

# PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM NEWSLETTER

## February - March 2021



***Celebrating 40 Years  
1981- 2021***

### **From our Chairman**

It is my pleasure to introduce another edition of our newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading our latest offerings.

Work has continued throughout the winter to complete our new Exhibition Hall, to be named the “Kindred Building”. The concept is a building that conforms to modern standards but looks as much as possible like one from the 1940s. Wartime style lights create a yellow glow whilst glass cabinets are lit with LEDs and artefacts are displayed with new style, easier to read labels. Various photos and memorabilia are wall mounted in the research area. We are working with local families to identify the personnel in some of the local Home Guard and Auxiliary photos.

The additional space allows us to display several items that were in store. These include original records and an Imperial typewriter, like that used by Joan Bright to type up Col Gubbin’s *The Art of Guerrilla Warfare* in 1939. Ever mindful of the need to appeal to children, we have provided a dressing up rail from which younger visitors can try on various items of American and British uniforms and equipment.

Our little working group has been much encouraged by the positive response of the very few who have seen the results of our efforts. The attempt to blend the history of the locality, the British Resistance and Station 153 with world events seems to be especially appreciated. The last set of wall mounted display boards are being manufactured as I write. Most of the electrical work in the replica base is complete. There just remains the locating of some mannequins and floor painting, and the hall will be ready to open.

The final stage of the project will be an attached building to house our 390<sup>th</sup> jeep. It will also store artefacts from the replica operational base, which must be removed to a dry environment during the winter.

Whilst all this has been going on, we have been improving other areas of the museum too. For example, the barrack room and showers have been refurbished, as has the old Signals Office on the first floor. There is a corner devoted to the airmen's pet mascots. It is always important to remember that the Tower itself is a significant historical exhibit, so we are ensuring that each part has a clear description of its original function.

When will we be able to open to visitors? We are normally closed at this time of year, but all museums are shut because of the Coronavirus. We remain optimistic that government restrictions will be gradually lifted this spring. Currently we are using the latest safety advice to plan our visitor experience to make it "COVID secure". When we first open, this will mean some significant changes to ensure the safety of visitors and volunteer staff. These may include limiting visitor numbers and other measures to ensure strict hygiene and social distancing. We trust you will agree that it is better to open with these precautions in place than not to open at all for the new season.

We thank you for your continued support. Please concentrate on keeping well so that you can visit us this summer!

**Peter Senior**

### **From our President**

Following a very windy, cold (down to -10°C!), snowy spell of weather with snow drifting across the aerodrome, our working party volunteers have complained of the cold in the Control Tower.... It makes us realise what conditions would have been like for the servicemen from warmer climates working in that uninsulated Control Tower building. It would have been worse in their sleeping barracks; tin clad Nissen Huts, with only half a bucket of coal for the night to warm them.



However, conditions for the ground crews working outside all night to prepare their aircraft for the next day's missions with a vicious cold east wind blowing across the airfield must have been almost intolerable. They certainly needed their tents for a little protection and waste oil burners to warm their hands.



One wonders, if conditions in 1944 may have been similar to, or possibly worse than, today's weather with dense fog also to contend with. There are local people alive that still recall that fateful day, the 27<sup>th</sup> December, when the 390<sup>th</sup> were sent on a mission to aid the "Battle of the Bulge", resulting in a disastrous crash in Parham.

*T2 Hangar and Control Tower at Sunset*

The group of very brave pilots took off at about 8.15 under instruments, heading for the rail yards at Fulda in Germany, with icing on the wing tips and props. Visibility was so poor the planes taking off could not be seen from the Tower. Regrettably, one plane, B-17G *Gloria Anne II* clipped a tree close to the end of the runway and crashed onto the railway line and into the Methodist chapel in the village. All 6 bombs on board exploded, resulting in a dreadful scene of carnage and debris. All the crew, members of the 569<sup>th</sup>, were KIA. Fortunately, no villagers were seriously injured; the crash occurred just a few minutes before the 9 o'clock church service.



