

PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

June - July 2020



Registered Charity Number 284146

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

It is my pleasure to introduce the June-July edition of our newsletter. We include some updates and a selection of items that we trust you will enjoy reading.

These are strange and challenging times. As I write, the museum remains closed to the public in accordance with government requirements. We have had to disappoint various groups that were booked to visit. However, we continue to respond to various requests for information about the 390th Bomb Group and the British Resistance Organisation. We remain optimistic for the future and have been thinking about 2021. I am pleased to confirm that the play about Joe Kennedy has been rescheduled as a major event to look forward to.

Work continues with our new building, led by our President, Peter Kindred. He has hardly missed a day since the project began, working through the wet and cold winter, continuing to move forward even when we were unable to ask volunteers to assist.

The extension of our closed season has also given the opportunity to carry out some additional maintenance. Martin Scripps leads on this. It is amazing what can be achieved on a tight budget with a very few socially distanced volunteers at a time when most of the builders' merchants and DIY stores have been closed.

The annual Memorial Day ceremonies at Maddingly had to be cancelled this year because of the virus restrictions, so we held a small, socially distanced remembrance of our own at the Tower instead to remember those who did not come home. We laid two wreaths and Steve Smith kindly volunteered to play "Taps". It was very quiet and rather moving, as one would expect.



All us Parham volunteers hope that you and your loved ones are keeping safe during the current emergency. If you are isolating and lonely, do get in touch via email or Facebook. We always try to respond.

If you have been affected financially, we hope you are able to recover before much more time elapses. We look forward to hearing from you, and of course to the time when we can welcome you back to the museum.

Best wishes from us all.

Peter Senior



PARHAM COMMEMORATES VE DAY

Despite the Coronavirus, the village of Parham managed to celebrate VE Day in various ways. Garden tea parties and socially-distanced village green get-togethers were held and children enjoyed decorating windowsills, fences and making some wonderful bunting. There was a 2 minute silence at 11am and at 3pm there was a toast to the heroes of World War II – *To those who gave so much, we thank you.*

At 9pm, there was a speech from the Queen, broadcast at the same time that her father King George VI gave his radio address on 8th May 1945.

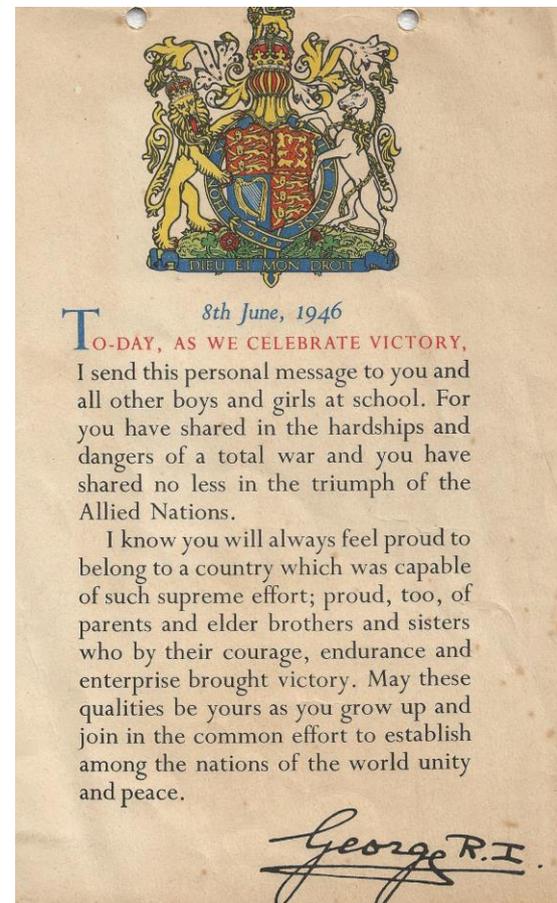




Bunting outside *Moller's Peace* (named after Colonel Moller)

Right, thanks to long-serving volunteer Mick Tipple for sending in this extract as we celebrated VE Day.

This message from the King was sent to all school children at the end of the Second World War, recognising the fact that the whole of the country, children included, had played their part.



Left, the memorial to the 95th Bombardment Group that sits in front of the Control Tower has been repainted.

THE NEW EXHIBITION HALL

Our President has ensured that work has continued through the challenges of winter and the complications arising from the Coronavirus. As many of you will know, Peter leads from the front!

