



# ROUNDEL



July 2020

The Swiss Branch Newsletter

**RIP**

**Dame Vera Lynne DBE the Forces'  
sweetheart.**



Things have been done differently this year. France's borders were closed. In a moving gesture, however, we received the above picture of the annual commemoration of our Lancaster crew at Chapelle Thêcle this year. Our humble thanks to our French friends, particularly to Alain Chaillet, the mayor, for this great-hearted gesture.



Alan & Margie Lenton, long-time Swiss Branch Members, welcoming Dame Vera Lynn to Sussexdown



The year 2020 is half over. Many of our events have either been cancelled or postponed. At time of writing France and Switzerland are out of 'lockdown', though each country is doing things its own way. The vast majority of our members fall into the 'at risk' group of the population. Stay sane, stay safe. Meantime, our newsletter will continue. Chin up; we'll see each other soon. *Ed.*

## Memoir of Roy Vale

*(Kindly provided for Roundel by his son-in-law, Brian Hewitt, via Alan Baker)*

"Moods and Memoirs" was the title of 607 Squadron's in-house publication and my first contribution was of the latter kind. Moods are not easy to describe, at least for this author. Memoirs are much easier as, if the memory has gaps, one can usually fill them in by employing a little imagination, tying each end of the missing period to the preceding and following events by selecting the most likely happening.

Fortunately, my memories of early experiences are still fair-



ly clear, partly because the remembered occasions were exciting for an adolescent and partly because the frequent calling to mind over the intervening years has kept them fresh, polished brightly, so to speak.

In the summer of 1944 I was a Sergeant Pilot in the Royal Air Force, recently graduated from a Service Flying Training School (SFTS) in Zimbabwe or Rhodesia as it was called then. I was posted to an Operational Training Unit (OTU) in Egypt and converted from North American Harvards to Supermarine Spitfires, the fastest fighter aeroplanes of the day. The airfield was located beside the Suez Canal, which certainly helped on the rare occasions when I became disoriented after a practice dog-fight with another student pilot.

The Egyptian desert was mostly vast tracts of sand with few landmarks, the most well-known being the Pyramids of Giza which are relatively close to the capital Cairo, from which we budding fighter pilots were ordered to stay clear. I did once fly with my instructor in a Harvard trainer to

the international airport at Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, so that I could return the aircraft to base, allowing my instructor to enjoy a leave sampling the delights of that romantic city.



When I was reasonably certain that I had met the expectations of the Unit so far as being suitable Squadron material, I took a chance early one morning, flying between the two largest pyramids. In retrospect it is fun to imagine the amazement of the

masons at the topping-out ceremony four thousand years earlier if by some aberration of time my Spitfire had flown

past them at three hundred miles per hour. And to think that it was only forty years, one hundredth of the intervening span since the Wright brothers became the first men to fly in a heavier than air craft.

Had I been reported I would certainly have been "on the mat" before the Groupie (in those days a groupie was not a pop idol fan). Group Captain John Grandy, commanding the OTU did reprimand

me once for absence without leave after being picked up by the S.P.'s (Service Police) as I tried to re-enter the base after a night in Cairo. I could have claimed to be the victim of an



unfortunate mistake, boarding the wrong train to return to camp from an afternoon in the town of Suez at the southern end of the great canal, but I did not. He did not ask me why I had been A.W.O.L. and I did not volunteer an explanation.

Toward the end of the course I was involved in an unfortunate incident that injured a fellow pilot and grounded him. Sergeant George Simpson and I had taken off early before breakfast to indulge in an hour's dog-fight using cine camera guns. The plan was for me to be the target for the first half-hour and then for him to be my target. The film would be developed later in the day and we would both be shown the results. The purpose was for us to learn from our mistakes and to assess our marksmanship.

We had finished the exercise and were flying in formation at about 12,000 feet altitude when Base came on the R.T. (radio telephone) ordering us to return, as the weather was deteriorating.

George was leading and I was formateing on him. We were on oxygen, which was piped into the masks which also carried the radio microphones. I expected George to set a course for base but he carried on as if he had not heard the order. When Base did not receive an acknowledgement of its message it repeated the order.

Still George did not reply and carried on the same course. I became a little concerned but the first thought that came to mind was that George was being bloody-minded and was foolishly refusing to obey. Australians were sometimes known to exhibit

'bolshie' tendencies but it was not like George to disobey orders. He was responsible for me as well as for the two aircraft, not just for himself alone.

