



NZ Bomber Command Association News

March 2016

Honorary Chaplain: The Venerable Neville Selwood Archdeacon Emeritus of Dunedin

President: Ron Mayhill DFC (75 Sqn)

Vice Presidents: Bunny Burrows (15, 622, 487 Sqn), Keith Boles DFC, pff (109 Sqn)

NZBCA CHARITABLE TRUST 2561560

WEB SITE: www.nzbombercommand.co.nz

From our President



Welcome all to 2016. We Vets have knocked another one off.

Back in 2012 when having afternoon tea in the village I told some dear ladies I was off to London to see the Queen unveil the statues of the Bomber Command Memorial.

"Did you fly Spitfires?" asked one while another offered "Dresden".

Today, thanks to the massive publicity afforded that occasion, the public are far better informed. February passed without letters to the editor.

In hindsight, Dresden was a tragedy, and not only for the people there but also for Bomber Command and its C in C "Bomber" Harris.

War, of course, is a tragedy and the exigencies of war breed large losses of life: Guernica, Warsaw, Rotterdam, Coventry, Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki amongst them. Somehow, people remembered Dresden but not Tokyo 9/10 March 1945. yet this Tokyo raid caused far more deaths than any other, day or night. The napalm incendiaries destroyed all inflammable housing over 15 square miles.

We in New Zealand are most fortunate that our remote location still protects us from so many of the human tragedies of the world.

In remembering WWI now a century ago, do make a point of visiting Te Papa in Wellington. Richard Taylor's Weta Workshop display is both magnificent and very moving.

Best wishes to you all, *Ron Mayhill*



My apologies for the delay since the last newsletter, no excuses but days, weeks and months are surely much shorter than they used to be.

So a bigger issue than normal to cover past and future events and some thoughts on that special group of past aircrew, the POW's. *Peter Wheeler*

Meet our New Patron

Peter Stockwell kindly agreed to accept the position of NZBCA Patron late last year. He was Chief of Air Force from 2011 until 2014 when he retired from the RNZAF after over 40 years of service. Peter trained as a navigator (that's another one for the Navs Union!)

His first posting was to 1 Squadron and its Bristol Freighters.

Peter is now Chief Operating Officer of CTC based at Rukuhia, a major training centre for future airline pilots.



**AVM Peter Stockwell
ONZM, AFC, FRACS**

From our Patron

Late last year when I received Ron Mayhill's letter on behalf of the Association inviting me to become the new Patron, I was both honoured and thrilled to accept. While familiar with Bomber Command's superb exploits during WW2, my familiarity with the association grew considerably during the 2012 trip to London with 30 veterans for the opening of the magnificent memorial in Green Park, London. That experience has left a lasting impression on me concerning the men who served in the Command, and their many fine deeds.

The Association, while its membership is understandably reducing, still has an important role to play in representing the historical interests of all those who served in the Command, as well as educating current and future generations about the critical role that the campaign played in not only the outcome of the war, but also the way the world evolved in the post-war years.

I spent 41 years in the RNZAF as a transport squadron navigator, with the majority of my flying being on the B170 Bristol Freighter and the C130 Hercules. My career culminated in me being appointed as the Chief of Air Force (CAF) in 2011, following a previous posting as the Commander Joint Forces New Zealand in charge of all of the military's operational activities across the three Services. I was the second navigator to have been appointed CAF following on from AVM Pat Neville in the late 1980s who had been a Canberra navigator. I retired from the RNZAF in 2014 and am now the Chief Operating Officer for CTC Aviation's Hamilton-based ab initio pilot training activities.

As I said, I am very honoured and proud to have been appointed as the Association's Patron, a daunting task as I follow in the footsteps of my two predecessors, Sir Richard Bolt and Les Munro, both distinguished airmen with direct connections to Bomber Command. I only hope that I can do justice to the role as the torch gets passed to a younger generation.

The Air Gunner

Against the six 303's (some with two 0.5s) carried by the RAF heavies, the German night fighter pilot had cannons.

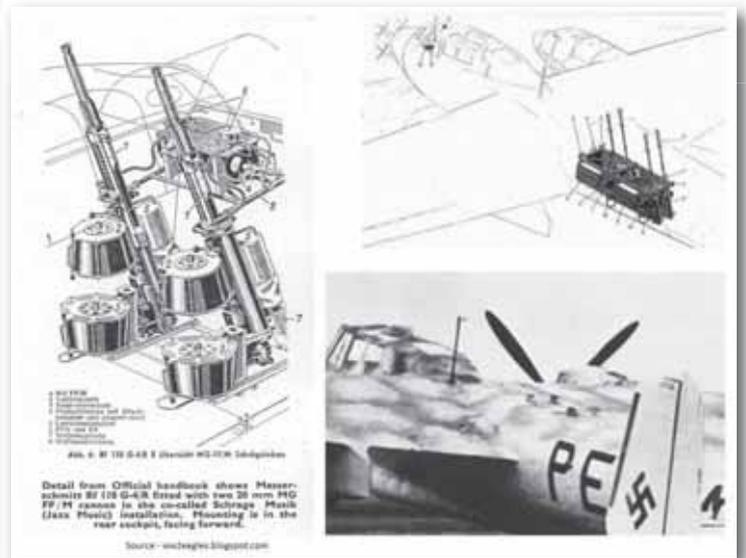
The upward firing "Schrage Musik" fitted to Messerschmidt and Junkers Nachtjagers caused heavy losses and the RAF did not know of their existence for some time.

