



Lest We Forget.



JOURNAL OF THE 458 SQUADRON COUNCIL

Year 66 No 251 April 2015

Commemorating ANZAC Centenary

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U.K: Leon Armstrong



Lest We Forget.



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Canada.

*** Post communications for Squadron Secretary to David Longhurst (address above), and for the Squadron (and NSW Flight) Treasurer to John Gibbins (address above)**

**** Have you notified Roland Orchard if you prefer to receive your newsletter by email? Are there others in your family, or circle of friends, who would like to receive a copy by e-mail? Please advise the Editor – see address and e-mail details above.**

Contributions and reports for the next Newsletter are due to the Editor Roland Orchard by 30th July 2015. Please feel free to mail or email in your stories, articles or enquires to Roland. All are welcome.

VALE:-

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
|  Ralph Frederick BAILEY. | NSW |
|  Bill Flentje. | VIC |
|  Peter Cochrane. | UK |
|  Bill Turier | NSW |
| Margaret Gannaway | WA |
| Mrs E. Piggott | NSW |
| Shirley Ethel Granger | VIC |
| Adam Fielding Thomson | QLD |
| Les Kennedy | VIC |

FLIGHT REPORTS:

New South Wales Flight report by Stephen Bruce

VALE: It is with great sadness we report the passing of Ralph Bailey, Bill Turier and Mrs E. Piggott. From all within 458 Squadron Association we offer our sympathies to all of those families.

L-R Back row-Roland Orchard, Rob Wilkinson, Ron Munkman, Peter Bitmead, Jeremy Orchard, Chris Orchard, Stephen Bruce.
Middle row-Bev Bitmead, Beryl Dodds. **Front row-** Keith Cousins & Eric Munkman. **Photographer-** Sam Bruce.



The 458 Squadron Council Meeting was held at the Kirribilli Club, Milson's Point on Tuesday 31st March. Our invited guests "The Brothers Orchard" were recognized in a generous speech by President Keith and were presented with a plaque in appreciation of their outstanding efforts in both the compiling of the 250th Newsletter and the

Squadron website. Photo of attendees. Sam Bruce is the photographer.

ANZAC Day 2015- Sydney.

Order of March -WW2 AIR FORCE Troops/Banners.

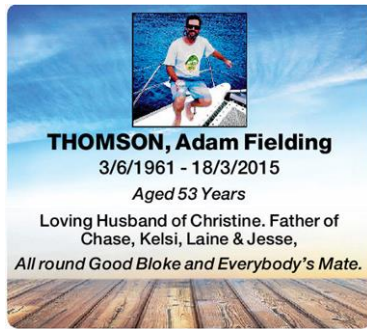
BOMBER SQUADRONS PATHFINDERS, 2, 22, 24, 454, 456, **458**,
 459,460, 462, 463, 464, 466, 467, 18 (NEI) SQN.

Pitt Street, North of Hunter Street, facing South. **Form up 8:45am:-**

We agreed to stay at Castlereagh Hotel NSWMC for our ANZAC Day function due to proximity of site at completion of March. A higher standard of food and refreshments to be negotiated with Rita Surio from the Club. Those who wish to view all ANZAC Day details online see the following rslsw website - <http://rslsw.org.au/commemoration/anzac/>

As Adam Bruce will be in Gallipoli on 25th April with Qantas we approved his laying of a wreath at Anzac Cove as a mark of respect.

Queensland Flight Report



THOMSON, Adam Fielding 3/6/1961 - 18/3/2015 Aged 53 Years. Loving Husband of Christine. Father of Chase, Kelsi, Laine & Jesse.

On Behalf of all members and families of The 458 Squadron Association we offer our sympathies to Christine, Chase,

Kelsi, Laine and Jesse. Our thoughts and prayers are with you during this sad time. A much loved man taken too early. Forever with his Dad. Pilot Officer John Wallace Thomson.

Veteran Allan McLean wrote me on Australia Day this year in response to the Article about Jock in the 250th Edition. Allan was a crew member of Jock's and wrote some fond memories. Christine informed me that Adam had indeed contacted Allan earlier in the year. I would like to include the correspondence in the next newsletter. ed.

Canada Flight report by Bryan Quinlan

Tom Lindsay at 98 still gets his almost daily exercise with his wheeled Walker at the local shopping centre but otherwise had nothing else to report. Tom Rowan advised that he was honoured by him throwing the ceremonial first rock at the final Canadian Legion Saskatchewan Final Curling tournament. After Provincial champions are decided they advance to the Canadian final. Several times a week Tom also plays a card game called MIL, which is apparently similar to whist with the idea not to take any tricks. Tom, now 96 recently applied for the renewal of his driver's license, which for his age group is supposed to be renewed each year and received a 5-year license which he figures should be sufficient for his anticipated driving requirements. Talked via phone to Gladys Maitland to get an update on husband Bert's situation who has been in a Care centre for several years now and apparently is in an advanced state of dementia and has recently undergone some serious illnesses. Joan and I have little to report other than age-related problems. We both find that these days we have more to do and accomplish less. Joan's main problem is extremely painful osteoporosis. My most exciting news is downsizing from our aging 1992 Nissan to a 2007 Toyota Corolla with only 25000 miles on the odometer. I spend considerable time reading the Owner's Manual to get used to all the different buttons, etc., quite different from the old Nissan."

West Australia Flight report by Ted Jewell

No report from Ted, however a great story from Vera Etherton. Vera's farm life during the war and her RAAF Certificate of Appreciation for service in the Volunteer Air Observer Corps. I hope everyone is well in the West. ed

The following is by Vera Etherton (nee Bridgeman).

I am writing this war time work story which was shared with my sister Jessie and sister-in-law Lil. So will use 'we' not 'I' as it covers the 3 of us. Our father D.W.Bridgeman owned 2 farms several miles apart. We lived on "Eastbrook", 6 miles west of Northampton. Our father & brother Bert (who was manpowered out of the forces to help run these properties with our help). We walked miles setting rabbit traps, up early next morning to go round the traps, kill the rabbits and skin them. Reset the traps and go home and put the skins on wires to dry, later to sell them. At times our father mixed poison with oats and we took it out into the paddocks, make a furrow in the earth and lay the poison oats in it for the rabbits to eat. Next morning we'd go and pick up the dead and skin them, this was an awful job as they were cold and stiff and hard to skin and very smelly. When our younger brother Gordon left school he worked with us too. We helped muster sheep for shearing and crutching. Worked in the shed to pick up the dags and sort them into good pieces and throw out the dirty. Pick up the fleeces and throw them onto the table for Dad to class. The fleeces would be placed in classes and when enough of each, we'd put them into the bale press and get in and press them down with our legs until the bale was full and tight. After shearing it was time to dip the sheep to keep them lice free. The sheep would be yarded and pushed through a run and they would jump into the dip of poison liquid. The dip was a long cement trench. Our job was to push the sheep's head under the liquid using a long handled tool. As the sheep hit the water we would be splashed too. The sheep needed to be drenched for worms, so were yarded and each one caught and held while an instrument was put down it's throat, if we weren't holding the sheep we used the instrument. After lambing the sheep were mustered into make shift yards in the paddocks and we caught the lambs and held them chest high for our brother to cut their tails off and the male ones castrated. A very dirty and tiring job.

