they had their chance. It was 10.09pm on day one, nearly seven hours after the crash. The Brixmis interpreters were ordered to do everything they could to buy time, trying to mollify the by now clearly concerned Bulanov. At the same time, technical experts were flown out from the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough to examine the aircraft's Skipspin radar, which unlike the then western systems could look up and down as well as straight ahead.

Down below the water, one British serviceman was trying to get the pilots out of the aircraft so they could be examined by the intelligence experts. By 1.45pm on the second day the bodies had been bagged up and, below the water, work was going on to remove the radar. Meanwhile, Major Geoffrey Stephenson, one of the British interpreters, persuaded Bulanov that they were still trying to recover the bodies of the crew.

But the Russians were suspicious the British might spirit something out under cover of night. Bulanov accused the British of having troops ready to shoot any Russian who got near the site. Major Johnathan Backhouse, the Brixmis interpreter on duty, denied this.

Bulanov's response was to order up a platoon of Soviet guardsmen and to march them down a track towards the lakeside. "We hadn't gone a dozen yards when suddenly two riflemen jumped out of the dark," Major Backhouse recalled. Both sides clicked off their safety catches and there was a long pause as the British officer frantically thought of a way to defuse the situation.

Hoping the British infantryman would back up his claim that there was no attempt to stop the Russians finding out what was going on, he asked: "Are you authorised to let this Soviet officer pass?"

"Not on your f\*\*\*ing life, sir," the British soldier replied.

Fortunately, Bulanov roared with laughter and ordered his men back before turning to Major Backhouse and saying: "I think, major, Russian intelligence is superior to yours."

At 4.07 that morning the bodies were slipped back on to the raft. As dawn broke, the Russians were informed they had been recovered and would be handed over that evening.

The cockpit radar unit was already on its way back to Britain to be examined but they needed more time to get the radar dish out of the nose cone, which was buried in the mud.

At 2.40pm that day, the Russians noted a launch arriving at the raft to offload a couple of apparently unimportant passengers before departing towards the shoreline of the British sector.

What they did not see was the divers attaching the jet engines by line to the launch which dragged them along behind it taking them to a jetty a mile from the wreck where they were loaded into crates and flown back to Farnborough for examination. Meanwhile the pilots' bodies were handed over to Bulanov. Within 48 hours, the engines and the cockpit radar unit had been carefully returned to the Firebar's wreckage.

It was at midnight on April 13, that the raft sailed to the Soviet sector where piece by piece the wreckage was handed over to the Russians. As the engines were handed over, Bulanov looked at them and could clearly see that the tips of some of the rotor blades had been sawn off. "He didn't say a word," Stephenson said. "He simply looked at me and shrugged, as if to say: 'I've been screwed', and of course he had."

Then the Russians discovered that something was missing. The British insisted that everything had been handed over. If anything was missing it must still be down on the floor of the Havelsee. What was missing? The Russians were unable to reply. They could hardly say it was a top secret radar dish. They just had to hope the British were right and it was on the bottom of the lake. It had taken a long time to get the radar dish out. But Brixmis had managed it.

They hadn't had time to put it back but they had pulled it out and the resultant changes to RAF aircraft to deceive the Skipspin radar restored parity in the Cold War.

*More info and pictures can be obtained by googling "British jet crashes in berlin lake" and scrolling thru' the resultant web sites.*