Produced by Mauser AG the 20mm electrically fired cannon threw 82mm (3 inch) shells at 750/per minute. The Luftwaffe estimated that 15 – 20 hits (a 1.5 second burst) would down a four engined aircraft while the later 30mm shell needed just 3 or 4 hits to do the same job.

Those aircrew who were fortunate to survive an attack recall just a flash of light and a clap of thunder. One Luftwaffe pilot over Nuremberg claimed nine bombers in one sortie on the night 99 RAF aircraft were downed.



If I must be a Gunner
Then please Lord grant me Grace;
That I may leave this station
With a smile upon my face.
I may have wished to be a pilot,
and you, along with me,
But if we all were pilots
Where would the Air Force be?
It takes GUTS to be a Gunner,
to sit out in the tail,
When the Messerschmitts are coming,
and the slugs begin to wail.
The pilot's just a chauffeur,
It's his job to fly the plane;
But it's WE who do the fighting,
Though we may not get the fame.
But we're here to win a war,
and until this job is done
Let's forget our personal feelings
and get behind the gun.
If we must all be gunners,
Then let us make this bet;
We'll be the best damn gunners
That have left this station yet!



CONTACT US

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Contributions to the NZBCA news are always welcome.

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AT THE-NEW-ZEALAND-
BOMBER-COMMAND-
ASSOCIATION

NZBCA Christmas Luncheon

In a first for the Association a pre-Christmas lunch was held at the Commercial Club. A chance for all to meet our new Patron personally and to host Wing Commander Dan Hunt CO of 5 Squadron, the 2015 recipient of the NZBCA Memorial Trophy.

5 Squadron was selected by an RNZAF operations panel headed by Chief of Air Force AVM Mike Yardley for its long period of active service in the Gulf and for the prompt response and very long hours put in, in the search for the missing MH47 airliner. For us, 5 Squadron is special as it is the last of the "heavies" and still delivers 1000lb bombs.



Keep in Touch

Remember those in Nelson to contact Graham Pullyn (03 547 8272) for details of local activities.

Also for the latest updates go to our Facebook page (or ask a family member to do it). There is new comments and discussion every day and we have over 15,000 followers worldwide.

With the apparent dwindling activity by the UK RAF Bomber Command Association, we have found the Lincolnshire Lancaster Association now producing excellent full colour magazines with material from throughout the five year campaign. They also support the RAF Memorial Flight. Subscription is \$40 p.a., P.O. Box 474, Lincoln LN58ZW UK.

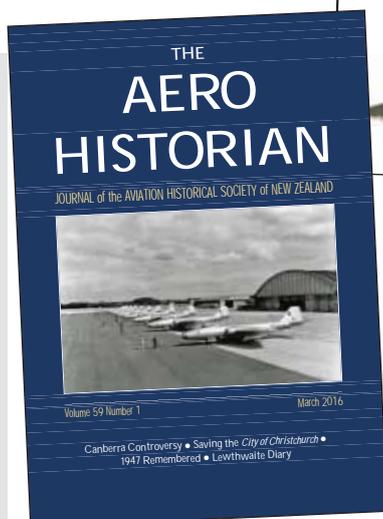
75 Squadron Reunion

For those 75ers who haven't yet been contacted the Squadron will be holding it's bi-annual reunion and dinner at Classic Flyers in Tauranga. (30th September – 2nd October). It will be 80 years since 75 Sqn formed as a Home Defence Squadron of the RFC. Contact Glen Turner for details on 021 732 835 or 75sqn.assnz@windowslive.com We will run a charter DC3 on the Sunday.

Your Board of Trustees and Executive

Patron AVM Peter Stockwell ONZM, AFC
Honorary Chaplain – The Venerable
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Aviation Historical Society

The Aviation Historical Society (AHSNZ) was founded in 1958 and has published a journal continuously over the last 59 years.

The *Aero Historian* (TAH) is published quarterly and covers a wide range of subjects with in-depth articles covering all aspects of New Zealand's 150 years of aviation history.

Also published quarterly is *Aerolog* which covers current events such as changes to the Civil Aircraft Register, accidents and incidents. Membership is \$48 per year and those joining within the next month will receive a complimentary copy of the March TAH. You can pay by cheque or on line (ron.ark@xtra.co.nz). PO Box 6482, Upper Riccarton, Christchurch 8442.

Editor's Note: This is extremely good value and the publications are first class.

Legion d' Honour

With the French Government honouring War Veterans who fought for their "liberation" the Ambassador Mrs Florence Jeanblanc-Risler and her regional Consuls have been visiting many veterans in award presentation ceremonies.