We walked over and plowed paddocks to pick roots and big stones and put them in a cart, clearing the land so crops could be put in. Wild raddish was bad in the crops and we walked through the crops and grubbed them out and if in seed we put them in a bag to take to destroy. The empty super bags we put into the water in a nearby creek to soak and clean and go back several days later drag them out to hang on a fence to dry to be used for the seasons wheat (no bins or big trucks then). Also all old bags were sorted and any needing mending were mended. After the hay was cut in sheaves, we'd stook them to dry out and then throw them up onto the truck to be taken and stacked. While harvesting was being done we sewed the bags of wheat ready for carting into the bin in Northampton. Chaff was needed for the team horses (we had a tractor too) so the sheaves were fed into a chaff cutter and fed into bags, a dirty and itchy job. Petrol was rationed so we took it in turns to ride a bike the 6 miles into Northampton (gravel road) and get bread, mail and papers etc once or twice a week. All this time we took it in turns to report the comings and goings of aircraft (V.A.O.C) for the Air Force in Geraldton. And home duties. We milked cows and made butter, made jam, grew lettuce and sold them to buy war bonds. Cooking of meals etc. Shearers stayed on farms and so were fed 3 meals a day and two lunch breaks and this would be for several weeks (2 shearers). Work shared with Mum. I was a lieutenant in Girl Guides, Tawney Owl in Brownies in Northampton. We worked hard in raising funds for Naval Comforts. Jessie was in a "Queen" Competition representing the Navy. We did all kinds of things to raise funds for her, penny trials, lots of street stalls, once we had a live rooster given us for sale, no buyers, so I took it to a ladies house, cut it's head off, and dressed it. Sold it for 2/6. We organised a big "Ball", several dances and concerts which we both took part in. We collected paper and aluminum to send to the war effort. Collected medicine bottles, cleaned them and sold to the chemist. We knitted for the Naval comforts and Red Cross, our brother and friends overseas.

Vera's Certificate
of Appreciation for
Service to the
Royal Australian
Air Force
Volunteer Air
Observer Corps

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South Australia Flight report by Rick Michell

No report from South Australia. We wish Rick and everyone well. Ed

Victoria Flight report by Roland Orchard

Vale- Bill Flentje Passed away on 1/12/2014



My dad, Bill passed away yesterday morning. Just after his 96th birthday in July he had a fall and was admitted to hospital and although nothing was broken, he was shaken up quite a bit. He was then admitted to the hospitals Rehab ward and he stayed for about 6 weeks where they tried to get him to walk again which he did for a while, but he continued to fall when unsupervised or roll out of bed. The rehab doctor advised he needed to go into a nursing home for the best possible care due to his age, condition and various ailments, which

was a tough realisation for Betty (Bill's wife) and myself (but proved to be the best solution for all) and so he was moved into a temporary nursing home until a permanent bed could be found. He was then moved to Mirridong a nursing home less than 5 minutes from our home, but his health continued to deteriorate until yesterday. The end

of another 458er and the last member of his crew to pass away as Dud McKay had died in July this year...**Neil (Bill's son)**

Shirley Granger's son Graham contacted me to let me know that his Mother had passed away on the 26th November, 2014.

My wife Janet, took a phone call from someone informing The Squadron of the passing of Mr. Les Kennedy, whose brother served with 458 Squadron. Our heartfelt condolences go out to all families who have lost loved ones.

ANZAC Day 2015. Melbourne.

Melbourne ANZAC Day March 2015. Meeting place is Federation Square side of Flinders Street, east of Swanston Street. Look out for our 458 Squadron Banner. We are marching in between 455 Squadron & 460 Squadron. Please be formed up by **10:00am** sharp. RAAF Europe & Middle East is due to step off at 10:20am. If there are any questions please contact me (Roland) by email editor@458raafsquadron.org or leave a message on my mobile 0400433382. We are still in negotiation for a venue for our AGM and after march refreshments. For ANZAC Day March Venues throughout Victoria visit the RSL Victoria website on <http://www.rslvic.com.au/> or Telephone ANZAC House, 4 Collins Street, Melbourne, VIC. 3000 on **039655-5555**

United Kingdom Flight report by Keith Wilkinson

It's with some sadness that I announce the death of a former 458 pilot, Peter Cochrane, who lived in Yorkshire. Until recent years Peter had attended a number of squadron reunions and events in the UK and so was quite well known to a number of people with connections to 458. Peter, who died at the age of 93, flew as second pilot with the much-respected Dudley "Tiny" Woodcock – so nicknamed within the squadron because he was 6 feet 4 inches tall, an extraordinary height for a Wellington bomber pilot, and one of the tallest in 458. Peter – who was a farmer after the war - used to tell many a funny story at reunions; and sometimes sad ones too. Peter and Tiny (who moved to Canada from England in the 1960's) used to do two hours on and two hours off each at the controls while on long ops in the aircraft. He once told me: "When Tiny used to get tired he used to give me a nudge and we would swap. He was a gigantic fella was Tiny. If the aircraft had ever got damaged, how would I have got him out of his seat? I have no idea! "He was a really amiable bloke but he always used to look down on people, of course, physically, so to speak. I always remember going into the Operations Room at Bone. Tiny walked in and there was an officer there. He looked down at him and he looked up a bit and looked level and then actually looked UP! This fellow must have been seven foot tall. I had never seen him look up at anyone before. "Peter's father was a shipbuilder in a business started by his grandfather. Peter remembered this chance encounter. "My father built trawlers and anti-submarine vessels. During 1940 we went round an anti-submarine vessel in Hull. And a few years later it was in Malta harbour when we were there (with 458). Tiny and me met some of the officers and we were going to go on board the next day, but she sailed. But it was interesting to see it. "Peter described Tiny as a "good pilot" and they were together since meeting at RAF Cranwell in February 1943. As I wrote earlier, there were sad tales too. When Peter was in Palestine in 1945, a German JU88 aircraft crashed into what later became his home in Yorkshire. He said: "All the crew were killed and three people in the house as well. "After the war, he spoke of becoming a pacifist. The house was rebuilt and a cross was placed in the garden. German crews made numerous visits to the location to attend services in remembrance. Peter – like many British pilots at the time – did his flying training in Canada, sailing there across the notorious North Atlantic in September 1941 on the Highland Princess in very rough weather with all around him being sick. He returned on a ship that was sunk later in the war. "Fortunately, I did not know until 25 years later, that when I was making the crossings, it was two of the worst periods for ships being sunk." Ninety-three-year-old 458-er Charlie Humbles has had a scary moment this year. He was suddenly taken ill at his home in Hertfordshire, England. Paramedics worked on him in the ambulance for half an hour after his heart failed. He was then rushed to hospital, with sirens and blue lights, and the next day he underwent major surgery with the installation

of a pacemaker. Charlie says: They saved my life. I'm very lucky to be sitting here talking to you. "During the war Charlie was an aircraft engineer with the squadron, having started right at the beginning at Holme upon Spalding Moor in Yorkshire. November was a momentous month for him and his wife, Joyce, aged 94. They received a card from The Queen to commemorate their 74th wedding anniversary, and it's now framed and displayed with great pride on the wall at their home.