**Peter Kindred**



## Roy Langley

Roy died on January 8th while undergoing treatment for Covid-19. He will be remembered by all his friends at Parham Airfield Museum as a quiet, dignified man and a loyal friend to many. Roy was, unarguably, one of the longest and most dependable supporters of both the 390th Bombardment Group Museum of the USAAF and the British Resistance Organisation Museum, both of which are situated within Parham Airfield Museum itself.

Roy was very much a man of Aldeburgh, where he spent most of his life except for the two years or so on National Service in the RAF. He worked for many years for the local Water Board. He had a masterly technique with a spade and this undoubtedly saved a fortune for the Board which, with his speciality in the vanguard, enabled them to delay the purchase of heavy trench digging equipment for several years. It also stood him in good stead with the Aldeburgh Allotment Association, of which he was a long serving participant.

And then, when supporters of the BROM rashly decided to clear many tons of Suffolk clay from the local Auxiliary Units secret hideaway at Sibton, he outlasted all other volunteers in the grinding task of filling the buckets for his fellow taskmaster, Jim Knappett, to haul to the surface. There the rest of us, all-talk second raters, took our time to decide how best to ditch the contents with the minimum of our effort.

Green-fingered Roy took command of the gardens and during most weekends, he was planting and weeding and watering and thus adding to many visitors' appreciation. Roy was also expert with a strimmer and tidied the weeds ever closer to the lower level of the Nissen Huts, so closely indeed that the whirring impact of the cutting apparatus was said by an unsmiling library staff within, to be 'louder than the bombardment at El Alamein.'

Those of us who were to benefit from his many kindnesses, his thoughtful consideration for others, and to know his undemanding modesty, will miss his quiet presence in some unassuming role. For, although he was not a man to expect special recognition, he was always in the front line as a volunteer and as such, a valued mainstay in the development of Parham Airfield Museum.



May God Bless you, Roy. And, as we were born within a fortnight of one another in 1930, do please keep a place up there for me too - wherever it is that you may now find yourself.

**John Warwicker**

## New Building Photo Journal



*New exhibition hall with blast wall*



*Above, new rifle display feature*



*The interior and displays are almost finished*



*Right, British Resistance study area*



*Left, some of the display cabinets with WWII timeline to rear*

## FORTY YEAR FLASHBACK

As our museum enters its 40<sup>th</sup> year since the Control Tower was opened to the public, we thought it would be fitting to look back at how the museum was started and remember our founding volunteers.

After the war, local farmer Percy Kindred used the Control Tower as a store room for fertiliser, but in the 1970s it became redundant.

Ron Buxton had witnessed a Hurricane being shot down in the early stages of the war at Bredfield near Woodbridge. This sparked his lifelong interest in researching crash sites and aviation history. He approached Percy in 1976 to find a home for the various engines he had retrieved and asking what his plans were for the Control Tower. Percy had much admiration for the Americans who were based here and liked the idea of renovating the Tower as a tribute to the endeavours of the 390th Bomb Group.

He gave Ron free use of the building and a group of aviation enthusiasts started work to restore the old Control Tower. It took the volunteers five years to complete the entirely self-funded renovation project.



Museum supporter and nephew of 390<sup>th</sup> Veteran Emil Mateyak, Bob Jesko, sent us these photos from his first visit to Parham in the 1980s.

*Left, the Control Tower, with Ron Buxton's car in front.*

***From left to right some early museum volunteers including founding volunteers Colin Durrant and Ron Buxton to the right.***



## **The History of Our Nissen Hut- Part 1**

After the Museum opened in 1981, one of the questions asked by our visitors was where could they get a cup of tea. As funds were limited, this question could not be addressed until later. During the AGM of November 1989, the subject of erecting a Nissen (Quonset) hut was discussed. In 1990, plans were submitted to Suffolk Coastal District Council for permission to erect the building and permission was granted. The Museum was indebted to the Kindred family for providing the land adjacent to the Control Tower and Mr John Gray of Moat Farm donated a Nissen Hut from the 571<sup>st</sup> Squadron area which was sited on his farm.