**Arthur Joplin
(617sq) with
the French
Consul**



**Ron Mayhill and Basil Williams with the
French Ambassador aboard a
Marine Nationale frigate**

**The TFD family from left
Com Drew, S/L Hight, Steven Kelly,
Lesley Hill, Ron Mayhill, Shirley Carter,
Matt Crankshaw**

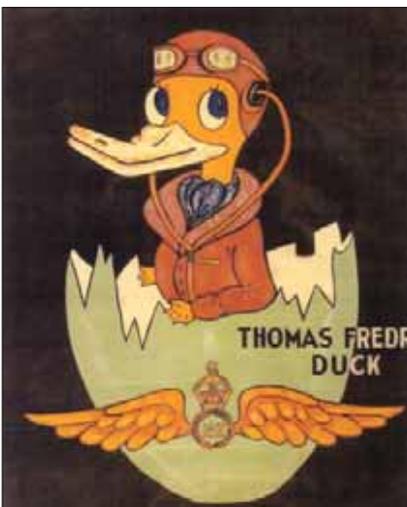


Dedication of Thomas Frederick Duck Display

The Wright crew were unusual, a great bunch, six of the seven crew being Kiwis and they flew two tours, one on 75 the other on 156 pff.

Their names will be familiar to many, there's Nick Carter, Rang The Bell Crankshaw and Alf Drew and their Wellington D for Duck and "Lancaster T, Thomas Frederick Duck were equally well known. Jack Wright's family donated the nose art of TFD and together with pictures, sketches and photos from other families of the crew, a special exhibition was dedicated in February at MOTAT. Present were family members of five of the six crewmen. (Podge Reynolds family cannot be traced). The family of Bruce Neal (who flew with the crew on 75 but died in an OTU accident between tours), also attended.

The display is quite special, come and see it with us.



Calendar : Reserve the dates NOW!

Sunday 13 June 1030: Annual RAF Bomber Command Memorial Service, Auckland War Memorial Museum
– Including rededication of the NZBCA Memorial followed by refreshments.
– Invitations to follow.

Saturday October 1: Charter DC3 to 75 Reunion Lunch. Book now.

Details to be advised: Visit to 5 Squadron, Whenuapai, and another Luncheon at the Commercial Club
2017

Sunday 26 February: RNZAF 80 year celebration, we will run a chartered DC3 for the days flying at Ohakea.

Journey Back to ITW

Having secured the essential parent's signature on the RNZAF application (by fair means or foul), struggled through the twelve weeks of mathematical assignments (often at night school), call up papers would finally appear. Freed from apprenticeships or a post office bicycle, the dreams of flying (always as a fighter pilot) and glamorous overseas travel often came to naught, or at least, delayed.

Faced with a surplus of bods and not enough beds, the RNZAF raised Aerodrome Defence Units and dispatched them far and wide.



Phil Small in the wilds of North-land with fake signs to confuse the potential enemy, and certainly the locals



Clive Estcourt manning a Bofors in No. 2 S, not a tin hat in sight. "The Air Force do not wear tin helmets sir!"

After months in the field they were suddenly snatched back from the covetous eyes of the Army, 'no khaki for us'. True to the mysterious ways of the Forces, young men found their application for flying training to be diverted into the air gunners pile or MT pool if they were a mechanic, or silly enough to include fixing cars amongst their claims. This process occurred throughout training, poor marks and off you go. Naturally the reverse occurred, like Jim Sheddan flat out as an air gunner at Wereroa to be siphoned off as a fighter pilot. Good spotting as Jim became an ace and downed 16 VI. rockets before ending as CO of 486 Tempest Squadron.



Observers w/op training at Levin



Course photo January 1941 contains at least two future Squadron Leaders but many more KIA



The half boarded huts remembered by so many

So off to Wereroa (1940) or later Rotorua (1941) or finally the Siberia of camp Delta (1944) went the ITW boys. Those who took to the flying trade moved to an EFTS the others were off to Canada.



The luxury of Rotorua's boarding houses and hotels



The Square bashing at Delta



And the mud

Wereroa still stands, empty today, bit as a wag recently pointed out its fortune has followed the "boys" lives, from an agricultural Borstal prewar, to an asylum after the RNZAF left, then for many years as a home for the impaired!

A future newsletter will detail some of the experiences in Canada. So please send us a few memories.

Welcome to Crew Three, 5 Squadron (P3K Orion RNZAF Whenuapai)

In a new initiative by the RNZAF, active units have been "adopting" service Associations such as ours. Our foster crew are FH. Lt, Arnott-Steel and his crew 3 from 5 Squadron RNZAF Whenuapai.

We hope to arrange a get together very soon.

5 SQUADRON HISTORY

No. 5 Squadron was originally formed in November 1941 as the Royal New Zealand Air Force expanded to meet the inevitable fact of a Pacific War. Based in Fiji with Vincents, then four elderly Short Singapore flying boats, the Squadron provided a long-range maritime patrol force for that region. The Squadron was disbanded in 1942, but reformed again at Fiji in 1944 with Catalina flying boats. The Squadron moved to the operational area of the South West Pacific in late 1944, operating from Espiritu Santo to the Admiralty Islands.