The message, signed Elizabeth R, says: "*It gives me great pleasure to send you my sincere congratulations and best wishes on the occasion of your 74th wedding anniversary*".

When Charlie had his heart scare, all he could think of was his beloved Joyce and being back home with her. He tells me: "I went in to hospital on the Monday, had the operation on the Tuesday and on the Wednesday I came out! Joyce is registered blind and I thought: I'd better come out and go home" "We wish both of them every happiness and congratulations.

ARTICLES OF INTEREST.

Excerpt from the Memoirs of Flying Officer Ron Verity. RNZAF



458 Squadron -- Bone -- Algeria

Seldom did the Sabbath pass without some form of service being held even when operations were at their peak. On leave, or attached to a holding unit, the same applied although attendances varied greatly. On a Sunday late in October, I listened enthralled to a Scot who chose to speak around the text "Heaven and Earth shall pass away, but my Word shall not pass away." To prove that he was not tied to theory or semantics he had us playing cricket on the Monday. And the next day we were waiting for a plane to take us to 458 Squadron, which, formed in Australia, had commenced operations at Holme on Spalding Moor in Yorkshire in 1941. The Squadron's story is told in "We Find and Destroy" by Peter Alexander, who is still very much responsible for regular News Bulletins, and a Squadron reunion every second year. This is soon to become an annual event as the number of surviving members has sadly been depleted. Getting to the Squadron was no easy matter. It was our turn to be hitch-hikers. The final stage of our trip from Castel Benito was made in a Dakota, although only three of us managed to squeeze aboard, and then by truck to Protville (Tunisia) where we arrived in the moonlight. And we were expected! It was grand to meet up with Kevin George and his crew. The C.O. had a record for keeping the aircraft and crews in the air, so on the following evening, I flew as an "extra", on a patrol which lasted for 10hrs 45mins - all over the sea - even as far as Genoa! Around 2am I was taking my turn as "lookout" from the astro-dome, and I'm sure that at some stage I was asleep standing up watching for enemy aircraft. I reported to the Captain who was very sympathetic! Obviously he didn't believe me. As Eric and Ernie arrived at the Camp on

Monday 20th September, we were off, on our first operation on the night of Tuesday, a nine-hour anti-submarine mission carrying depth charges. Even as we landed a signal from the Middle East Headquarters sent all serviceable aircraft off to Bone, Algeria, where the Squadron took over a peace-time landing field just inside the sandhills, where a marshy level tract of land had been equipped with runways of metal webbing. The Squadron had been at Protville about three months when we joined and we immediately had the feeling that everything was but temporary. With the retreat of the enemy forces, and the surrender of the Italian fleet, Coastal Command Units were highly motivated to exert as much pressure as possible, and also to provide maximum cover for the convoys passing through the Mediterranean, where German submarines were always a threat. Just after midnight on Oct.2nd, we were called out to escort a convoy passing through the Mediterranean to Malta under a wicked electrical thunderstorm. It was a new experience to see gremlins play along the aerials, and the whirling props enclosed in a circle of light. One pilot was heard to comment: "I'd rather ditch my aircraft, than face another such trip" - and my Rear Gunner lamented: "It's the first time I've had to strap myself in the turret to escape injuring". Visits to neighbouring tents became quite regular when not on operations, with keen competition to see whether the Australians or the Canadians or the New Zealanders could make the best spread, from the special Red Cross parcels which were eagerly welcomed. Even a piece of toast with N.Z. butter and lemon curd could brighten the evening. Imagine grown men re-telling their favourite childhood stories: Eric with *Alice in Wonderland*, Axel and *Pickwick Papers* and another with *Three in a Boat* - and so another night would pass. We had barely fitted into the rhythm of life at Protville, when we were sent on detachment. This meant that at short notice three or four aircraft with crews and maintenance staff would fly to a forward landing field for operations. Thus it was that we found ourselves camped in an olive grove at Borizzo, near Trapani, in Sicily. During October we flew on three day (22 hours) and ten nights (87 hours) sorties and accumulated much valuable experience. There were memories too, of Etna erupting at night as we passed a few miles off-shore. In Trapani we listened in brilliant sunshine to a couple of Italian street entertainers sing popular airs (no more war). At such moments one wondered what made men go to war. Although we had been based in Protville, Tunisia, when we first went to Borizzo the Squadron was in Bone Algeria, when we returned a fortnight later! We were learning to live on the move. With the passing of October we were conscious of the approach of winter. We managed to equip our tent with a kerosene stove



Protville Tunisia

where on occasions we could produce soup, fry eggs and prepare toast. It was on Oct 30th that Vic informed me that he had been aloft with me as a pilot on more than 80 occasions, in Canada, Ireland, England, Gibraltar, North Africa and Egypt over the past two years. I expressed the hope that our good fortune might continue. With the departure of an Air-Sea Rescue unit which had been operating near-by we organised a raiding party to snap up as quickly as possible anything which might contribute to our comfort. We now had a cupboard with shelves and a carpet on the floor. Attached we had our own ablution unit - at least an alcove plus wash basin. Kev's commission came through and he left the Sergeant's quarters. For my part I was content to share life with the crew, and it seemed unfortunate that being given officer rank was the signal to team up with other officers. Ruggles was the only officer in our crew, but he was young and a good mixer.

November - December 1943

The first half of November jogged by. Generally the weather was unsuitable for sustained flying and crew members went sick in rotation. However, the latter part of Nov provided me with some tense moments, moments which



reminded me that danger was ever present. "K" for King, a good machine, easy to fly, according to Kev George, who had flown it on three successive occasions, had just passed the 40hr mandatory inspection by the ground staff. Now it had to be taken for an Air Test prior to flying again on operations. Bill, Ernie and I carried out the usual pre-flight check before turning on to the runway. Everything was O.K. I turned into the wind and gradually opened the throttles. I was about to lift off when the port motor cut out. In an effort to prevent swing I cut the starboard and coaxed the port engine to fire, but there was no response so both engines were shut down and switched off. Brake power was insufficient to check the swing and we did a ground loop. I lingered somewhat trying to figure out the cause but was soon made aware of my potential danger as Bill and Ernie did some frantic pantomime alongside the cockpit. They had been exceedingly adroit in reaching the ground - and I followed.