The main structure is complete except for one matching window and some minor exterior work. The underfloor heating has been commissioned, allowing us to properly dry the floor prior to painting it. Some of the specialist contractors have been unable to work because of the virus restrictions, but we are optimistic that the electrics will be completed soon, together with the roof section between the existing and new build. Meanwhile, the walls are painted, and we have shelving with workstations for research. The various safety and information signs are being prepared.



Much thought is going into the new wall displays. The introductory boards are in place. We are currently working on a timeline which will cover the wall beyond the cinema room. It will run from 1941 to 1945. The top line will be the key events in the world war. Below that, the building of the airfield and the contribution of the B17s

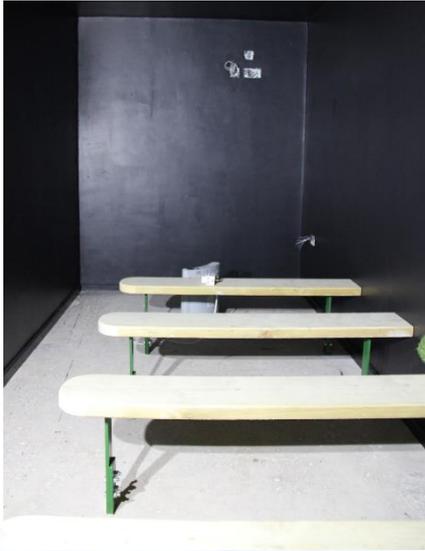
of Station 153 will be featured. The next row will be about the resistance to the threat of invasion and how even a little village like Parham could contribute to the defeat of Nazism.

An Anderson shelter is under construction whilst all this is going on. It is made from original materials that were found in “stores” on the farm and should complement our home front exhibition and the indoor Morrison shelter.

When the building is finished and the displays arranged, we plan to hold a formal opening ceremony. By then we will also have chosen a name for the building, as was done when the Moller Building was completed.



Photo Journal



Right, B.R.O Information centre with book shelves and computer desk.



Left, our cinema will play a short film on a loop.



Above, blast walls, like this one in front of the outside door, were a wartime feature. It also doubles up to conform to building regulations by preventing cars parking in front of the fire exit.

Right, this log is the cover for the "secret" hatchway which is similar to the entrance of an original Operational Base- although visitors will be using the safer, more modern entrance! It is counterbalanced, and moves the ladder beneath it.



The B-17 Sperry Ball Turret



It's hard to think of a worse place to go to war than in the ball turret position of a B-17 Flying Fortress.

I'd like you to imagine that you have been recruited into the U.S. 8th Army Air Force. You've just turned 19 years of age; you've travelled from home - the warm state of Arizona in America – via a long circuitous route across Canada, Greenland, Iceland and eventually taken up your posting in a cold, wet and exposed location in Suffolk England that is Station 153, Framlingham - home of the 390th USAAF Bomb Group.

Your home is now a tent in a muddy field – the comparative luxury of the Nissen, or Quonset huts are not yet ready for occupation. You occupy that tent with umpteen other crew members. Your uniform and bedding are in an almost permanent state of 'damp'.

Unfortunately for you - you are slight of build - around 9 stone – an ideal candidate for the position of ball turret gunner - the twin machine gun unit that protects the soft underbelly of your Fortress, mounted about halfway down the underside of the fuselage.



The Ball Turret was manufactured by the Sperry Corporation – a major American equipment and electronics manufacturer. It's a round ball made of thin aluminium and plexiglass, electronically powered, that has a diameter of around 3 feet.

That's right - 3 feet in diameter; and you are the operator.

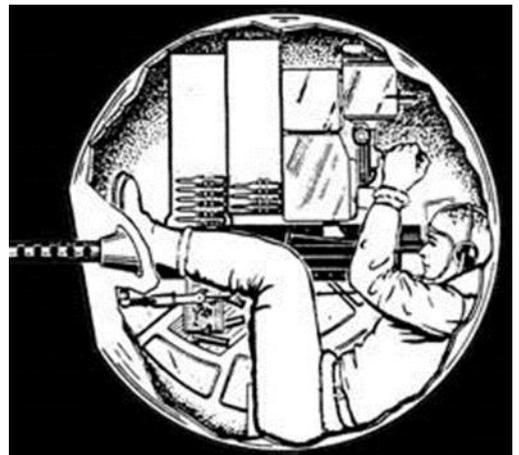
The whole unit is suspended on a gimbal – a pivoted support that allows the rotation of the turret about a single axis.