Following WWII, the Squadron relocated to Lauthala Bay (Fiji). Short Sunderland flying boats replaced the Catalinas in 1953. The Squadron's missions were maritime surveillance over the vast South Pacific ocean, medical evacuation flights and communications flights for the colonial administrators. In 1966 the majority of the Squadron was moved to Whenuapai as it took delivery of five new Lockheed Orions. Lauthala Bay was closed and the Sunderlands were withdrawn in 1967.

The Air Force's Orion operations have seen aircraft and crews from No.5 Squadron travel to many different countries. The Squadron has won the prestigious international maritime FINCASTLE competition on several occasions. In the early 1980s the Orions underwent an upgrade which resulted in a change of type designation from P-3B to P-3K Orion. In 1985 a sixth Orion (ex-RAAF) was added to the fleet.

In February 1998 a short term detachment of two Orions, crews and support personnel were dispatched to the Arabian Gulf in support of a build-up of coalition forces in the region. The detachment returned to New Zealand mid March 1998. Between May 2003 and February 2004 a detachment was deployed to contribute to the multinational antiterrorist operation Enduring Freedom coalition, flying a total of 142 missions conducting Maritime Interdiction Operations in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Oman. In February 2006 No.5 Squadron deployed to Antarctica for the first time as a trial to pave the way for Antarctic-based maritime surveillance operations.



5 SQUADRON FLIGHT LINE

FINCASTLE WINNERS:		LM MAINTENANCE TROPHY WINNERS:
1964	1980	2002
1982	1983	2006
1988	1991	
1997	1998	



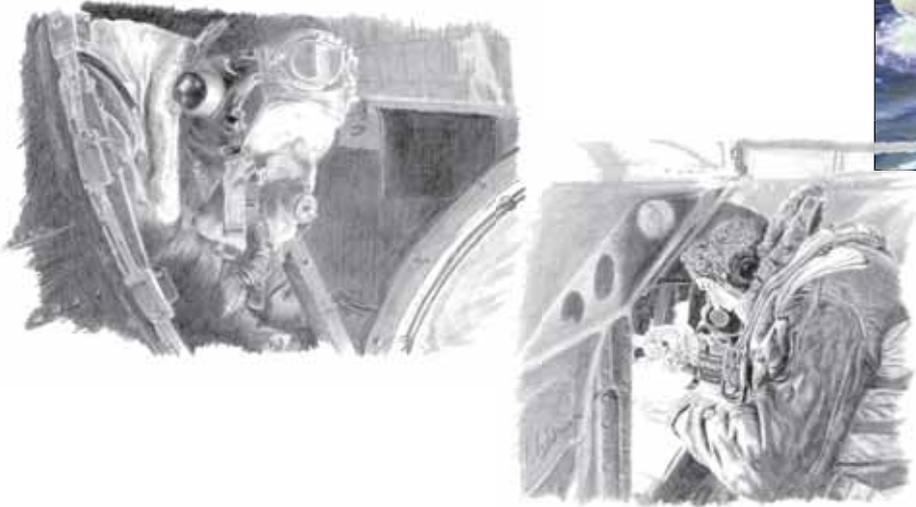
"Since the last one"

**We now have
Lancaster Bitter
and Spitire Ale, it's
about time there
was Halifax Stout
and Hurricane
Lager.**



NZ Art

Don Wilkie specialises in pencil, pen and ink drawings and oil colour aviation subjects. If you would like a personal picture (at a very fair veteran's price) contact him by email: longforan@xtra.co.nz or by mail 6 Ellison Street, Napier 4110. For those visiting MOTAT there is a large display of his work in the foyer.



**Marshal of the
RAF Sir Arthur
Harris AOC in
CRAF Bomber
Command**



Quotes to think on

FROM SIR ARTHUR HARRIS TO HIS SQUADRONS.

"Tonight you go to the big city, to Berlin. You have the opportunity to light a fire in the belly of the enemy and burn his black heart out."

AND TO THEIR MEMORY,

"There are no words with which I can do justice to the aircrews who fought under my command. There is no parallel in wartime to such courage and determination in the face of danger over so prolonged a period, of danger which at times was so great that scarcely one in three could expect to survive."

AND TO HIS NEMESIS, THE CIVIL SERVANTS,

"And what aspect of the war effort are you retarding today?"

ON HAMBURG JULY '43

The terrific damage lies in the fire storms, the alternative dropping

of blockbusters, HE and incendiaries makes fire fighting impossible developing in a short time into a fire typhoon such as never before witnessed against which every human resistance is useless.

AND REICHMINISTER SPEERS (MINISTER FOR ARMAMENTS) REPLY,

"I reported to Hitler that a continuation of these attacks might bring about a rapid end to the war, as a rapid repetition will cripple the will to sustain armament manufacture."

BUT CLOSER TO AIRCREWS HEARTS:

"The unit was the home of the Whitley bomber Conversion Unit and the transitory aircrew who had a reputation for high spirits and low morals. The Queen Bee (the senior WAAF officer) was lecturing a group of newly-arrived WAAFs on the need to beware of the attentions of the evil aircrew. One particular girl, obviously keen but dim, pointed her finger to her head and said, "Don't worry, ma'am, I've got it up here."

"I don't care where you've got it, my dear," said the QB, "they'll bloody well find it!"

