



THE DASH

The Newsletter Of The Channel Dash Association



Volume 1 Issue 2

www.channeldash.org

Summer 2008.

Welcome to the second issue of 'THE DASH'. In this issue we feature a true account by one of our members, J.F.N. 'Bill' Wedge, on the heroic actions taken by the Destroyers during Operation Fuller. In particular the article tells of the events involving HMS Worcester. Bill served as a young Sub Lieutenant R.N.V.R. onboard the Worcester during the attempt to prevent Scharnhorst, Gneisenau and Prinz Eugen reaching Germany from Brest, France via the Straits of Dover. This is Bills own moving account. The article also includes a Poem written by him to commemorate the event and in honour of his fellow ship-mates. (His story can be found on page 2)

"Did You Know"

By John Williams

The Navy Lands In Thanet.

It was Saturday 20 April 1912. The unfamiliar sound of an aircraft was heard flying over Ramsgate. Lieutenant Spenser Grey with his mechanic Mr. Fred Brown were flying a Short S45 above the town. They had taken off from Eastchurch Flying Ground on the Isle of Sheppey, arriving over Ramsgate at about 0645hrs. They had flown a distance of some fifty miles in an hour and ten minutes. The Short bi-plane was powered by a Gnome engine of some 50 horsepower giving a speed of forty miles an hour. The pair had flown over Margate and Broadstairs and, after circling over Ramsgate, made a landing to the rear of St Lawrence
(Continued on page 3)

Channel Dash Spotlight

Brian Westland Rose DSO.

Brian was the pilot of Swordfish W5983 during the attempt to prevent the German battle fleet passing through the Dover Straits on 12 February 1942. His Observer was Sub Lt Edgar Lee and at the rear was TA/G Leading Airman A L Johnson. Brian's aircraft was second in line behind Esmonde's as they went in for the attack. During the approach the aircraft was hit by canon shell splinters which caused significant damage to the aircraft and had split the fuel tank covering the crew with



Lieutenant Brian Rose DSO RNVR

petrol which, fortunately did not ignite. Brian was severely wounded in the back by the canon shell but managed to keep the aircraft flying and release their torpedo. Brian switched over to the reserve fuel tank which would give them a further ten to twelve minutes flying time, however, the aircraft was losing height and Brian struggled to keep it flying. The Aircraft flew over the stern of the Gneisenau as they turned to starboard in order to try and avoid the anti aircraft fire from the ships. As Brian concentrated on keeping the aircraft flying Edgar had turned and saw that TA/G 'Ginger' Johnson was slumped over his machine gun. He had been mortally wounded by the exploding canon shell which had hit the aircraft earlier in the attack. Meanwhile the aircraft was still losing height and Brian was able to make a controlled crash landing on the sea about half a mile from the Prinz Eugen. As the aircraft started sinking Edgar was able to help Brian escape into the dinghy before their Swordfish disappeared below the surface taking the body of 'Ginger' Johnson with it. Brian and Edgar
(continued on page 4)

STOP PRESS—STOP PRESS—STOP PRESS

The planning for the Channel Dash Memorial Dedication Service is now well underway and, at the time of going to press, the occasion is developing into a truly spectacular event. Our Patrons, Admiral the Lord Boyce and Sir George Martin have both indicated their intention to attend and a suitable guest list is currently being developed. In order that as many local people are able to attend the ceremony it is anticipated that the event will most likely be held on a weekday evening in June 2009 and take the form of a Military Tattoo
(Continued on page 4)

HMS Worcester in the Channel Action 12 February 1942

J.F.N. Wedge, then Sub. Lieut. RNVR

Following a boiler clean alongside Parkestone Quay we had been coming to 15 minutes notice for steam each evening, though at my lowly level I knew not why. It was therefore something of a welcome change that the 16th Destroyer Flotilla sailed on the morning of 12 February 1942 for gunnery practice at sea with a tug-towed target. As officer of quarters, pom-poms, mine

was a passive roll, but my mental peace was severely shattered when Sub. Lieut. Bill Bowmer RNVR came down from the bridge to say "Roll on my VC!" Proceed in execution of previous orders? We are to intercept the pocket battleships!" I went down the hatch in the iron deck to my cabin to get my Bible, which fell open at an agreeably reassuring passage...

We crashed our way at full speed through a choppy sea under low cloud, with little said. Aircraft appeared through the clouds now and then, mainly British and some apparently of the opinion that we were German.

"Enemy in Sight", battle ensigns hoisted, and a tense silence at the pom-poms which had earlier been in action against threatening aircraft. Dark shapes in the misty distance and our 4.7's began firing and the flotilla attacked. As I recollect, 'Worcester' was centre ship of the five and thus the main target of the enemy. The released their torpedoes but Lt. Cdr. E.C. 'Dreamy' Coats R.N. Pressed on for what seemed an age before ours went, the last RDF (Radar) reading was just

over 2000 yards.

We were already being hit but it was a relief at least to be turning away. However we continued to be straddled and hit and quite shortly were lying stopped.