It houses two 50 calibre machine guns. They, and the ammunition magazines (250 rounds per gun) consume a lot of your 3 feet diameter place of work - as did the huge sophisticated computing gunsight. There is also a breathing oxygen regulator a first aid kit, a small radio along with interior lighting. The remaining space is yours - and as you are slight of build you will probably be able to strap a chest parachute to your front, or have it crushed against your side. Your main parachute will have to stay in the fuselage. You hope it's a smooth flight – in a wild pitching aeroplane under attack, it probably won't be where you left it when you need it.

Getting into the ball turret requires you to plan ahead. You cannot wear your heavy wool lined leather flying jacket – or your flak jacket - there's not enough room. You do wear your heated 'bunny suit' though. It plugs into a socket in your steel seat – it will help keep the 40 to 60 below zero in-flight temperatures *almost* tolerable.

You do not enter the turret for take-off – if the undercarriage should fail or any other mishap cause the Fortress to belly flop you will almost certainly be crushed to death – the turret is only 15 inches off the ground. Instead, once safely in flight, you adjust the ball so that the guns are pointing straight down, bringing the entrance hatch door inside the fuselage. This hatch entrance also serves as your emergency exit in case of trouble. As you can see from the photos above – it was hardly large, about 24 inches across – let's hope this mission doesn't bring you any 'trouble'.

You climb in feet first, sitting between the guns - slipping your feet into stirrups positioned on either side of the 13 inch diameter window in front. You are now in a foetal position – your knees almost tight against your chest, your arms bent at the elbow almost to their maximum. You know you've got to get used to it – this mission could be an 8 to 10-hour flight deep into heavily defended Germany. A pedal under your left foot adjusts a reticle (crosshairs) on the gunsight glass which is in front of your face. When the enemy is framed therein – you know the range is correct. Two post handles pointing rearward above the gunsight work valves in the self-contained electro-hydraulic system to control the movement of the ball turret. A firing



button located at the end of each handle will fire the guns. Empty shell cases will be ejected through a port hole just below the gun barrel.

Your Turret has a full 360 degrees of motion horizontally and 90 degrees of motion vertically – you could be in any attitude from laying on your back to standing on your feet – but always in that cramped foetal position.



You are sceptical of the 'protection' that the plexiglass and thin aluminium offers from the devastatingly destructive power of the Messerschmitt and Focke-Wulf 20 millimetre cannons and the thunderous, bursting 88 millimetre flak gun shells that you know you will encounter as you fly into occupied Europe and on into Germany.

Wish you weighed a few more pounds? A less glamorous job - perhaps quartermaster, doesn't seem so bad now.

Steve Smith

RECENT VISITORS

We haven't been able to welcome any human visitors recently, but we have been blessed by an abundance of wild visitors. A herd of fallow deer often visit us, and muntjacs are frequent (albeit pesky!) visitors.

Red kites and sparrowhawks often soar above the airfield, taking advantage of the large, flat open space to see their prey. Skylarks are often heard and occasionally seen darting around the skyline. Last week we heard a turtle dove, but we have not been lucky enough to see one yet.



AIRMAN OF THE MONTH

JUNE



ROBERT E HYBARGER

2 JUNE 1924 – 2 JUNE 1944

Robert was born in Indiana and enlisted into the USAAF on 19 November 1942. He trained as a Navigator and flew just 5 missions from Station 153.

On 2nd June 1944 at 20:46 near Paris A/C733 'Paper Doll II' was hit by flak just after bombs away. The aircraft peeled to the right out of formation with one of its engines on fire. Two crews reported seeing only one parachute and another crew reported that the plane exploded.

Three crew members, who survived the explosion, remember congratulating him on his birthday just before the plane took a direct hit in the nose section blowing Robert back towards the catwalk.

Robert is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Indianapolis. He was killed on his 20th birthday.

Act to us

APPLICATION FOR HEADSTONE OR MARKER	
1. NAME OF DECEASED (Last, First, Middle) HYBARGER, ROBERT E	2. RESIDENCE (State, County, Precinct, Post Office) INDIANA, DECATUR COUNTY, CRAWFORDSVILLE, INDIANA
3. BIRTH DATE (Month, Day, Year) June 2, 1924	4. DEATH DATE (Month, Day, Year) June 2, 1944
5. SERVICE NO. 0-703880	6. GRAVE LOCATION (Country, City and State) INDIANA, CRAWFORDSVILLE, INDIANA
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF NEAREST OF KIND (Full Name and Address) LeRoy Hybarger, R.F.D. 1, Crawfordsville, Ind.	8. NAME AND ADDRESS OF NEAREST OF KIND (Full Name and Address) LeRoy Hybarger, R.F.D. 1, Crawfordsville, Ind.