And The Ghosts Still Come Back

I've lost my Lancaster –

Maurice Askew – Christchurch

15 NOVEMBER 2015

"It is indeed rather a minor miracle that my Lancaster EE126 (A-Able) should have been discovered after seventy one years by a German aviation historian, Volker Urbansky. I was a Flight Engineer on 207 Squadron on our second op (to Leipzig) on 19.2.44.

After my parachute landing in 1944 I was picked up by some German farm people and taken to one of their farmhouses. They patched me up as well as they could before sending for the local police. Three of my crew are buried in Blecklingen cemetery. No other members of my crew are still alive."

Letters from Volker Urbansky

7 SEPTEMBER 2015

I'm a volunteer aircraft researcher in Germany. I found over 120 crash sites in my home area of Oldenburg-Bremen and North Sea. I have many contact to relatives from the old crew members and inform the members about the exact crash sites. All of them are so grateful to me for my research and many visited me. Our association could clear the fate of 21 missing crew members.

It's too much to tell all of crash site of your Lancaster EE126 in the small village Pestinghausen on a field for about 3 weeks. Mr Stover an 86 years old eye witness showed me together with an historian of the city Syke. I explored the field and found parts of the Lancaster. Many aluminium parts were merged. I think the airplane is burned. I also found some plexiglass and ammunition.

I hope you are still alive and in good health. I would appreciate your feedback and your memories about this last mission.

One of the deceased crewmember is buried very near my home. Only 8 miles at the war cemetery in Sage near Oldenburg. I also have more information and photos about Phil Paddock (my bomb aimer).

10 SEPTEMBER 2015

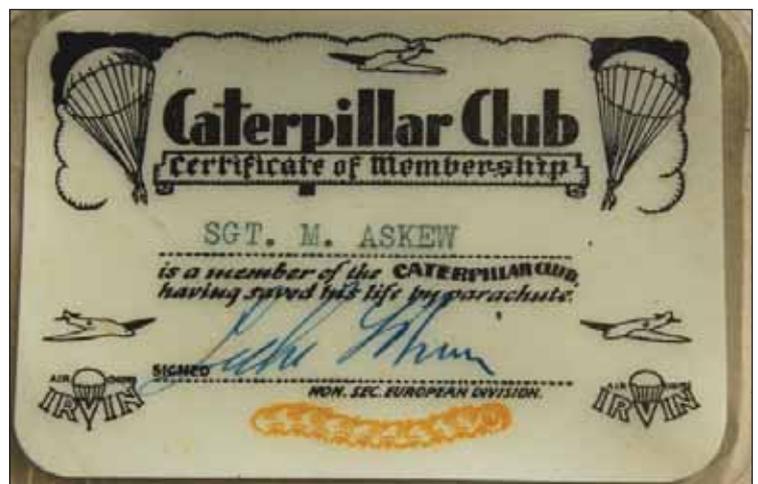
"I'm so happy that you are still alive!!!!"

Today I will drive to the war cemetery Sage and I will make a photo of the grave of Sgt. Sam Rogers (my rear gunner). I think the first burial place of the killed crew members was in the city Vechta at the old "Russian cemetery". This was the normal situation during the war for most killed members of our area.

I appreciate your great age. Please stay healthy!!!

Interesting to read that the Germans have 5 prisoner and 2 KIA, perhaps one crew member died later in captivity. Perhaps one crew member comes from another crash site. Many old records corresponded not always accuracy.

Please do not forget me. Greetings to your family members.



23 OCTOBER 2015

Your books are full of interesting information and I shall read them with great interest.

I will keep all your things until I die with honour.

I think it was a great story that we got to know after 70 years.

I wish you so many health and a few beautiful years of life.

Volker Urbansky

Editor – Maurice continues to enjoy "a few years of life".

Prisoners of War

With 40% of bomber aircrew and 49% of bomber pilots coming from the "Dominions" the POW camps held many from New Zealand.

Looking at NZBCA membership lists the three initials POW appear beside many names. Ron Noice was a long time President of the POW Association, while the recent passing of Jim McQueen and Trevor Strong was a reminder that our POW's came home to a very different world from that they had endured.

There's also the evaders like Jim Kirk, a gunner on 75, who stayed and fought with the marquis, Harry Cammish who walked over the Pyrenees to Spain and Bert Pond who caught a Lysander back to Britain.

Then there's the hard luck stories, Jack Hardie a POW who hadn't got into a squadron, Trevor Guthrie, a first op loss and John Morris a POW twice. And the tragedy of "Bob" Hope a New Zealander captured early in the war. Killed in April 1945 by a shell from a strafing Typhoon.

So from our files, here is a collection of diary notes, stories and pictures in tribute to our POWs.

Winston Churchill POW 1899

It's a melancholy state you are in the power of the enemy. You owe your life to his humanity, your daily bread to his compassion you must obey his orders. Await his pleasure bless your soul in patience.

The days are very long. The hours crawl like paralysed centipedes. Moreover the whole atmosphere of prison even the most easy and best regulated prison is odious companions quarrel about trifles and get least possible pleasure from each other's society. You feel a constant humiliation in being fenced in by railings and barbed wire, watched by armed men and webbed in by a tangle of regulations and restrictions.