The shelling ceased. In the silence no-one appeared to move. From the pom-poms it seemed inconceivable that anyone on the bridge

were the only officers left alive but miraculously No.1, Lieut. Anthony Taudevin R.N.V.R. Appeared, and things took some sort of shape, unhappily not before some people had gone over the side.

As we wallowed, a Junkers 88 flew above, firing recognition flares, and later an R.A.F. plane dropped torpedoes at us. Quiet bodies lay in flats and Surgeon Lieut. D.C. Jackson R.N.V.R. And S.B.A. Shelley worked heroically on the wounded in various parts of the ship.

The Chief, Commissioned Engineer Hugh Griffiths R.N., and his team were achieving miracles, and an engine started turning. Two destroyers approached, 'Campbell' and 'Vivacious', (not German ones sent to finish us off, as I had feared!) and rescued some of our survivors from the sea, returning to Harwich to replenish torpedoes when Captain Mark Pizey in 'Campbell' (leader of our force) was satisfied that we were under way. Later we lost power again and we languished very anxiously in the dark before the Engine Room again triumphed and at about nine knots we made our way home to Harwich.

It had been a long, very cold and very uncomfortable night on the pom-poms, and throughout the ship. As we approached land a 16th D.F. Hunt Class destroyer, 'Hambledon', appeared and offered assistance, proudly turned down by Lt. Cdr. Coats who indicated that we had managed so far on our own and would like to finish the job.

(Continued on Page 3)

'HMS WORCESTER'

Two anxious hours to contemplate bleak death
At thirty knots consuming cold grey seas.
Action Stations, duffel coats, tin hats —
Below a throbbing engine room reprise.

Junkers aircraft bombing from the clouds
Brought urgency, then "Enemy in Sight!"
The forward four point sevens bellowed out
Their challenge to the battlecruisers' might.
Tall shell-spouts cased her as she turned to fire
Torpedoes. As they leapt, cacophony
Erupted, brute bombardment wrenched apart
The bridge, chewed steel in vicious gluttony.

Five minutes' devastation. Sudden peace,
Uncanny, as she wallowed without power.
Miraculously the lower hull survived
But Gibson, Dow and Grant, and twenty more
Lay dead. Doc Jackson's needle eased the pain
Of others. Pom-poms warned the RAF away.
Bizarrely, Junkers' recognition flares
Confirmed the wild confusion that day.

So, vulnerable, rolling helplessly
She lay for seeming hours. Then nervous ears
Rejoiced at turning screws. By fits and starts
She staggered home, a frozen fifteen hours.

John (Bill) Wedge Sub. Lieut. RNVR

(Published "Memories of War" [Sahara Publications]2007
and in "Hard Lying")

could still be alive, giving the battering that the structure had taken. I walked the few yards aft to the 12-pounder gun, which had been hit. Gunner (T) L.G.C. Wellman R.N. Was lying on the deck, conscious and not too badly wounded. For a moment I thought that he and I

The Navy Lands (Cont from page 1)

College coming to rest in a cornfield midway between Ramsgate and Broadstairs. It was not long before a crowd gathered, many having seen the tiny flying machine from the streets of Ramsgate and Broadstairs. They came rushing across the fields to get a closer glimpse of the very first airmen to alight in Thanet. Willing hands soon pushed the machine on its wheels to the very edge of the cornfield close to an isolated group of farm cottages adjacent to Newby's brickfield. Lt. Grey sent a young boy into the town for petrol for the return trip. After taking a rest, the two airmen prepared to take off and return to Eastchurch. The aircraft made a successful take off at five minutes past eight. Those bystanders who had assisted with the moving of the aircraft suddenly found their hats blown off by the rush of air from the propeller. The Short biplane bounced along the cornfield for over twenty yards before becoming airborne. Lt Grey flew the machine in the direction of Broadstairs and then returned on a curved path to sweep over St Lawrence College before climbing and then passing out of sight behind a belt of trees. Thus ended the first flight and landing of an aeroplane in Thanet. It was not long before many aircraft and airmen started to arrive on our island, all based initially at the Naval School of Aviation, Eastchurch where the Admiralty had purchased ten acres adjoining the Royal Aero Club's Flying Ground for the newly formed School of Naval Aviation. On 29 May 1916 the Royal Navy decided to establish an emergency landing ground at Manston. Lieutenant Spenser Grey later instructed Winston Churchill in 'basic aircraft handling' at Eastchurch.

HMS Worcester (Continued from page 2)

Alongside, after the sad disembarkation of the wounded and the dead, we were all checked by a medical team. I was completely deaf for a time—someone tried semaphore to talk to me ! - but most of my hearing returned sufficiently for me, with Bill Bowmer and Sub. Lt. Guy Agard-Butler R.N., incongruously to play word games that evening in the Railway Hotel with Beatrice Lillie, her agent and her sister, after an ENSA concert.