There were repercussions. The fire tender, the Medical Officer and the Engineering Officer were all on the scene. Although I made it plain that I was ready to go off in another plane, the C.O. cancelled our night trip, and put us under the care of the doctor. The following day the engineering investigation revealed that a new type of petrol hose had collapsed under full throttle: all planes were cancelled until checked! Almost every day was marked by an event - not always pleasant. Quite

close by a convoy is attacked by a U boat which makes a "kill". A flap is on and a swamp organised. Crews take it in turn to patrol a given area around the clock with pleasing results. At dawn we hear that a Navy Captain has accepted surrender of the U-Boat. Some credit is given to the Squadron which pinned the U-Boat down until the air supply forced it to surface. One of our chaps had a tyre burst in the air, but made a good landing. Another in our tent line lost his way at night and crashed into a hill killing all the crew. Another aircraft had to ditch but four survived. Saddened we were by these accidents, but we were resolved to do what had to be done to the best of our abilities. After a night patrol of some three hours, the port motor began vibrating. As a stand-by crew was on duty, I asked Gerry to inform base that we were returning. Apparently Eric had not been connected to the inter-com when the conversation took place and when informed by the navigator, who wrote on his pad "port engine vibrating badly", Eric promptly added "So am I". Such ready wit helped us over what might have caused unnecessary alarm. In mid-Nov I took another pilot to a satellite airfield to collect a new aircraft. Armed with a good met report we expected a quick return. However, we experienced thick cloud with icing and we just touched down at Bone in zero visibility. On the 23rd we again had trouble. An error in navigation and a faulty elevator trim gave us some anxious moments. As if that were not sufficient, we burst a tyre whilst taxi-ing to dispersal! After debriefing and a meal of potatoes and sausages we collapsed into bed at 2 am. Could this be true? At 2200 hours on Dec 11th we were one of the crews detailed to escort "Winnie" who was travelling through the Med in convoy "Sandstorm". Two days later the Navy forced a U-Boat to surface and surrender. I wonder. Did they know that Sir Winston Churchill was in the area? And could that have persuaded Bill and Ivan to put on a special meal of potatoes, carrots, peas, lamb tongues under Ernie's supervision? Or was it to mark a birthday?

The War Years: Here, There, and Everywhere.

Although I have searched my notes and exercised my mind, I am unable to discover why my diary, for the first four months of 1944 is blank. Perhaps it started when I had to visit sick headquarters, and from there I was sent to No. 5 General Hospital for an injection.



Jan 1944 Bone 458 (b)Ernie Self Eric (f) Gerry Rug Bill

However, I remained on duty. At this time a visit from A.V.M. Sir Hugh Pugh came to spur us on - or did the storm on New Year's Day, which wrecked the Mess tent and the library, have a greater input? For some time we had been aware of a reduction in the number of suitable targets in our area, and a decision was made to place us closer to the critical areas

by sending us on detachment. Thus it was, that on Jan 8th, thirteen Wellingtons and sixteen crews moved to Blida airport, near Algiers, for a "swamp" with C.O. W/Cdr Dowling in command. The detachment flew 36 sorties totalling 267 operational hours, made four sightings and made two attacks on U-boats. Winter was upon us but there was no let-up in the campaign. We had been flying the Mk XIII stickleback version when a new type of Wellington, the Mk XIV, all white, with better detection gear, and a two million candle power retractable searchlight for illuminating the submarine at the moment of strike, appeared. The idea may have been quite good, but in operation it made flying very difficult, and it could not be rated a brilliant invention mainly because the light was effective for a few seconds only. We had barely returned to Bone from Blida, when, along with five other crews, we were despatched to Grottaglie near Taranto in Southern Italy, to search for a submarine in the Adriatic. It was memorable in that five of the six aircraft had difficulty in returning to base three days later, because the adverse weather made the usual landing grounds unserviceable, and mechanics on the ground were scarce. In February we were again on detachment at Ghisonaccia in Corsica sharing the drome with an American Marauder Bombing Group. Here we had our introduction to the "chow" line, and the luxury of starting the day with a glass of tomato or pineapple juice. It was here, also, that we had our lectures on health and medical problems, with long discussions. And, yes, we did take advantage of the over-night trips to the west, to gaze on the place where Napoleon had been born, Ajaccio. The scenery through the hills was delightful, although even sealed surfaces did not make the steep gradients and tight bends any easier for the drivers. The detachment was short-lived and then it was back to Bone with more Convoy Escort and Anti-Sub patrolling. With the special equipment on the new planes, targets at nights were more easily recognizable, navigation much easier. In May we were off to Malta - the G.C. Island, and I, (knowing that pilots had been caught in a down-draught at the commencement of the main runway at Luga airfield, and determined not to make the same mistake), went in too high and floated along. When the aircraft finally touched the earth there was little left of



Ron at controls

the runway, and despite hard braking we finished in a field of barley with a badly damaged aircraft, but no injuries! Two days later a F/Lt did an overshoot too, parking his aircraft alongside mine! I felt a bit guilty - a bit of an ass - and ashamed. Forty-eight hours later, back at Bone, I was informed that my Commission had been gazetted. No connection you understand! The C.O. and the crew had pressured me into applying for promotion. It was a tribute to all of them, and moving in to the Officers' Quarters, where I shared a tent with Alan Ruggles, (my navigator for more

than a year), was quiet and orderly. Skipping back a little it is hard to write about Malta without a feeling of pride in what the people suffered. Valetta and the Grand Harbour, swarming with men and women in uniforms had the charm of being permanent and indestructible. The statistics of the battering they received by German bombers makes incredible reading. Coastal Command had its share of rumour, of waiting and change. With the Allied advances in Italy and especially after the fall of Rome on June 4th, it was evident that our work would be in higher latitudes, especially along the shores of Italy and Southern Europe. So it was that on June 10th we shifted the Squadron to Alghero, the north-west coast of Sardinia. It was an ideal spot from which to fly on armed reconnaissance, anti-submarine patrols, convoy escort and bombing missions. We did them all. We even escorted a

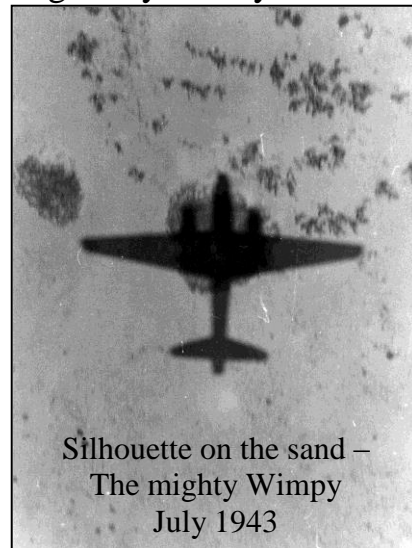
Eric, Ernie & Bill Playing with 11 ½ lb practice bombs. Alghero, Sardinia.