Sing a song of stalag
Days that never end
Tons of balmy Kreigiers
Nearly round the bend
When the gates are opened
The Government will sing
If that's the cream of Britain
O'Death where is thy sting.



Lamsdorf Lament

On the 8th of October they tied up our hands. Reprisals for killing back there on the sand.
Now close this old prison and long to be free from this barbed wire at Stalag VIII 13
Winter has come to this dark dirty hole
There isn't much heat from our ration of coal
We dream of our home far over the sea
And plan our escape from Stalag VIII 13
The boys are all cheerful and say with a grin
It can't last forever, and we sure to win
When spring comes again, we are sure we shall see the end of this nightmare VIII 13
Now Xmas is coming, we hope for the best when the Allies close in from the East and the West
The guns will soon thunder how happy we will be when we drown out the memory of VIII 13

New Zealand

Oh land that is farmed
For its heavenly charges.
Keeps calling me back
To its sweet loving arms.
Oh New Zealand in my dreams
I can see those wide open spaces
Are calling to me.
Land of my destiny in kindness you've shown
Let a pool have his millions
A King his throne.
For all I ask, and I ask for no more
than you welcome me back
To the land I adore.



The following extracts were chosen to show other sides of camp life than usually seen, but nothing written can convey the boredom, uselessness, hunger and danger felt by the Kreigies.

FROM ERNEST DAVENPORT, (7 Squadron, Aircraft fire June 1943) Stalag Luft Heydekrug).

There was a train loaded with tanks, guns etc moving slowly, probably being shunted to its departure point, behind where I was standing and with everyone's attention on the fire-fighting activities I, noticing that each truck had a destination label held by a spring clip, had the thought that I should pull off the labels and add to the confusion. I managed to collect quite a pile of labels before the German senior NCO in charge of our party saw what I was doing. He did a typical, what we all see as a comic German jumping up and down screaming act, sized a sub machine gun from one of his underlings and pushed it into my belly. Whether, in his state of outrage, he forgot to release the safety catch or if perhaps the gun misfired I never found out but fortunately for me the gun didn't work and eventually calmed down and settled for taking away my POW identity disk with a tirade that I took to be, in my ignorance of the language menacing threats of what was going to happen to me at the end of the journey.

On the following day the Germans were informed that we had all exchanged identities for the purpose of attempting escape and now wished to revert to our previous status. The party, excepting me, was returned to Stalag Luft 6, Heydekrug. I was accused of sabotage and placed under arrest awaiting trial. When the trial eventuates, 10.2.44, it was in the form of a court martial and I was accorded a defending officer, a Luftwaffe Officer who spoke English and was certainly very helpful. The charge against me was that I had walked all over the marshalling yard sabotaging trains. I pointed out that it was my duty to escape and that if I had been free to walk freely about the marshalling yard I would have taken the opportunity to escape. My defending officer must have made a good cause for me as I was sentenced to 14 days solitary confinement on bread and water rather than a firing squad.

Solitary confinement meant living in a tiny cell with bare boards to sleep on, no reading matter, the electric light on constantly. Twice each day I received a cup of water and two slices of black bread. Each morning I was taken out to an exercise yard and allowed to walk in a circle for one hour watched by an armed guard and a dog. After a few days it became difficult to remember how many days one had been there. The trading was started with any one individual German in a small way, a few cigarettes or a can of instant coffee from a Red Cross parcel for a few eggs or some onions. Once the man was committed he could be bribed to bring in much more incriminating items under threat of exposure to his superiors of his earlier conduct. The system worked well.

Activities in the camp included two head counts a day when we were all required to parade on the area variously used as sports grounds or assembly field. As this was summer and we had little else to occupy us it was agreeable to protract the roll call as clearly this annoyed the Germans and wasted their time. It was a simple process, we were assembled in groups in five ranks and one of the guards would walk along in front counting the number of files, it was not difficult to shuffle about in the centre of the group and foul up the count. The guard would take his tally back to the German Officer in charge and after all the tallies had been totalled they would find that they had too many or not enough and would start again. These counts could last for hours and often did while the Germans got more and more furious and we stood and laughed. Needless to say we didn't do it in the winter when the ground was covered in snow and the east wind was blowing. That was when the Germans got their revenge.

The German food ration was distributed daily. The time varied, our room seemed to get ours in the late morning. The main part was the bread. Nominally rye bread its actual ingredients were not disclosed. It was not palatable but it was better than nothing. The loaves weighed one kilogram but a large part of the weight must have been water as the loaves were quite small. The ration was one loaf to seven men and the usual method of sharing was to slice the loaf and then hopefully give each man four slices. A good deal of skill and diplomacy was required on the part of the duty person to slice the loaf evenly, end up with the right number of slices and avoid acrimony.