APPROVED: **APR 23 1950**
RECORDED: **MAY 01 1950**
INDEXED: **MAY 01 1950**



GENERAL SUMMARY

JUNE 1944

The high spots in June were D Day operations on the 6th and the take-off for the England-Russia-Italy-England shuttle on the 21st. D Day operations were hampered by dense clouds, but despite the 10/10 undercast the group hit its Caen Coast targets accurately, recon flights the following day revealed.

A new high for the number of A/C dispatched and the number of missions flown was established in June. Twenty-four missions were flown. Only seven B-17s were lost, as compared with twice that number the previous month.

Enemy aircraft opposition which was moderate in May, decreased still further in June. On most of the missions enemy fighters were not even sighted. Flak, however, seemed to increase in accuracy.

During the month fighter attacks were almost nil, although it is believed that flak has, if anything, been more accurate.

A mobile training unit came to the base in June, to give additional engineering training to ground crews, pilots, co-pilots and flying engineers. It carried a stripped B-17 -engine, electrical system, bomb racks, hydraulic system stabilizer, compass etc.

JULY 1944

Twenty missions were flown in July, with bombing results reported by the group bombardier as being on a par with those of June. For the first time in several months, the group never flew more than one mission in any one day.

The completion of the first Russian shuttle mission was the outstanding event of the month. The aircraft which took off for Russia, bombing an important German target on the way, on 21 June, returned after stopping at Italy on 5 July. All crews which participated in the three-way shuttle mission returned to the station. Bombing on the shuttle mission was very good.

Enemy aircraft attacks were encountered on only one mission in July, the attack on Merseburg targets on the 29th. Seventeen enemy fighters were destroyed by the group, two probably destroyed and one damaged. The group's losses for the month totalled seven aircraft lost in action.

In tactics, the chief development was the introduction of the thirteen-plane formation, which the group flew for the first time.

Twenty-eight new combat crews were received in July. At the beginning of the month the group had 63 B-17s assigned. Eight more were received in July.

AIRMAN OF THE MONTH

JULY



JOHN E DI TRAPANI

30 DECEMBER 1920 – 7 JULY 1944

John was born in Long Beach, California and enlisted into the USAAF on 11 June 1942. He trained as a Ball Turret Gunner and flew 28 missions from Station 153.

On Mission 145 to Merseburg-Kolleda at 06:04 John's plane A/C070 'North Star' was rammed by A/C983 due to A/C070 dropping back because of prop wash from the planes ahead. Both aircraft became meshed together and only parted at 10,000 feet spinning and disintegrating, both exploding before hitting the ground near Hoorn in Holland.

John is buried at the Netherlands American Cemetery and is remembered on a memorial in Hoorn. He was 23.

SECTION A									
HEADSTONE INSCRIPTION AND INTERMENT RECORD									
INSCRIPTION (Front) (Name, Rank, Organization, State, Date of Death, Grave No.)									
JOHN E. DI TRAPANI S SGT 571 BOMB SQ 390 BOMB GP (H) CALIFORNIA JULY 7 1944 11									
INSCRIPTION (Rear) (Service Number)									
19101854									
FURNITURE COUNTRY		MARGRATEN		4601		BLOCK		0	
SERIES		2		1		ROW		5	
SECTION B		AM (2 OLC)		PH		GROUP		123	
NAME AND ADDRESS OF NEXT OF KIN		4650		PPP		E.O. NUMBER		4456	
MR. MARIO DI TRAPANI (FATHER)		1157 EAST 20TH ST.		LONG BEACH, CAL.		WOMAN'S RESIDENCE		1	
CHL c-974									