French destroyer through a thunderstorm at night! Losses amongst the crews were much reduced, but there were many close calls from unpredictable weather. On one occasion a fellow pilot was compelled to ditch his aircraft which ran short of fuel after being kept waiting

for the drome to clear. Happily he managed to get close in shore and made the model ditching with no loss of life or injury. On the night of June 26th, whilst on an armed reconnaissance looking for seibel ferries or merchant ships north of Elba, we gave ourselves a well-remembered fright. Flying at 1000ft, all was well, and I decided to hand over to the 2nd pilot, but unbeknown to us he activated the flap lever as he took over my position. He soon complained that the aircraft was difficult to fly and losing height. Even extra engine boost didn't help. At 500ft I took over and a quick cockpit check revealed the cause. At around 100ft we eased off the flap by degrees and eventually we were back on track. I should mention here that low flying at night when there are no visible landmarks, present many problems. The altimeter which works on atmospheric pressure is a basic instrument. A problem arises when flying between places where the barometric pressure can vary by several millibars. As one millibar represents 30ft in altitude, a difference of 20 millibars between two places (due to changing weather patterns) can mean the altimeter will read either positively or negatively by 600ft, depending on whether the aircraft moves from a High to a Low, or a Low to a High pressure area. Fortunately, improved radar equipment gave us accurate distances, bearings and altitude, when necessary. At this time a "tour" in Coastal Command was based on 500 hours of operational flying. Being much closer to our targets cut down the hours available, and with more trained crews reaching the squadron, competition for flying hours increased. Old comrades were disappearing and we were looked upon as

one of the more experienced crews. Ernie, "my second", who had flown on operations before joining us was the first to be "tour expired". His place was taken by F/Sgt Havers. Because of our seniority we were being detailed more frequently to take over the work of Dury Crew, when we would have to spend the day in the Flight Office monitoring all flying. Problems arose when aircraft returned to base because of deteriorating weather or mechanical failure. Frequently they would have to be diverted to another aerodrome, and Elmas in the South of Sardinia was an area we came to know well. Off-duty evenings were often spent playing bridge which had a wide following. When the weather was warm we enjoyed swimming either on the beach or further afield at an Officer's Club close to town. Somehow I seemed to get rather more than my share of censoring the out-going mail from other ranks, but with the war turning in our favour it proved an easy task. Now it became my turn to have a spell in hospital. I was definitely off-colour with abdominal and muscular pains. No real diagnosis was offered; although sand-fly fever was mentioned. I settled for gastritis and arthritis. Pills were prescribed and no red meat in the diet. Three days later I said goodbye to my American friends and returned to light duties. If flying was suspended, there was always plenty of interest. On July 22nd I record that the Gestapo had policed Berlin and on the same day I study the educational programme as laid down by Messrs. Hanna, Forsyth and Armstrong, for the Primary Schools in N.Z! Interests vary. On the beach I inspect a home-made boat using over-load fuel tanks and propelled by a small motor. Promotions and postings continue. And so does the flying with some minor successes and failures. When



F/O Aitken crash-landed at Ajaccio there were no casualties. On the 12th August we were "scrambled" on an anti-sub patrol, the C.O. promising that we would be T.E'd if we made a kill. We didn't even get a contact or a sighting! This was the same night that Eric, our S.E. operator celebrated 11 years of marriage. To bring us back to earth, Colin Fereday, who had been on a bombing trip landed with a bomb still hanging in the rack. It exploded on landing injuring all the crew. Although the end of our tour was now close, the C.O. asked us to continue, promising us daylight anti-sub work, air-sea rescue missions and general ferrying of aircraft. It was obvious that he was more concerned about a potential shift of the unit to Foggia in Italy. On the 15th August when an invasion of Southern Italy began, I had a night on duty organising an anti-sub patrol, finally getting to bed at 8a.m. A week later in glorious weather we fitted in a Convoy Escort mission

shepherding more than fifty vessels, merchant and navy to a safe arrival at the Anzio landing. Such trips were most satisfying. Satisfying too was our last trip, a photographic exercise with the Navy off the North-East shoreline off the North-East shoreline of Sardinia.

For Ron's complete memoir of his life visit <http://458raafsquadron.org/honour-roll/servicemens-stories.html> and click on Veity R. The above excerpt was reproduced with kind permission from Ron's daughter Pam Hurst. Ron's story and pictures are subject to Copyright and cannot be reproduced in any way without express permission from family members of the Late Joseph Ronald Verity.

458's Colonel Bruce McKenzie and 500 Squadron in Ghisonaccia



THE CORSICAN RATS – SPECIAL OPERATIONS DETACHMENT

'The First Plane In' - By Andy Bennett.

Copyright. Andrew Bennett.

Africa – Ghisonaccia 1943



RAF 500 COUNTY OF KENT SQUADRON.

In the theatre of war, many true stories get left untold or are just forgotten in the mists of time, stories of terror, bravery, interest and love. Sometimes records recorded such events and sometimes they didn't. Sometimes, it was left to the individual to record things in their diaries or flight logs or just leave them floating about in the back of their minds or long forgotten yellowing photographs which tell stories more interesting and vivid than any record book from the archives. Of the official records in the UK, there were essentially two main ones, those from home and those created in the field of war. However, all sources are equally of value to the true historian provided sufficient evidence can be provided. The information below has been gathered over a long period of time from those that were there, lovely, elderly gentlemen who served as very active young boys in WW2 watching life in all its finery and sheer terror. At the end of the war, with men coming out of the service in their droves, the girls and boys who worked in the record offices had to correlate all the activities of each man to provide their due pay, discharges and release records. The records they used were both records from in the field of action and those based back home and as any British soldier, seaman or airman from that period of history will know, these records often conflicted or differed widely and had sometimes even vanished from the face of the Earth as a casualty of war itself. Those from the record offices knew this, especially the ones that worked in the correspondence offices at the end of the war when men would write in telling the official document departments exactly where they went and what they did! As such, apparently the girls were always told to give them the benefit of the doubt to take the word of the soldier, seaman or airman over certain home or missing records. For other squadrons, records weren't supposed to be found. These were the records of the SOE. Sometimes the paths of the SOE crossed with those of regular squadrons and when they did, detachments, equipment and men flew in every direction! For one extremely active squadron, the above was true, RAF 500 County of Kent Squadron formed at Manston Kent, they soon went on to settle at Detling Aerodrome where they experienced violent air raids early in the war and saw much of the early action. From there, they took part in many theatres and proved their worth time and again hunting submarines. One such theatre, was their early involvement in Operation Torch where they were pinned down and fired on by Vichy snipers whilst landing on the beaches and moreover their tour of duty thereafter in North Africa, Corsica and Italy. Here is just part of their story and