I decided to take matters into my own hands. After trying to get George on the R.T. without success I waggled my wings, flying slightly ahead so that he would notice and gesticulating, motioning him to descend and follow me. I thought his R.T. might

be on the blink. No response!

In retrospect I should have radioed Base for instructions but I did not. Perhaps I worried that George might get into trouble for not obeying an order. It is my regret that I did not rise to the occasion and instead took the coward's way out. We were heading into cloud, going away from base and I distanced myself from George

in case we collided in the reduced visibility. I did a 180 (about -turn) and returned to base on my own. I was hungry and after parking the Spit headed straight for the mess hall for sausages, eggs and coffee. I should have reported to the Airfield Controller and told him about my return and perhaps mentioned George's untypical behaviour but alas, I did not.

Upon my return to Flight Dispatch I enquired after George and was told he was still absent and reported missing. There was never any recrimination of me. When it was obvious something had happened and no reports had been received from other airfields a senior officer, perhaps Group Captain Grandy, but I'm not sure, went out in a Harvard to where George's 'Spit' had been sighted, landed in the desert beside his wrecked aircraft and brought him back in the passenger seat. It must have been a wonderful feat of airmanship to land in raw desert like that without special tires and to take off again safely.

I met George in Cairo after he had recovered from his crash but if he remembered me he didn't appear to. The general opinion was, as far as I could make out, that his oxygen had failed and he had passed out at 12,000 feet. It was a wonder he was still alive.

The Spitfire was a lovely flier and it was possible, if the controls were properly set, to put it into a spin and then with hands and feet off the stick and rudder controls, allow it to regain straight and level flight on its own. That may have been what happened. The plane flew straight and level into the sand, making a long gouge, with or without help from its pilot. If George had regained consciousness enough to land when fuel ran out we don't know. He may have done, but the knock on the head sustained in the crash may have affected his memory.

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## Armed Forces Week 2020 - Veterans

This year's Armed Forces Week sits between several important anniversaries for the Royal Air Force.

Eighty years ago, last month, nineteen and twenty-year-old pilots of No.85 Squadron flew their Hurricanes in the skies over France, providing fighter cover to the Allied Armies as they withdrew to Dunkirk in the



face of overwhelming Blitzkrieg attacks from the German invasion. It became known as the Battle of France.

Eighty years ago, this month and through to October, the pilots of 85 Squadron alongside pilots from multiple other Fighter Command squadrons and from across the Commonwealth and other allied countries took part in daily sorties as part of the Battle of Britain.

Ten years later on 25th June, the Korean War began with personnel from the Air Force involved flying Sunderlands around the Korean peninsula and on exchange with the US and Australian Air Forces.

Many veterans from those conflicts are no longer with us. We remember their sacrifice and their courage in the face of adversity. Today, of all days, we will remember them.

Find out more about Armed Forces Week: <https://bit.ly/2YQg63y>

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A police officer sees a man driving around with a pickup truck full of Squirrels. He pulls the guy over and says... "You can't drive around with squirrels in this town! Take them to the zoo immediately." The guy says "OK"... and drives away. The next day, the officer sees the guy still driving around with the truck full of squirrels, and they're all wearing sun glasses. He pulls the guy over and demands... "I thought I told you to take these squirrels to the zoo yesterday?" The guy replies... "I did . . . today I'm taking them to the beach."



## Knickebein

In this modern age of GPS and long-range radar it is hard to imagine the difficulty of navigating an aircraft at four miles a minute in darkness across blacked-out enemy territory using only dead-reckoning, star fixes and maps.

Thus, it was hardly surprising that during WW2 the Luftwaffe adopted radio methods to guide night bombers to their targets in Britain. The story of the secret and silent 'battle of the beams' between the attackers who developed these specialised systems and the defenders who strove to disrupt them is one of the most fascinating in the history of short-wave radio. It is a drama in which British radio amateurs played a pivotal role.

## Lorenz

On 28 October 1939 in the first air raid on Britain in WW2 a Heinkel HE-111 medium bomber was shot down by a Spitfire of No 602 Sqn over the Firth of Forth. When the plane's radio equipment was taken to RAE Farnborough for examination, the technicians were surprised to find the aircraft's Lorenz blind approach receiver was a 7-valve super set of much higher sensitivity than the 2-valve straight set that was adequate for normal service. Later, captured aircrew from another HE-111 were overheard saying that no matter how diligently the British searched their plane they would never find their bombing navigation equipment, implying that it would be overlooked because it was right under their noses.