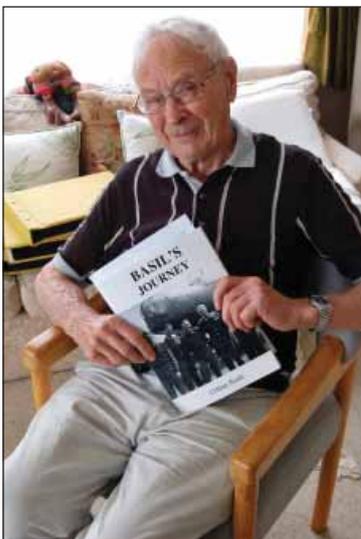
BASIL WILLIAMS, the Long March or Forced March Across Germany (432 Squadron, Shot down on 3rd Op) Stalag Luft V1, Heydekrug from September '43

FORCED MARCH FROM STALAG LUFT 4

We left Stalag Luft 4 on 6th February 1945 for what was to be a weeks march but lasted for three months. Before we left the camp, the atmosphere was very sobering as a column of POWs had stopped for a nights rest and when they were lined up you could have knocked them over with



Ernest with the late Jim McQueen (75 Sq). Jim as a W/op and ended up in Stalag VIII B Lamsdorf. This was a particularly tough camp and Jim built, operated and maintained camp's secret radios. A very brave man amongst many.



one hand, such was their poor condition.

We were issued with an American Army blanket and a pair of Army boots. These were real life savers. On leaving the camp we were given a Red Cross parcel. Our column totalled about a thousand, including 200 Americans, 800 British and 24 New Zealanders.

On one occasion when we stopped on the road beside some houses, a woman came out in the snow with hot water. One prisoner Alec Lawson gave a young girl some Red Cross sugar. This raised a faint blush on his white face as he had not spoken to a female in a long time, four years in fact.

On one rest day we were at a large barn which contained a stack of dried peas which tasted better than peanuts. Whilst sleeping that night, we could hear the rats running all over the place and also over the sleepers too. Feeling generous, the farmer killed a sheep. It went in a stew and I got a piece about as big as one square inch of meat.

Dysentery, or something similar, was rife. Mine started after the rat infested barn. It lasted for 21 days.

By this time, our captors thought they had us on our knees. Our response was to march out singing. Nevertheless, our feet and hands were continually frozen and it felt as if we were marching on the stumps of our feet.

We shared one barn with some Russian refugees. They were a disreputable bunch, arguing and shouting all night and lighting matches. We were glad to see the last of them as we had no desire to be.

At one stage, we had a Red Cross parcel so I shot off to see what I could trade. I went into the farmhouse kitchen and had just about persuaded the blond kitchen maid to swap a bar of chocolate for a loaf of bread when the cook intervened. They were cooking quail for the Manor House. 1/2 chocolate 1/2 Loaf, Nein, Nein, Nein.

The Arnhem heroes were there in their red berets. Food was rationed out at irregular intervals, a spoonful of sugar, a piece of bread and, best of all, a small wedge of Swiss cheese wrapped in foil.

We were overflown by RAF fighters who gave us a victory roll. A truck ahead was struck as was the barn on the nearby farm. The thatch was still smouldering next morning. A few POWs were killed so everyone became a little nervous and it created a rush to be by the exits of overnight shelters in future.

We passed lots of dead horses, probably died of starvation. Some had been cut up for food. The live horses were just skin and bone. We came across a leek field and the column diverted from the road and made quite a hole in the crop. We boiled them and had a fine meal.

My twenty third birthday meal was potatoes obtained from a potato heap.

Liberated by the 6th Freedom Division after 86 days marching over 600 miles. Being free was like a ton of bricks being lifted from your back. We entered Zarentin and went hunting for transport. We found a bike shop but were beaten to the two bikes by two Canadians. Later the two Canadians sized a car and we had their bikes, but, as there were three of us, we were one bike short. Next morning, some old guards cycled past. One stopped and I took his bike telling him it was now his turn to walk.

JACK HARDIE (51 Squadron, Shot down 1st trip) Lamsdorf from January '43

At that moment, before I could open the door again, a burst of cannon fire from a night fighter set everything on fire and shot the pilots controls away.

I shouted, "Can I help?"

The pilot said "Get those chutes."

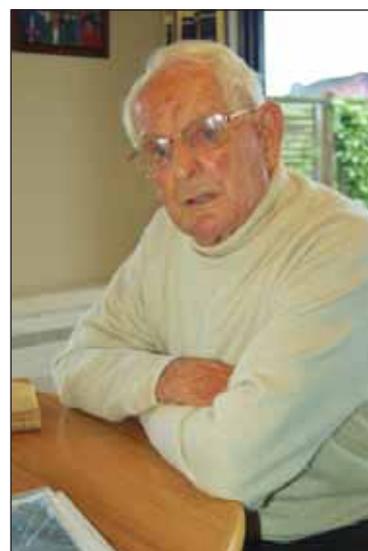
I opened the door again and found the fuselage was just a mass of flames. From each of the in-board motors was a pipe of about six inches diameter, which normally delivered warm air into the plane. Now these were like two giant flamethrowers sending out two jets of flame the length of the fuselage. I had to run down between these, climb over the two wing-roots, the first about shoulder height and the second about waist height. I reached the two parachutes, clipped one on, and ran back up with the other.

I could not hear what he shouted for the screaming engine noise. At that moment the plane must have gone into a spin and the three of us were pinned to the floor by the g-force. After a few seconds we were thrown up to the ceiling and pinned there.