one I have been researching for a long time... Reading all the information on the internet, there seems to be so much on the American squadrons that operated out of Ghisonaccia aerodrome Corsica, from December 1943 on, but little mention of the British operations that were sent there, before the Nazi's had left the island in September, October and November of 1943, when the British set up Ghisonaccia Gare aerodrome for allied use under the command of Col. Bruce McKenzie (of 458 Squadron) and a 500 Squadron detachment. And so it is to these men who these pages are dedicated. This is not intended to ignore the amazing work done by the French, the Corsican partisans or the Americans etc, but it is just to add a little more detail to the overall picture and get the records duly straight. In June 43, much was being planned by the powers that be (which I shall not go in to here as it has already been covered in a great many books) and Africa became a hotbed of many units under various control commands. Men and equipment were being detached or lent to other squadrons or units at the drop of a hat and new units formed. This meant that to trace an event or a person's real movements become very difficult for the researcher, who is keen to get things right. (As mentioned records from home are often scanty to say the least). Detachments were sent and bases were changed frequently to match the needs of war. One day they were in Blida, a few days later, Tafaroui and then back to Blida again. Air bases such as Blida, Tafaroui and La Senia became solid bases for the allies in North Africa, and in Blida, much undercover work was going on in terms of new under wing rocket testing and radar techniques. This included complete units specific to new radar developments and also newly formed and trained special operations units such as Flight 1575. This flight was highly secret and even today, few records survive, although at the time of writing this, there is a new website called '624 Unsung Heroes' which I can highly recommend. From May 1943 onwards Flight 1575 flew, regularly... '...at night over occupied Europe many times at less than 500 feet, delivering supplies and agents to the resistance groups in Corsica, as well as other places until September 1944. Its missions were top secret and each aircraft operated completely on its own for the entire duration of a mission.'

Sicily and Corsica were at that time, high on the list of operational focus with preparations for the eventual invasion by the French groups and the French / RAF spitfire units which eventually went into Ajaccio along with a multitude of others. In June 43, 1575 Flight became 624 Squadron, remained an SOE Squadron, and flew several top-secret missions into various places in Corsica. They were mainly operating from Blida and used Lysanders, Halifaxes, Hudsons and Venturas or indeed anything that was around and suitable for each mission.

At that time, other squadrons too were also operating from Blida, such as RAF 500 Squadron and detachments of 458, 36 squadron (+ others), and 624 SOE would occasionally 'borrow' both men and equipment from these squadrons for special operational duties - when required. (Only specially trained SOE 624 men were parachuted and landed in and off the coast of Corsica as required for special duties) but with the increase in apparent U-boat sightings and with the invasion of Italy really hotting-up, it was decided that the eastern aerodromes of Corsica would be strategic refuelling commands and radar bases for the allies. As such, on one occasion, before the Nazis had been ousted from Corsica, in late September on 28th, a Lockheed Hudson from RAF 500 County of Kent Squadron, also based at Blida, was ordered to fly to Bone and then onto into Ghisonaccia Gare on a 'secret' supply mission and moreover 'To Establish Squatters' Rights' (The actual wording of the orders!). Although the Nazis were still on the island at the time, they had just left Ghisonaccia and were heading north and evacuating in their droves from further up the coast around Bastia. But they had scuttled much of their German equipment beforehand and had even booby-trapped Ghisonaccia Gare aerodrome with mines! Ghisonaccia Gare had indeed been left in some state but it was desperately needed to give the allies a strong refuelling airbase in the area and to help the Italian campaign. In any event, it

fell to 500 RAF County of Kent Squadron to fly in on the first landing since the Germans had left the area and indeed 'Establish Squatters' Rights'. This included a specialist radar man from 'B' Flight and a liaison experienced NCO aircraft hand who, efficient at establishing new HQ's was also from 500 squadron 'B' Flight, one Corporal Frederick Bennett otherwise known as 'Torso' after a newspaper cartoon character of the time. A tall, dark and handsome, moustached gentleman of good physique. These men and their equipment were crammed into a Hudson along with a folding SOE bike and various other supplies and took off on the 'two hour' Journey to Ghisonaccia Gare. Johnny Thompson, a member of 500 Squadron recalled...

'Most of the time, Torso (Bennett) had to remain attached to HQ (Blida) but on occasion escaped to busier but in some ways more pleasant duties on exciting detachments. His rapidly found skills in dealing and controlling the local Arabs with whom we came into close contact and smoothing relations with our American allies proved very useful indeed.... But then came the detachment to end all detachments. It was to send an operating party off the west coast of Italy, and positioned ahead, of the then fought for army lines there. Actually, when our movement was first motivated, the Germans still held part of Corsica prior to their evacuating to southern France. Of all things, Torso was ordered to fly in on the first aircraft to land at Ghisonaccia Gare, to prepare the ground work there, and receive the main party travelling by sea. To make matters even worse, it was believed that there were only 800 yards of runway clear of mines with which some of the island had been infested by the retreating Nazis. Now 800 yards of runway is not really enough for a Hudson at the best of times, especially if it has been loaded with lots of essential equipment instead of its usual depth charges. However orders is orders and must be obeyed and so came the great day with our top-notch aircrew prepared for the task. Many of us went down to commiserate with 'Torso' with a crammed fuselage floor and surrounded by every conceivable item of gear and equipment even including a small motor-cycle!' 'We could only wish him well and 'Auf Wiedersehn.'

Later, back in Blida and later still at Bone North Africa, other men of 500 Squadron drew straws to see who would also be flying over to Ghisonaccia from Bone and Blida in October and November 1943 in three more Hudsons and who would be going by ship. The lottery winners were a mixed bunch of aircrew and ground crew along with a few selected radar men and maintenance crew. The rest would have a long journey to Ajaccio by ship and over the mountains to Ghisonaccia at a later date in December. The rest of the RAF 500 Squadron men who had been chosen to fly into Ghisonaccia Gare, 'the lucky ones', were again ordered in to help set up a Corsican radar station and airbase at Ghisonaccia Gare in October and November of 1943.

These were the second, third and fourth allied Hudson flights into Ghisonaccia Gare after the main Nazi evacuation and are also often overlooked by many historians mainly due to lack of information.. Two flew directly to Corsica, the other flew to Sardinia first on the 18th of October and then on to Corsica to join them. Together, these four 500 squadron Hudsons, flew in taking all sorts of SOE and later, regular equipment. For all of them, the approximately one hour flight was filled with excitement, sheer terror but interspersed with periods of 'almost boredom'. When the first Hudson approached the coast off Corsica in late September, 'Torso' Bennett and the others, awaited a landing into the unknown... and on the first approach, they saw to their horror that the runway had been left strewn with large bomb craters and wrecked German planes and trucks! It had, unknown to them at the time, also been booby-trapped with mines and consisted of only 700 meters of 'possibly serviceable' runway, slightly less than the 800 they had been told to expect! All eyes were needed on landing to avoid rocks, pot-holes, craters, barbed wire and wrecked German equipment. Somehow Frederick Bennett's plane managed to 'hop in' over the craters successfully and discovered a real mess left deliberately by the Nazis to make life very difficult for the new occupiers of Ghisonaccia Gare. Later on 18th October, P/O