The blind approach system had been developed by the Lorenz Company in Berlin long before the outbreak of war and had been installed at many airfields throughout the world. The system initially used motor-driven switches modulating the antenna lobes of a 120W 33.3MHz MCW transmitter located at the end of the runway, such that, if an aircraft were to the right of the approach path it received series of 1150Hz tone 7/8 second dashes, whereas, if it were to the left it received 1/8-second dots. The dots and dashes were synchronised, so that directly on the correct flight path they merged into a continuous tone. Was it

possible that this popular commercial system had been modified for long-range military purposes?

Initially, the Marconi Company advised the Air Ministry that a system operating at frequencies above 30MHz could not be used to guide bombers over Britain. The standard Lorenz system's range was only about 30 miles. The Air Ministry learned, however, that range could be extended using a larger ground antenna and a narrower bandwidth, higher transmitter power and more sensitive receivers. The frequencies set on crashed Heinkel Lorenz receivers were also duly noted (30, 31.5 and 33.3MHz).

## The crooked leg

The first clear indications that the Germans might have deployed such a blind bombing aid came from coded messages intercepted by the Y Service, which was largely manned by pre-war radio amateurs and radio

amateur voluntary interceptors (VIs). Over 1,000 VIs were recruited by 1940. They copied down weak Morse code enemy radio messages from their own homes often on homemade receivers. When Bletchley Park's code-breakers decrypted them, one was found to read "Knickebein at Kleve is confirmed at point 53°25'N, 1°W". Significantly, the town of Kleve is near the western frontier of Germany in the part closest to Britain. The Air Ministry guessed that the message reported a radio beam from there had been checked as crossing England at the geographical location specified which was near Retford in Nottinghamshire. The name 'Knickebein' ('crooked leg') suggested a system that used two directional radio beams intersecting at an angle over a target, although it was later found that it actually referred to the 165° angle of the dual-beam antennas used





at the transmitters. The first Knickebein antennas at Stolberg, Kleve and Maulberg were nearly 31 m high and mounted on 90 m diameter circular railway tracks for aiming purposes.

Y Service also successfully eavesdropped on Luftwaffe airborne communications, some of which were in plain language. Surprisingly some messages used the international Q-Code

familiar to radio amateurs, even including abbreviations in English (such as 'RPT' for 'I repeat'). Many experts remained sceptical about the idea that Luftwaffe bombers were navigating by radio beams. Arthur Harris, later the head of RAF Bomber Command, was positively scathing since he thought that any skilled aircrew could find their targets without such paraphernalia. He changed this view when the Butt Report revealed in August 1941 that less than one RAF bomb in ten fell within five miles of its intended target. Churchill, however, had scientifically literate advisers and he was convinced by the Air Ministry to authorise a few exploratory flights to search for beams. At that time the RAF had no general coverage receivers for the frequencies in question, so the man from the Air Ministry sent one of his civilian staff in a hired uniform to Webb's Radio in Soho where he successfully requisitioned the shop's entire stock of Hallicrafter's S-27 amateur radio sets, promising the Air Ministry would pay for them later. The receivers were installed in aircraft at the Blind Approach Development Unit at Boscombe Down which had aircrew with considerable experience in beam flying. Y Service supplied the 'Special Wireless Operators' posted there to operate them.

On 19 June 1940 an Avro Anson Mk 1 took off from RAF Wyton on a beam hunt. The set failed. On the second flight the Luftwaffe flew no sorties. There were calls for these search flights to be abandoned. One more flight was authorised on the night of 21 June. This time a 31.5MHz beam from Kleve was located about one mile south of Spalding in Lincolnshire. The Anson flew along the beam until the operator picked up a crossbeam from Stolberg. The beams intersected over the Rolls-Royce factory at Derby, which made the Merlin engines for Spitfires and Hurricanes. The seriousness of the threat was now apparent and the RAF appropriately code-named the enemy beam system 'Headache'. When Fighter Command Chief Hugh Dowding was asked what should be done, he replied in one word: 'Jam!'