Work began in September 1990, excavations completed and the metal hoops of the Nissen Hut cleaned and painted. It was during this time that a water supply was laid on. The supply to the T2 hangar was located and a pipe was teed into it, a trench dug (avoiding land drains); instant water. Work went on during the winter to complete the building. When finished, the new building would have toilets, a kitchen, a sales area and floor space for tables and chairs for our visitors. Heavy duty carpet tiles were laid on the floor, courtesy of Royal Mail, Felixstowe. The building was completed, fitted out and ready for the re-opening of the new season, March 1991.

During the construction of the new building, Percy Kindred reported that the 571<sup>st</sup> Squadron ghost had put in an appearance. As the framework of the Nissen Hut was 571<sup>st</sup> it could well have been his accommodation.

**Mick Tipple**

## **FROM OUR ARCHIVIST**

### **GENERAL SUMMARIES**

#### **February 1945**

Although weather permitted fifteen operational missions in February, heavy cloud cover over Germany restricted the Group's bombardiers to only three visual sightings on their targets. H2X technique was employed on ten of the missions and Micro-H on the remaining two. Four missions were considered successful, one partially successful, one unsuccessful and for nine, results were unknown.

Two missions to Berlin, in direct cooperation with the great Russian offensive on the Eastern front, highlighted the month's roster of operations. A departure from ordinary bombing technique was established when the Group's aircraft attacked certain visual, tactical targets, relatively flak-free, from altitudes as low as 15,000 feet. Indications point to future attacks on such targets from even lower altitudes.

Losses for the month were extremely low. One aircraft, hit by flak at the target, broke in two and exploded. Another crashed in the North Sea returning from a mission and a third crashed in France after its crew had bailed out. Six aircraft landed on the Continent and had not returned to the base at the close of the month. 22 men are missing in action, 4 wounded in action and two killed in action.

No combat claims were submitted during the month.

22 new crews were received from the Replacement Pool, processed and given ground and air training before being sent on operations.

## MARCH 1945

As rapidly shrinking enemy-held territory reduced almost to the vanishing point the number of strategic targets open to heavy bombardment, the Group, during the month of March, concentrated on targets of a more tactical nature. 22 operational missions were flown in March, the second highest number in the Group's history, exceeded only by the 25 missions flown in June 1944 under the impetus of D-Day.

Outstanding among the March missions were the two flown on the 24<sup>th</sup> in support of the Rhine crossings when airfields at Steenwijk and Ziegenhain were successfully attacked and that of the 31<sup>st</sup>, on which the Group led the Eighth Air Force, bombing oil refineries and marshalling yards at Zeitz, Bad Berka and Erfurt with good results.

H2X technique was employed on eight missions, Micro-H on four, eight missions were visual, one a H2X-visual combination and on one bombs were dropped on smoke flares of the preceding group when the 390<sup>th</sup>'s beacon equipment failed. Nine missions were considered successful, three unsuccessful, and for ten, results are unknown.

Seven aircraft were reported missing for the month, with 64 combat crewmen listed as missing in action. Five men were slightly wounded in action.

The Group's Forts met enemy fighters on several occasions but only one combat claim was reported. A bombardier was officially credited with damaging an ME262 on the Berlin mission of 18 March.

The new nine ship-four squadron formation was flown for the first time in March. This formation allows greater striking power by providing one additional sighting for the same number of ships previously making up the Group's formations.

12 new crews were received from the Replacement Center, processed and given ground and air training before being sent on operations.



# AIRMAN OF THE MONTH

February



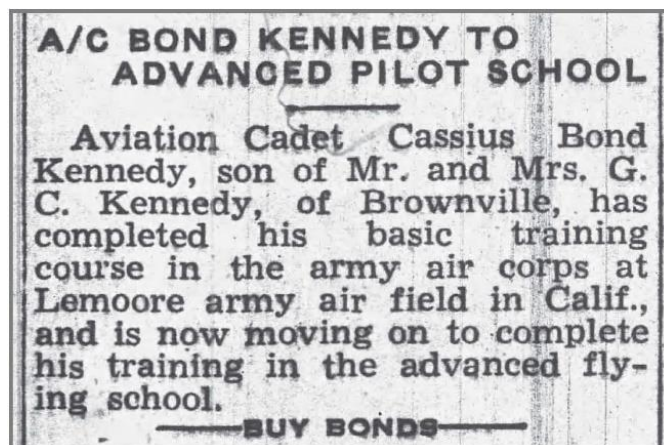
## CASSIUS BOND KENNEDY

**16<sup>th</sup> September 1921 – 17<sup>th</sup> February 1945**

Cassius was born in Nemaha County, Nebraska. He enlisted into the USAAF on 4 March 1943 and trained as a pilot. He was killed on his ninth mission from Station 153.