I hazily realised that both the flames and noise had stopped and I wondered if I was out in the air, though there was no sensation of falling. Luckily I pulled the rip-cord, a metal handle attached to all parachutes. This came away in my hand as it should, but in my befuddled state I was sure something had gone wrong and the chute wasn't working. I felt a tremendous blow and heard an agonising groan. I thought whoever groaned like that must be in tremendous pain - then realised it was me. I slowly also realised there were a lot of people standing looking down at me and there was a door to a building behind them.

Mail from NZ usually took three months or more and mine had just started coming when the Lamsdorf camp number was altered to Camp 344 and the VIII B number was given to a different camp. So for several more months practically not mail came to Lamsdorf and evidently it all went to the new VIII B camp. When it was finally sorted out most of us received a handful of mail, three to nine months old.

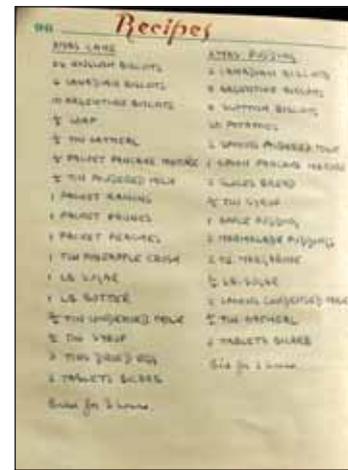
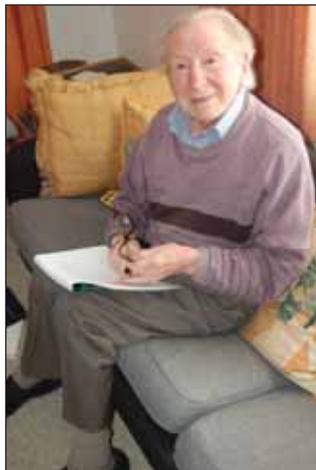
A group of soldiers from the Gorbals district of Glasgow started terrorising part of the camp when they procured cut-throat razors and used them on several people. Things came to a head on a Sunday morning and word came round the barracks - all Kiwi to the church - now. Several hundred arrived in no time and we were addressed by Padre Hopkins. His speech went like this: "We all know about the razor gang terrorising some people in this camp. The German Commandant says it is not their problem and I am suggesting we issue an ultimatum. If even one New Zealander is threatened by this gang the New Zealanders in this camp will sort



out and kill every member of their gang. I am willing to lead the group and I am ready to stand trial by court-martial at the end of the war if necessary. Who will follow me?" There was a roar of approval, and Hoppy asked for anyone against. No one replied, so Hoppy said he would see the message was delivered.

Within minutes word came round for all Aussies to report to the church, then South Africans, then each of the dozens of nationalities all had their meetings. Nothing was ever heard of threats or a razor gang from that moment.

For anyone considering suicide, there was one very sure swift way and chose that way while we were at Lamsdorf. They needed only to walk over the tripwire as if they were going to climb the double 10-foot fences and it was all over. When it happened at night it was especially hard on the rest of us. When we heard the machine gun open up we would wonder if it was someone we knew. Could we have helped in any way? What had cracked within him?



MAURICE ASKEW (207 Squadron, Shot down 2nd op) Stalag V1 Heyderberg from February '44

In A12 hut we were all issued with two thin blankets and slept on straw palliasses, underneath which were five narrow wooden slats to support our bodies. The bunks were double-deckers. With our small quantity of personal clothing piled on top of us we were desperate to try to keep warm. In each hut were two tiny stoves. At infrequent intervals goons (guards) would bring round tiny quantities of wood or coal. Now and then working parties of prisoners were given permission to leave the camp to cut wood in the surrounding forest area but under such heavy armed guards and snarling dogs that any possibility of a prisoner slipping away was absolutely impossible.

Outside latrines, roofed over but fully open to the elements consisted of long planks of wood with about twenty holes cut in them allowing drops below directly into an open sewer sloped to culminate in septic tanks. These were cleared by Russian prisoners.

When the weather began to improve our daylight hours enabled us to begin tramping round the compound just inside the safety perimeter wire. This 'circuit bashing' allowed us to walk and talk and put the world to rights as well as giving us the gentle exercise that our declining health needed.

In the camp was a small wooden hut that had been built before the war as a tiny theatre, which we used to put on our own productions. This was not high-powered Shaftsbury Avenue stuff, you understand, but it did offer some relief to the tedium of camp life. Oberst Van Hoerbach, the camp commandant, was amenable for us to be doing something like this to take our minds off digging escape tunnels or misbehaving ourselves in other ways. A few of the German officers deigned to attend some of the shows but were not exactly honoured guests.

Maurice ended up in Stalag V1 at Heyderberg. His art skills produced some great stage sets for the "Behind the Wire" shows.

Photos are from the collections of Davenport, Williams, Hardie, Askew, Strong and Croall held in the NZBCA archives.

All four have written about their experiences and were happy to share extracts. Thank you gentlemen. And to the many others in our ranks who weren't mentioned, my apologies. Perhaps a large book is required, but it would need to be a very large book.