## Safely to the Skies

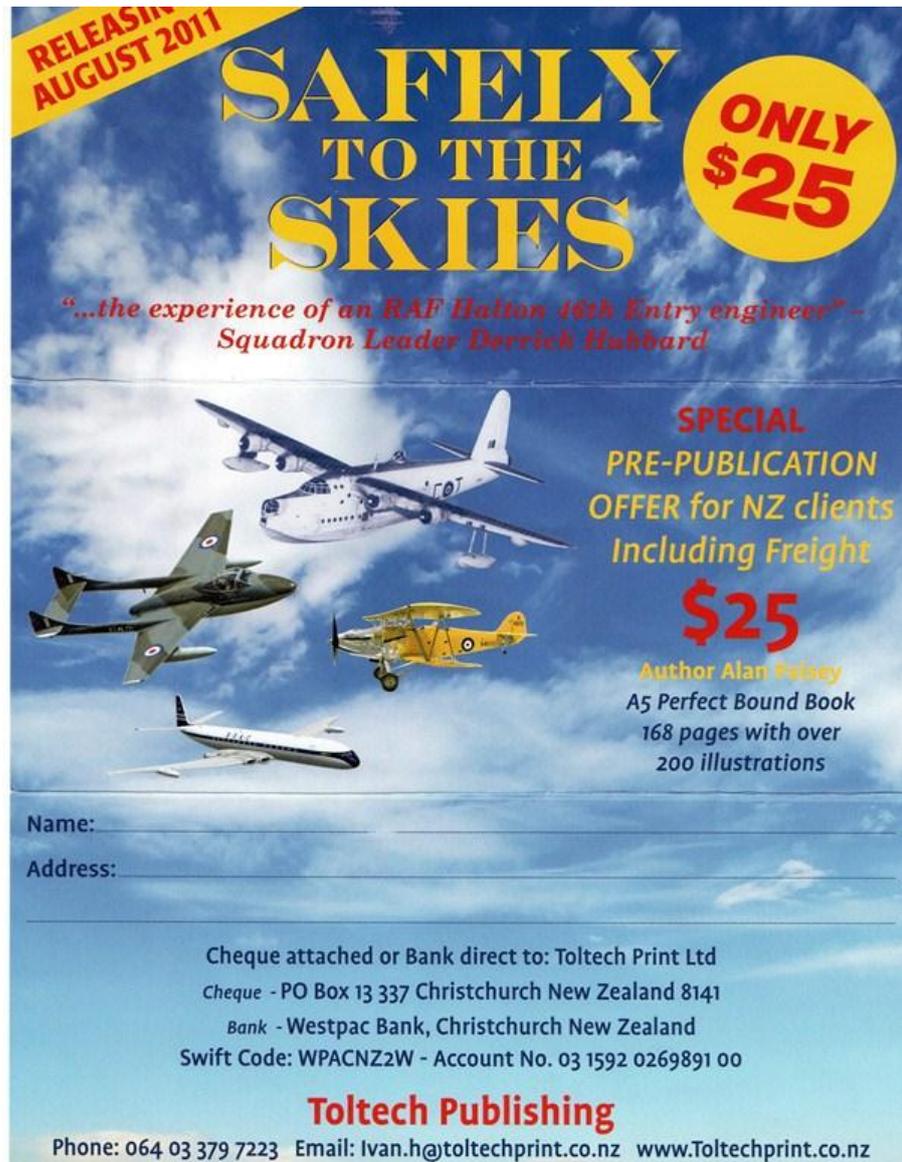
This book is devoted to the less spectacular aspect of military aviation...the engineering by which aircraft are manufactured, prepared for flying, and are subsequently maintained in a flying condition. So says Air Marshal (Rtd) Bruce Ferguson, KNZM, OBE, AFC in his forward to the book.

The author has written a number of books including *Forever Valiant Vols 1, II, & III* and *Without Reserve*, a story of RNZAF ground staff in the Pacific Islands during WW 2.

*Safely to the Skies* is based on the life of Derrick Hubbard, 46<sup>th</sup> Entry, from his birth in Hertford, England, in 1926 until the present day. Derrick's aircraft engineering career ended in 1981 when he retired from the RNZAF as a Squadron Leader Engineer. Most of us came into contact with Derrick during his 23 years of service with the RNZAF and will be familiar with many of the people and situations described in the book. But there is another side to this man, his family background and wartime experiences as a school boy in England, war time training at Halton, and numerous RAF postings between 1943 and 1952. The author describes the history and wartime role of many of the RAF Stations that Derrick served on. Derrick was selected for pilot training in the RAF and carried out most of his pilot training in Rhodesia. He took the opportunity to return to the UK to complete his training. (A tug on his heartstrings influenced the move and those of us who know the delightful Vera will readily understand this decision). However the Berlin Airlift intervened and the RAF had a greater need for trained Airframe fitters than partly trained pilots! In 1952 Derrick decided that post war RAF was not providing the satisfaction he craved and resigned to enter the civilian aircraft industry. He joined the de Havilland factory and was involved with the production of the Comet airliner. The book describes the trials and tribulations associated with the world's first commercial jet airliner, and how they were solved. Times were difficult in England after the war and like many others the Hubbards looked for greener pastures further afield. In 1958 Derrick joined the RNZAF and accepted an offer of a four year engagement. Shortly thereafter he sailed from Glasgow in the *Captain Cook* without Vera who joined him a year later with their two young children to live in a caravan at Hobsonville.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> April 1960 LAC Hubbard signed a supplementary engagement to extend his service to 23 years expiring on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1981. The rest of the book describes his career in the RNZAF culminating in his term as OC AMS at RNZAF Base Wigram. After retirement from the RNZAF Derrick and Vera embarked on new careers as house renovators, retirement home renovators, part time Zoo keepers and latterly as RNZAF Museum guides. During this time he also found time to continue his flying training and gained his PPL on the 10<sup>th</sup> September 1987. Throughout his career Vera has supported Derrick in all his endeavours and still keeps the home fires burning.

*The publisher has agreed to supply copies of this very interesting book to our members at the pre- publication offer detailed in the flyer reproduced above.*



**RELEASING  
AUGUST 2011**

# SAFELY TO THE SKIES

**ONLY  
\$25**

*"...the experience of an RAF Halton 46th Entry engineer" -  
Squadron Leader Derrick Hubbard*

**SPECIAL  
PRE-PUBLICATION  
OFFER for NZ clients  
Including Freight**

**\$25**

Author Alan Paisey  
A5 Perfect Bound Book  
168 pages with over  
200 illustrations

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Cheque attached or Bank direct to: Toltech Print Ltd  
Cheque - PO Box 13 337 Christchurch New Zealand 8141  
Bank - Westpac Bank, Christchurch New Zealand  
Swift Code: WPACNZ2W - Account No. 03 1592 0269891 00

**Toltech Publishing**  
Phone: 064 03 379 7223 Email: Ivan.h@toltechprint.co.nz www.Toltechprint.co.nz