A/C566 was returning from the mission to Frankfurt, when there was an explosion in the nose of the aircraft, which started a fire. Three crew members bailed out over the sea only one surviving. The aircraft crashed into the North Sea with the rest of the crew still onboard including Cassius.

Cassius is listed on the Tablets of the Missing at the Henri-Chapelle American War Cemetery, Belgium and on a memorial stone in his home County. He was 23.



*Nemaha County Herald 27 January 1944*

**XXXX**

# AIRMAN OF THE MONTH

## March



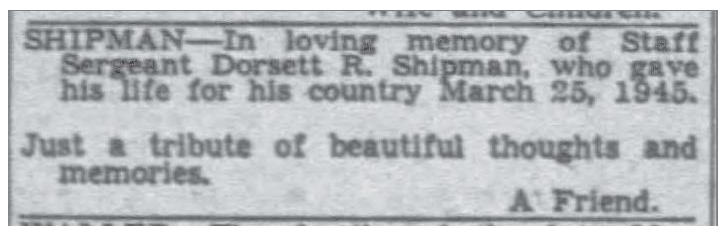
### DORSETT RANDOLPH SHIPMAN

**14<sup>th</sup> May 1924 – 14<sup>th</sup> March 1945**

Dorsett was born in Richmond, Virginia. He enlisted into the USAAF on 2 January 1943 and was trained as a waist gunner. He was killed on his thirty-fifth mission from Station 153.

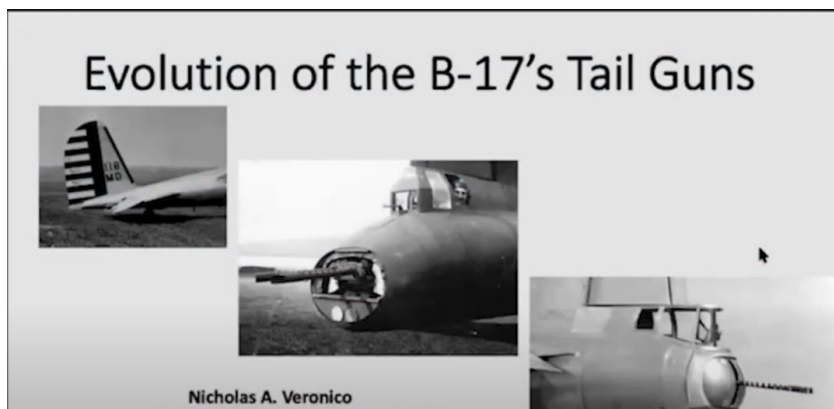
A/C831 'Lady Velma' was involved in a mid-air collision while on Mission 274 to Seelze, Germany. A/C831 was caught in prop wash, the right wing crashing in to the vertical fin of A/C972, flying no.6 in the lead element, bounced off and crashed in to it again. Both aircraft burst in to flames and exploded several seconds later. Pieces of both planes were seen falling to earth. Crews observed only one chute from the total of both planes.

Dorsett is buried in Oakwood Cemetery, in his home town of Richmond. He was 20.