## 80 Wing

In August 1940 No 80 (Signals) Wing was formed as a radio countermeasures unit to provide electronic intelligence and counter the German beams. The Wing's air arm, later to

become No 109 Squadron, carried out regular flights to locate German beams. To narrow the search area for the Ansons, manned receiving stations were set up by lashing garden sheds to the tops of the towers of a few selected Chain Home radar stations. Braving the freezing cold in these high-level shacks the operators could pass Wing HQ the Knickebein frequencies used on any given night together with which side of each station the beams lay. Since the beams were turned on well before each night attack this gave time to identify the probable target and set up the jammers.

*(Continued in the next Roundel.)*

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Back in the days of tanners and bobs,  
When Mothers had patience and Fathers  
had jobs.  
When football team families wore hand  
me down shoes,  
and T.V gave only two channels to choose.  
Back in the days of threepenny bits,  
when schools employed nurses to search for your nits.  
When snowballs were harmless; ice slides were per-  
mitted  
and all of your jumpers were warm and hand knitted.  
Back in the days of hot ginger beers,  
when children remained so for more than six years.  
When children respected what older folks said,  
and pot was a thing you kept under your bed.  
Back in the days of Listen with Mother,  
when neighbours were friendly and talked to each oth-  
er.  
When cars were so rare you could play in the street.  
When Doctors made house calls; Police walked the beat.  
Back in the days of Milligan's Goons,  
when butter was butter and songs all had tunes.  
It was dumplings for dinner and trifle for tea,  
and your annual break was a day by the sea.  
Back in the days of Dixon's Dock Green,  
Crackerjack pens and Lyons ice cream.  
When children could freely wear National Health glass-  
es,  
and teachers all stood at the FRONT of their classes.  
Back in the days of rocking and reeling,  
when mobiles were things that you hung from the ceil-  
ing.  
When woodwork and pottery got taught in schools,  
and everyone dreamt of a win on the pools.  
Back in the days when I was a lad,  
I can't help but smile for the fun that I had.  
Hopscotch and roller skates; snowballs to lob.  
Back in the days of tanners and bobs.



Thank you Ron Emery from Dad Jokes England on Face-  
book

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## CORPORAL ERIC HEATHCOTE'S D-DAY ON OMAHA BEACH

Edited Report on the Landing in France of 21BD Sector on D-day, 6 June 1944

*(I came across this unexpected RAF D-Day episode on Omaha Beach. Amazing what you learn on the web. Ed.)*

The first Echelon of 21 B.D. Sector (*a BDS was what passed for a mobile radar unit to vector allied aircraft over the beachheads during the landings*) embarked in five LCT's (Landing Craft, Tanks) on June 2nd 1944, at Portland, where they remained in harbour until Sunday, June 4th 1944. At approx. 04:00 hrs the armada left port and set sail for Poole. Before reaching there

when the ramps were lowered. But, as the convoy approached, it was clear that the beach was still under machine gun fire as well as heavy shelling. It was obviously inappropriate to land non-combatant vehicles at that time, so we withdrew.

During this time heavy shelling of the cliffs was being carried out by the Royal Navy to try to silence the shore batteries that were concentrating their fire upon the beaches. Despite this, at 1700 hrs, the convoy was directed to the beach at St Laurent, having been ordered to land there whatever the outcome. This was about one mile west of Colleville-sur-Mer, which had been our intended landfall.

As we drew close to the shore, we saw that this, too,

was under heavy fire from 88 mm guns that were zeroed in on the beach and were consistently shelling the American vehicles that were lined up there. These were unable to get away as both exits from this beach were blocked.

Nevertheless, it was considered timely for 21 B.D. Sector to land there. Most of the vehicles disembarked in over 4ft of water but many suddenly became total-