Among those killed was Telegraphist Dennis Gibson in the W/T Office which was in part of the bridge structure so badly damaged. Dennis

and I had trained together at the beginning of the war after mobilisation of the R.N.V.R

Of the officers of the 'Worcester', who survived the action, Lt. F.W.L. Winterbottom R.N. Was later lost in a submarine, Guy Agard-Butler died in the Fleet Air Arm in Gibraltar, and Bill Bowmer in HMS Martin off North Africa. Dreamy Coats became a Commander went to a shore job and Anthony Taudevin eventually commanded a 'Captain Class' Frigate. 'Doc' David Jackson returned to practice in Brisbane after the war ended. His book, 'One Ship, One Company' includes his account of the action.



Lieutenant Spenser Grey

CDA Membership

The current membership of the Association as of 7 July 2008 stands at 217. Well done everyone who has helped with this by enrolling family and friends. Special thanks go to member Charles Giles who continues to recruit at least a couple of new members every week.

Channel Dash Memorial Appeal

T it is with disappointment that we report the resignation of our Deputy Chairman and Fundraiser Ian Lauder who, because of other commitments felt that he was unable to continue with the Channel Dash Association. In his resignation letter he confirmed that he had not been able to raise any sponsorship or contributions toward the CDA Memorial and, in his opinion, because of the current structure of the association would be most unlikely to qualify for public funding through the Lottery or Heritage trust. This is unfortunate as it means the committee and members must carefully consider the way in which we move forward. In the first instance we believe that we should consider applying for Charitable status. However, this can take some time and means we have already lost at least one year. This item will be placed on the Agenda for the next members meeting which is on 14 July 2009 immediately following the AGM. On a more positive note we are pleased to report that we now have a professional fund raiser who has readily agreed to work with us. He has already signed up a major Events Organiser who is setting up a Corporate Fundraising event at a suitable venue within London area which, will be hosted by Admiral the Lord Boyce and Sir George. Further details of this event will be reported more fully in the next issue of your newsletter 'THE DASH'.

Channel Dash Spotlight (Continued from front page)

were rescued by a British MTB and taken to Ramsgate where they received medical treatment and were thawed out after their harrowing experience. Brian was then admitted to Chatham where he was hospitalised for treatment to the severe back injuries he had sustained during the attack.

In April 1942 following successful treatment and recovery Brian was sent to HMS Daedalus for 825 Squadron (Swordfish). In April 1942 Brian was made a Sub Lt (A) RNVR and posted to Arbroath, Scotland for 811 Squadron (Swordfish II). In November 1943 he was promoted to Lieutenant (A) RNVR. During the next two years Brian was posted to various Naval Air Stations on

either training or flying duties, before going on a training course as a Deck Landing Control Officer or BATS and was sent to Machrihanish to await posting to an Aircraft Carrier. Whilst there Brian volunteered to deliver aircraft from Machrihanish on Mull of Kintyre to N Ireland via Abbotsinch nr Glasgow. Whilst delivering Barracuda MkII N° LS869 on 08 October 1944 he encountered undercarriage problems on approach to Abbotsinch, turning tightly at 300ft on his 2nd circuit the aircraft spun and crashed into a stubble field at Netherton Farm, Inchinnan Bridge, 1 mile NE of Abbotsinch and was fatally injured. Brian was last seen by his Observer and friend, Edgar Lee, coming out of the Bagatelle Night Club in Edinburgh

Stop Press. Continued from front page) with the Dedication Service at the heart of proceedings.

Next year (2009) the Royal Navy celebrate 100 years of naval aviation and, as the CDA memorial commemorates a significant combined Naval and Naval Aviation event the dedication service was offered to the RN as a suitable occasion for inclusion into the Fly Navy 100 (FN100) Calendar. The FN100 organisers have accepted and the Royal Navy will provide Senior Officers and a Fly Past of current naval aircraft. It is strongly expected that we will be joined by one of the RN Historic Flight's Fairey Swordfish.

The program will be:

Patrons and guests arrive and are greeted by a massed band from the local Cadet Corps (Sea Army and Air) and a Ceremonial Guard of the Sea Cadets. The Band and Guard will commence proceedings with a musical performance and display. The middle part of the evening will involve the Dedication Service and the RN FlyPast after which, guests will be entertained by local singer Kas (age 20) singing memorable melodies from WWII in the style of the forces sweetheart, Vera Lynn.. The ceremony will conclude with the band of HM Royal Marines Beating the Retreat who for a *finale* will play 'Stringbag Serenade', composed by Sir George as a tribute to the Swordfish Aircraft. Following the Memorial Service and entertainment there will be a reception for guests and sponsors before departure.



Edgar rescuing Brian from their sinking Swordfish aircraft.
(Special thanks go to Artist, Philip West and SWA Fine Art for permission to reproduce his latest work)

As the Association membership grows it is hoped that more articles of interest to our members will be sent to the Secretary for the editorial team. The articles can be from veterans directly involved in 'Operation Fuller' or their family & friends . Facts or anecdotes covering as wide a range as possible would be particularly welcome as it is our aim that the Channel Dash Memorial is inclusive of the whole of the operation. We would also welcome photo's, prints etc. Non 'Operation Fuller' will also be welcome with all material considered for publication in future issues.

and on a lighter note!!!!

*English teacher to pupil who is not paying attention:.....
'Edward,, give me two pronouns'.
Edward: 'Who, me?'*