Hallonqvist was a passenger in another 500 Squadron Hudson, Hudson 'F' flown by W/C Keddle on a 45 minute journey from Bone to Alghero in Sardinia. S/L J.H. 'Paddy' Simpson was co-pilot. Later still, on the 4.11.43, P/O 'Hal' Hallonqvist, , flew back a second time on another seemingly unrecorded Hudson, also as a passenger, flown by WC Keddle from Sardinia to Ghisonaccia Gare with F/S Jimmy Thompson, wireless operator, and two Australians: Arthur Dick (Navigator) and F/S Tom Renwick with similar orders and under the same conditions - dangerous landings for all! (According to Jimmy Thompson, Tom Renwick had replaced Billy Swift, who in Blida or Bone a short time before, had been called out of his tent and had volunteered for another mission. Billy never returned and had apparently crashed somewhere near Algiers). One other Hudson also took in supplies of which few details are known. This small group of men set up a base in the town of Ghisonaccia Gare. Ghisonaccia Gare was described by Bennett as full of rubble and wrecked modes of transport and on 28 September 43, a while the resistance were still ousting the Germans from Bastia to the north, Bennett immediately set about looking for something liquid and red to calm the pilot's nerves. He also organized the local Italian 'prisoners' and established suitable quarters for the men to follow. At that time, there were many Italians 'about 100' in the immediate vicinity of Ghisonaccia Gare on the island and contrary to modern retellings, the odd Nazi was still being found in the mountains – Hallonqvist recalled that contrary to many modern accounts where every Nazi had been cleared from Corsica by October 4nd, there were still a few around, some of them being found drunk as hell in the mountains (P/O Hallonqvist). However, the visible ones certainly had been ousted and the men of 500 squadron detachment set about organising the Italians into teams of workers to clear Ghisonaccia Gare aerodrome and prepare quarters for the men that followed. On the aerodrome itself, they set up four anti-aircraft guns, one at each corner of Ghisonaccia Gare aerodrome, mostly manned by the Italians. The Nazis sent a reconnaissance plane over at about 9 am each day and they all had to hide in the ruined houses and Bennett camouflaged their Hudson. 'The guns on the aerodrome were never fired in those early days as they 'set up shop'. Bennett and the officers, who had arrived on those first Hudson flights, establish themselves in 'The Hotel Continental' on the main street as mess and accommodation, whilst the rest later commandeered a large house just along the road. By mid-November 1943, they were nicely established and the men of this special detachment unit of RAF 500 County of Kent Squadron quickly became known as 'The Corsican Rats' ...for their expert foraging skills amongst other things! They set up base at the aerodrome by the railway station and continued to make the place generally habitable. The railway yard itself and the carriages etc, had, along with most of the town, been left blown to smithereens by the Nazis so an awful lot of clearing up was needed! But that was partly their brief. To find out what needed to be done and pass the information onto the American engineers who were to follow a few months later. By November, Ghisonaccia Gare aerodrome consisted of a detachment of RAF 500 Squadron including specialist NCO's such as Bennett and radar men, a small unit of about 12 American guards who had journeyed to Ghisonaccia by truck and a rather large amount of Italian POW's. So Ghisonaccia Gare had been liberated by the resistance on 26th September and a few days after the 500 Sqdn-SOE supply transit run had taken needed supplies into Ghisonaccia Gare on 28th. The new commanding officer, station commander, C.O Bruce McKenzie, of the South African Air Force, arrived a few days later. He first flew into Bastia around the 3rd October in his personal Hurricane to escort a 500 Hudson and a 458 Squadron Wellington also taking supplies to Corsica and he had stayed the night in Bastia apparently only to witness a bombing raid by his own squadron on the following day (4th October) very early in the morning at about 4am! Effectively, he saw one of his own bombing raids from the underneath! The Wellingtons were flown by F/O Maxwell, F/Lt Orchard, F/Sgt Verity and W/O D.O. Watson and they apparently

dropped 250lb bombs on the 'docks and warehouses' from 700 feet. Parts of Bastia were badly destroyed and over 300 people were killed! Luckily McKenzie survived to command as Station Commander at Ghisonaccia Gare a few days later when he joined Bennett. McKenzie, who was I understand from one radio operator, actually C/O of 458 Squadron as their Lieutenant, was something of a real maverick and a very nice chap. His operations were red hot and generally very successful, he thought of himself as 'one of the men' and naturally preferred 'his way' of doing things. This included his own dress sense ... 'operational style'. He also apparently enjoyed his practical jokes! Back in Africa, these included filling one wing with gin for his men. As a result of this, he became very popular with the men of both 458 and of 500 Squadron special detachment who came to admire and respect him for many reasons and both groups became known as part of 'McKenzie's Air Force'. Later still, around December, Group Captain Tuttle became station commander there for a while and the American's arrived in Ghisonaccia Gare en mass and 'took over'. These included runway engineers who tidied up the place a little more, got some nice food going and brought in some heavy planes! Interestingly, McKenzie's had fitted a machine gun in the nose of his personal Wellington in 458 squadron, which he named 'Henrietta'; this was destroyed by fire in an accident back in Africa. Similarly, in all the pictures of Frederick Bennett's first Hudson in to Ghisonaccia Gare, this Hudson too has, very unusually, a 0.5 Brownings / 303 machine gun fitted in the perspex nose (see photos) in the navigator's compartment. (In addition to those mounted on the nose). 500 Squadron were also well known for being very resourceful and had been one of the first squadrons to add a gun to the tail and belly of an Anson back at Detling which, when fired, actually increased it's speed by about 5 knots! In Ghisonaccia, The 500 squadron billets were on the main road about five minutes' walk from Ghisonaccia Gare aerodrome and the station. The Italian 'prisoners of war' had managed to get hold of some Italian three wheeled bikes (see photo of Hudson on Ghisonaccia drome – Fred Bennett standing centre) which were a great cause for amusement to the 500 squadron men having a reverse gear! When they wanted firewood, they just needed to call, and a couple of bikes would be driven to the door waiting to help them. Torso Bennett had the Italian prisoners well organized, so much so in fact that they called him 'Corporello Benito' and they refused to act upon a command from any other higher ranking officer until 'Corporello Benito' had given the ok much to the annoyance of the higher ranking officers. According to 'Hal ' Hallonqvist, Bennett and McKenzie often 'went fishing' using hand grenades and other ingenious devices to gather fresh food and McKenzie could often be seen riding around on a three-wheeled Italian bike with a machine gun killing a steer or two for the occasional slap up meal in the mess for his men. In any event, life at Ghisonaccia Gare in those early days wasn't all bad, even if extremely cold and snowy! In Ghisonaccia Gare, on one early occasion, Fred 'Torso' Bennett had led a group of several 500 squadron crew members on a foraging mission up into the mountains, down an eerily quiet ravine and up the other side to where a strange bell was randomly ringing in a village. It was recalled to me that he was the first man down the ravine and up the other side as no one else particularly wanted to go just in case any Nazis had 'missed their last bus'! When they got to the village, all the villagers were huddled in hiding, having seen them land and not knowing who they were and Frederick Torso Bennett proclaimed they had finally been 'liberated'. Much to the joy of the locals who proceeded to welcome them with open arms... and a few bottles of wine! Later, Bennett created an Italian motor cycle unit and on 4th November 43, when W/C Keddie, Simpson and Hallonqvist arrived, two motor cycles had gone missing. Bennett asked Hallonqvist to accompany him (even though Hal technically out ranked him) to search for the bikes. Bennett led a 'recovery' operation once again over the mountain and down a ravine to a village where about 50 locals were waiting there to welcome them. The locals included the x-mayor of Marseille who invited