ly submerged in en-

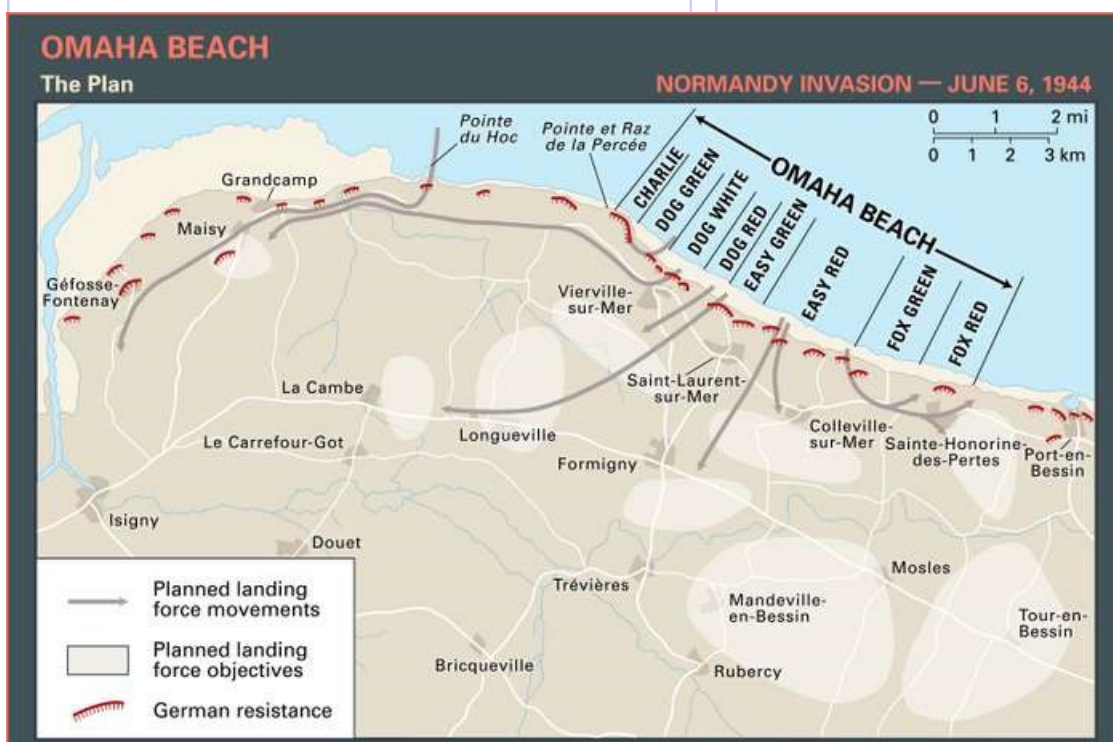
countering hidden shell holes. In all 27 vehicles disembarked, but only 8 were driven off the beach, others to be salvaged in various states of disrepair.

### The Team:

Editor, John Hannon, roving reporter, Alain Dardelin, photographers, Régis Pizot and Simone Meyer, contributing reporters and lifesavers, Alan Baker, Margaret Duff and Graham Robertson.

We regret to announce the passing of the following Member

Andrew Culliford, Life Member 17 May 2020



the whole fleet turned around and was back in port again by 0700 hrs, where it remained until 0430 hrs the following morning. At this time the armada set sail for France. The rendezvous off the coast of Normandy was reached soon after dawn on 6th June 1944. The sea voyage was completely without any enemy interference; no enemy aircraft having been seen during the whole voyage. The sea was rough, with a strong south-westerly wind blowing.

A first attempt at landing was made at 1130 hrs on 6th June 1944. The convoy moved towards the beach with the engines of all vehicles running, ready to disembark

LCT 649 dropped its ramp on a sandbank, in 4 ft of water, but considerably further out to sea than the other landing craft. In driving ashore the vehicles were soon submerged in 6ft of water, their occupants needing to scramble onto the tops of the vehicles to avoid being drowned.

All the vehicles from this craft were lost except one; this one never disembarked due to a failure to start. The skipper refused to countenance any delay. With such a considerable distance to swim there was great difficulty in saving the men from this craft; but we eventually got them all safely ashore without loss of life. Very soon after the vehicles were landed, they came under further shellfire from an 88mm gun and a number of them were destroyed as it was impossible to move them off the beach with both exits being completely blocked. This beach was more or less deserted, except for the crews of the American vehicles that were jammed on the beach, and for the many American dead and wounded who had been lying there since the first assault. We learned later that, in view of the fact that the emergency Medical Services were almost completely wiped out, and the fact that the beach was still under heavy shell fire, it had been decided to postpone the landing of the elaborate beach marshalling organization that was intended to handle the disembarkation of the "follow-up" RAF units. Our whole unit came under heavy shelling on the beach and we soon made our way to the top of the beach, where we dug foxholes in the shingle for shelter, and remained there until the situation could be reviewed and a place found for the Unit to be moved to; the front line being only about a mile inland.