REGISTRATION CARD—(Men born on or after February 17, 1897 and on or before December 31, 1921)			
SERIAL NUMBER	1. NAME (Print)		ORDER NUMBER
T 101	Emil John Di Trapani		T 1417
2. PLACE OF RESIDENCE (Print)			
1157 East 20th St. Long Beach, Los Angeles, California			
[THE PLACE OF RESIDENCE GIVEN ON THE LINE ABOVE WILL DETERMINE LOCAL BOARD JURISDICTION; LINE 2 OF REGISTRATION CERTIFICATE WILL BE IDENTICAL]			
3. MAILING ADDRESS			
Same			
[Mailing address if other than place indicated on line 2. If same insert word same]			
4. TELEPHONE	5. AGE IN YEARS	6. PLACE OF BIRTH	
Yes	21	Long Beach	
Long Beach 661-1111	December 30 1920	California	
(Exchange) (Number)	(Mo.) (Day) (Yr.)	(Town or country) (State)	
7. NAME AND ADDRESS OF PERSON WHO WILL ALWAYS KNOW YOUR ADDRESS			
C. S. Boyd, 1164 East 20th St. Long Beach, Calif.			
8. EMPLOYER'S NAME AND ADDRESS			
Ralphs Grocery Co. Los Angeles, Los Angeles, California			
9. PLACE OF EMPLOYMENT OR BUSINESS			
Ralphs Grocery Co. 1044 Cherry Long Beach, Los Angeles, Calif.			
(Number and street or R. F. D. number) (Town) (County) (State)			
I AFFIRM THAT I HAVE VERIFIED ABOVE ANSWERS AND THAT THEY ARE TRUE.			
D. S. S. Form 1 (Revised 1-1-42)		★ gpo 16-21830-1	
		Jack Di Trapani (Registrant's signature)	

BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM

VIRTUAL INTERVIEW WITH JOHN WARWICKER

MAY 2020- Part I

With the museum closed and work on the new exhibition room curtailed I thought I would take time to go back to the beginning and ask John how he first got involved in researching the story of the GHQ Auxiliary Units.

Retiring from Scotland Yard's Special Branch John and his late wife, Anne, moved to Great Glemham and became involved in research for Parham Airfield Museum which, at that time, comprised just the Memorial to the 390th Bombardment Group.

John told me that he was aware of rumours circulating in the locality that Herman and his older brother, Percy, had been involved *'in something very secret'* during the war. Speaking to Herman about these rumours it was clear that he had no intention of disclosing anything that he may or may not have known. Realising that there was a story to tell John suggested to Herman that if he got permission from Whitehall would he be prepared to talk about it. Herman's dour response was *"I might and might not"*. Thanks to John's known establishment contacts he was able to write to the Cabinet Office for approval for Herman to tell his story. John told me that, after an anxious fortnight's wait, he received limited authority for Herman to be interviewed. Within the letter was the caveat that, if there was any doubt over national security a particular individual on a given 'phone number should be contacted. Armed with this letter John told Herman the good news - *"Just read this letter from the most powerful unit of government in London and see for yourself. They give us the go-ahead - so now you are free to spill the beans"*. However, according to John, this was not good enough for Herman who insisted on ringing the 'phone number quoted in the letter and talking to the individual named. Having been connected and after a long conversation Herman put the 'phone down. John asked what had been said to which Herman replied *"He said he couldn't see what all the fuss was about. He had 150,000 classified papers for potential release and couldn't even find the British Resistance Organisation. But, yes, it will be OK provided he is kept in the picture"*. As John told me later, it subsequently became clear that the museum had been working with a completely erroneous title.

Thus it was that, in 1992, Herman was finally able to start telling the story of his involvement in one of the most secret organisations of World War 2. John told me that, having been given the go ahead, there was no stopping Herman. He told John that he was made the Sergeant in charge of the Stratford St Andrew Patrol and that his brother, Percy, was also in the patrol. Although



aware of the freedom to do so Percy never followed his brother in discussing his time in the Aux Units.

In the summer of 1992, John and Herman along with a local farmer, John Mann, ventured out to find the Stratford St Andrew Patrol's long abandoned Operational Base. Armed with a long-handled sickle Herman was probing the sandy soil where he believed the remains of the OB to be. Suddenly he declared "My God". "You've found the main chamber". Forty-eight years after walking away from the OB they would have hidden in, come invasion, they had found it again.

Herman Kindred re-discovering the Stratford base after 48 years.

To be continued in our next edition

**Chris Pratt,
Curator**

Peter Senior celebrated his birthday earlier this month. As we are now allowed to meet groups of up to 6 people outside, he enjoyed a birthday cake outside the museum (whilst socially distancing!) with a small number of fellow volunteers who were painting the Control Tower stairwell.



Thank you for your continued support and interest.
We hope you stay safe in these troubling times.