Bennett and his team to a slap up meal on a beautifully laid out tablecloth. They were served salt pork, roast chestnuts and drinks and after a good few hours, the motor cycles were recovered too! The initial SOE 500 flight was followed by three more 500 squadron flights into Ghisonaccia Gare most by Lockheed Hudson 'V':

Hudson 'L' - Date 28 Sept 43 (SOE supply transit -Unrecorded) Contained passenger Frederick 'Torso' Bennett ('B' Flight). A ('B' Flight) radar man, pilot and co-pilot - unknown. Blida/Tafaroui - Bone - Ghisonaccia Gare.



Approx. - Oct 5 Station Commander Bruce McKenzie flew From Bastia into Ghisonaccia Gare in Hurricane. Hudson 'F' - 4th Nov 43 Pilot was W/C Keddie (500/SOE -Unrecorded) Contained passenger Hal Hallonqvist. Bone – Sardinia – Ghisonaccia. Hudson 'V' - 16th Nov 43 - F.O V.C Pockson or Pookson/ P.O W.S Shea / Flgt Sgt G. Gamble or Bomble / F. Sgt H.F Mc Cloud; (Please forgive misspellings-

records difficult to read!)Hudson 'V' - 18th Nov 43 - P.O D.F Fuller / P.O R.H Garlick / F. Sgt J.D Pag(e) / F.Sgt J.J Key and Hudson 'V' - 25th Nov 43 - S.Ldr J.H Simpson / J.C Reed. - Please excuse any poor misspellings due to quality of documents. The rest of the detachment from 500 County of Kent Squadron, a group of 10 men, who had drawn 'the short straws' back in Bone, started on their long journey to Ghisonaccia by road, ship and truck. They went by road from Bone to Algiers, which took ten days, each night sleeping in their trucks. After stopping at fuel dumps, being surrounded by Arabs and being invited to watch an Arab circumcision ceremony, they continued to Algiers where they boarded the ship 'The Empire Dace'. The sea was rough but after seven nights they sighted Corsica and drinks flowed freely in the bar. Apparently, a fight broke out between an American and an Italian in the ship's bar and a shot was fired wounding a Frenchman in the arm! According to first hand information, the captain ducked back in to finish his drink afterwards! Bennett and Hallonqvist were two of 500 who were sent across the mountains to meet them. In Ajaccio, they were picked up by American drivers based there and spent the next day in a convoy of trucks travelling across the mountains from Ajaccio to Ghisonaccia Gare encountering blown bridges and landslides. In the following weeks before Christmas, the weather was icy and dreary and several Hudsons swung on take off and broke undercarriages due to the still very uneven runways (The Hudson of Noel D'Audney pictured below, did just this – The runway was still appalling and Noel a very good pilot indeed). Apparently, American engineers started to arrive in late November and December of 1943 and January 1944 when they gave the runway a desperately needed 'upgrade'. In November and December of 43, 500 Squadron often had to make trips across the mountains to Ajaccio, where tank landing craft stopped 200 feet off shore to unload 45 gallon drums of aviation fuel. Bennett had a very good following and when he ordered the men into the freezing sea to do their duty, there was no hesitation. They rolled the drums ashore and Hallonqvist established a nearby camouflaged fuel dump. One truck taking drums had its back end blown completely off by a mine! A stark reminder that every day was life or death in the theatre of war. In December of 43, more Americans arrived and the food got better, even including wine and turkey! When the American engineers started to upgrade the runway it was common to see Flying fortresses and the like coming in for refuelling. On one occasion, about 12 Flying Fortresses limped back to Ghisonaccia badly beaten up after a bombing raid on Polish oil dumps. They had to be refuelled and on their way again very quickly and it was left to 500 Squadron to fuel them up ...by hand pumps!

On another occasion, Hallonqvist recalled, 'I was asked to take charge of half a dozen men and proceed to a land slide that had blocked our land transportation. The purpose was to bring in mail sacks which were dumped at the other side of the slide some 50 yards.' Mail was indeed an important morale booster but landslides were dicey and not many volunteered to collect it. At first only Hallonqvist, Bennett and Dick volunteered however after a few trips, most of 'the lads' joined in. Hallonqvist continued... 'we soon had 20 sacks of mail loaded in the lorry and returned to base.' By early January, McKenzie had been posted and Tuttle had taken over. These first units were slowly replaced and the first detachment was ordered back from Ajaccio to North Africa via a very rough boat crossing and then on to La Senia by train. These accounts were all based on: information and interviews from members of 500 Squadron who were based in Ghisonaccia Gare in late September, October and November of 1943; their diaries and information gathered from The 500 Squadron Record Books at the National Archives London:-Frederick 'Torso' Bennett 500 Squadron. 'Hal' Hallonqvist 500 Squadron. P/O Noel D'Audney 500 Squadron Jack Dawber – 500 Squadron. Johnny Thompson – 500 Squadron. Jimmy Thompson – 500 Squadron. Reg Rutherford – 500 Squadron

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Respecting the privacy of the others / elderly gentlemen and members of the squadron: A member of the squadron, who still lives happily in England, has a great time remembering and has been a great source of information! Further squadron members who still live in New Zealand and have contributed to this account. ...and finally other members of the squadron who have given written and oral accounts and who are sadly no longer with us.

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Compiled by Andrew Bennett from a great many sources. All attempts have been made to keep information as accurate as possible from the sources given and no responsibility can be taken for unintentional mistakes - only my apologies and my intent to give all the brave lads who served in Ghisonaccia Gare...from all nations in those early days... a pat on the back and keep as many of their first hand experiences alive for others to share in the future.

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Our Memorabilia Page on www.458raafsquadron.org

A' Flight - 973 mm x 296 mm.



458 Squadron Photo - Protville, Tunisia 1943 - 973 mm x 220 mm.



'B' Flight - 785 mm x 300 mm



Velcro Backed 458 Squadron Badge



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Orch's Orate

At the going down of the Sun and in the morning, We will Remember Them. Lest We Forget



Lest We Forget.