Our wounded Padre, Squadron Leader Harding, gallantly reconnoitred the little village of Les Moulins, which is situated at the westerly end of that beach. He came back and reported that this village was not under fire and afforded some cover. Squadron Leader Trollope then went over the beach and ordered everybody to move to this western end of the beach, the men at this time being very scattered in craft-loads. For the next two hours, all personnel who were not wounded, were employed at the exit of the beach either in helping to recover vehicles from the sea, with a bulldozer that had now arrived, or with carrying both our own and American wounded off the beach. Whilst mostly under fire, our Medical Officer, Flight Lieutenant

Ryecroft, aided by the Padre, was continuously employed rendering emergency medical aid to the wounded under the worst possible conditions, from the time of landing until late the following afternoon; by which time all the wounded had received further treatment at the American Forward Aid Post that overlooked the next beach. All of our serious cases were evacuated to U.K. that night by LCT, except Wing Commander Anderson, who stayed until the following day to have his arm X-rayed and to see what was to happen to the Unit. When these tasks at the beachhead were completed, the unit moved up the road to the small hamlet of Les Moulins. Some of the treated wounded were taken to a courtyard of a house in this village, the rest being taken to a convenient crater on the beach, above the high water mark, where we made them as comfortable as possible for the night. The rest of the unit spent the night lying on the edge of the road at the entrance to the village, which was situated between two thickly wooded hills. In most places there was a low wall at the side of the road. This rendered some shelter from the sniping that continued throughout the night from the hills on both sides. The cliffs were full of snipers who had access to underground passages, like rabbit warrens, honeycombing the whole area.

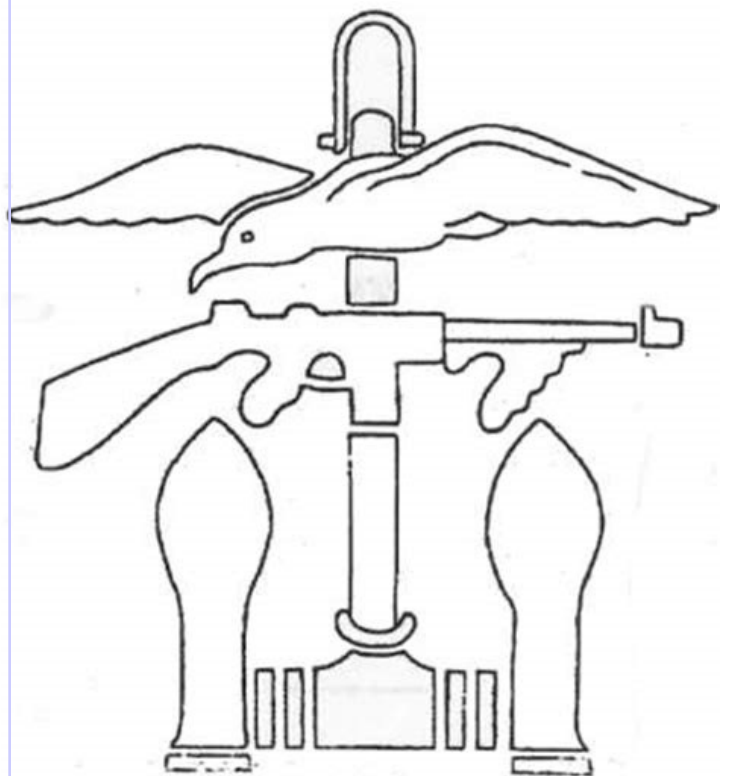
Soon after dark six Junkers JU88's, the only enemy aircraft so far seen or heard, came over and dropped some bombs on the beach. One of these aircraft was shot down by the Royal Navy.

At intervals throughout the night we were disturbed by shelling from the 88mm guns, that burst just above us. At 0500 hrs S/Ldr Trollope went up the road to see if it was possible to move the Unit farther inland, as we were obviously in a very dangerous position and our remaining vehicles were blocking the road should further transport be disembarked. It appeared from S/Ldr Trollope's reconnoitre that it might be possible to move a mile or so up the road. In fact, F/Lt Efinberger, who had been sent up this road to find a position to park the Unit, came back to report that the road was now under cross machine-gun fire. He had been fired at a number of times; on one occasion having his steel helmet knocked off. From our later experience it is likely this was 'friendly' fire by the Americans, who frequently mistook our R.A.F. blue uniforms for the enemy's field grey; so we stayed where we were. Actually, nothing else was disembarked on this beach, after us,

until late the following afternoon. At about 1100 hrs the 88 mm guns opened up on the beach with greater determination, so the Unit, after a further reconnaissance, moved up the road about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile and, as Transit Area No. 3 was still not taken, we pulled into a field. This field was full of American snipers, who were firing over our heads at random into the wooded hillside. There was also a certain amount of return fire from enemy snipers, but nobody was seen to be hit. At approx. 1400 hrs, Major Kolakos, the US Intelligence Office of 49th A.A. Brigade, contacted us in the field and told us that Gen. Timberlake suggested that the unit pull into Transit Area No. 2, at the top of the hill, and adjacent to his headquarters. This was the first official contact of any sort that had been made with the Americans since landing. We moved out of this field almost immediately. We passed through the village of St Laurent (where terrific rifle fire was taking place) and settled in Transit Area No. 2 for the night. This place was pretty crowded but we managed to find room to dig foxholes to sleep in. It was an extremely noisy position, as there was cross shell fire going on overhead between the Navy and the 88 mm guns that were still shelling both beaches. The Military position during the whole of this period was extremely precarious, the bridgehead reported not to be anywhere more than 2 to 3 miles deep. W/Cdr Anderson, who had been wounded in the wrist, and S/Ldr Trollope contacted Gen. Timberlake in the evening and the position was reviewed. It was decided to move out next morning, June 8th, to a nearby field so that we could examine our equipment to see if it was possible to get any of it operational. By that time S/Ldr Best and the other technical officers (who had worked unceasingly salvaging equipment of all sorts from the beaches, ranging from complete vehicles, down to small items of serviceable equipment from derelict vehicles) considered that it would be possible for the GCI Radar Unit to set up and become operational if a site was selected, our intended site still being in the hands of the enemy. S/Ldr Trollope again saw Gen. Timberlake, and a site was chosen that overlooked the cliff at Pointe-du-Hoc. The convoy moved there through Vierville-sur-Mer in the afternoon, and our Radar equipment was set up ready to become operational on the following night. The 83 Group HQ part of our convoy having been established in Vierville-sur-Mer, by the afternoon of the 9th, the

military position in this sector had improved to such an extent, the bridgehead now being 7 to 8 miles deep, that a signal was received, ordering G.C.I. 15082 to prepare to move to another location. The work of packing up was started immediately, hence the Unit did not operate on the night of 9th June as planned. We moved to the new site on June 10th, where we set up and became operational that night, to claim one enemy aircraft destroyed and one aircraft damaged. Up to and including 9th June there were large numbers of snipers in all the area surrounding St Laurent, with sniping continuing almost incessantly day and night. There was also a terrific barrage at intervals every night, from heavy and light AA, when enemy aircraft were over the area. The snipers were firmly established, some in underground tunnels, others in thick woods surrounding the village. It was found that some of these were secured in trees, by the aid of nets, and firing smokeless ammunition making them almost impossible to find until they gave themselves up when their ammunition had run out.

Of the total of 47 casualties that our Unit suffered 1 officer and 9 other ranks were killed; 1 was reported missing; and 5 officers and 31 other ranks were wounded (one of whom subsequently died).







### **A word from our Chairman:**

Do you, for those of us who are old enough, have memories of 8 May 1945 – what you were doing, where you were? If you would like to share those memories with other Branch Members please send them to me and I will forward them to our Members if you allow or maybe include them in the next Roundel.

My memories as a nine year old were the excitement of the huge crowds around the Monument in the centre of Penrith, Cumberland as it was then, staying out very late in the daylight until well after 11 o'clock – remember we had Double Summertime in those days.

To celebrate, Castletown, the area of Penrith where I lived, organized the first Castletown Gala a few days later. The Gala was still going strong in 1982 as you can see from the photograph published in the Cumberland & Westmorland Herald in 1945 and again in 1982. I played a 'paper & comb' in the Band – for those who know me see if you find me.

I look forward to hearing some memories. Best wishes, Bryan



# **Royal Air Forces Association**



## **Swiss Branch**

### **List of events 2020**

**Watch this space**