## Nick Veronico's Presentation on the "Evolution of the B-17's Tail Guns"

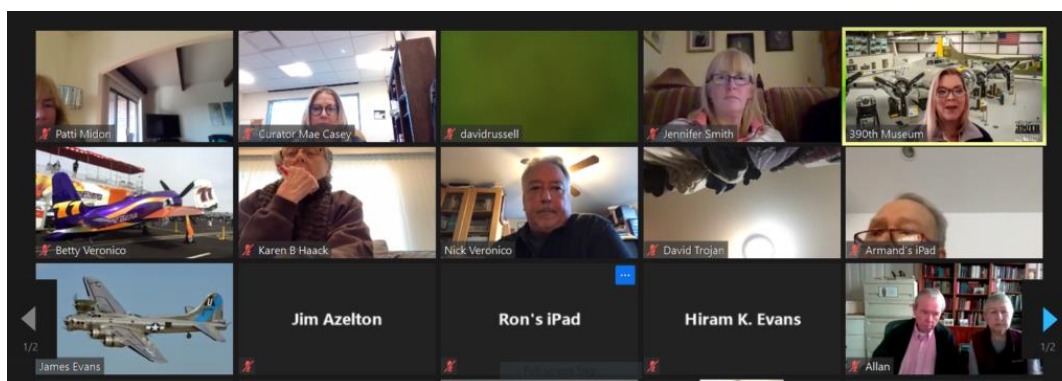
Nick Veronico, who is an aviation author, did a presentation (via Zoom) one Saturday morning in January, from his home in California, about a B-17 tail turret that he had restored over 30 years and has now loaned to the 390<sup>th</sup> museum in Tucson. The presentation documented the restoration process but also the history of the tail turret.



Steve and I attended the Zoom presentation and the unveiling of the turret at the museum, although it was late afternoon in the UK and the glasses of wine we were holding did confuse the American audience somewhat!!

While about 45 people attended the Zoom, the presentation is now available online. We hope you enjoy it as much as we did. The images he shared were some we'd never seen before and his expert commentary was thorough and fascinating.

It is a YouTube video, but the best way to find it is via the 390<sup>th</sup> website [www.390.org](http://www.390.org).



**Jennie Smith**



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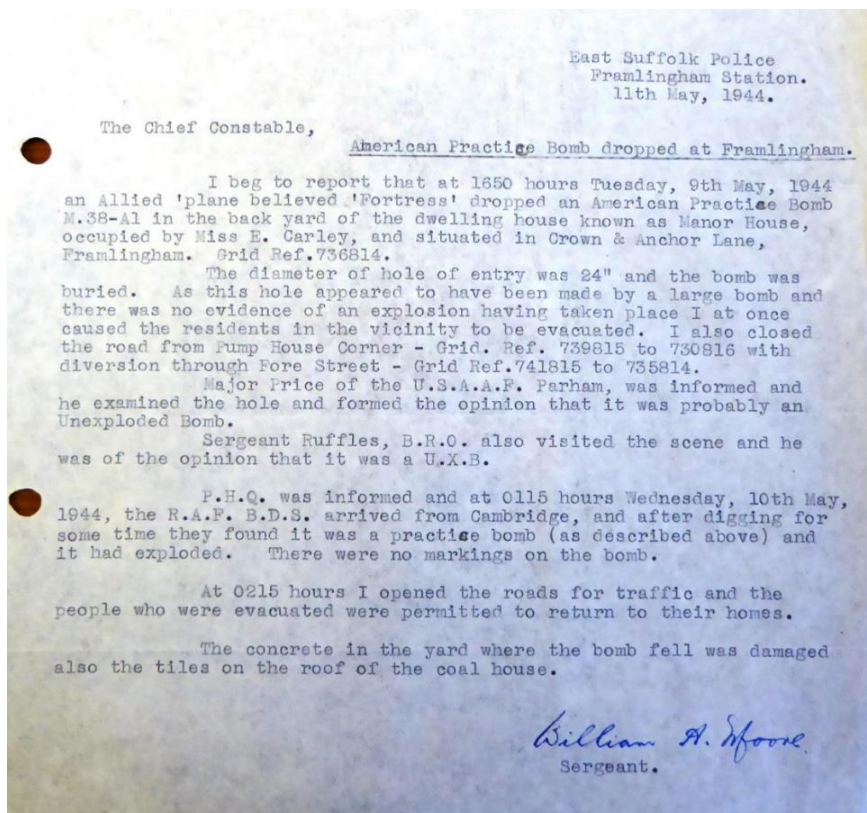


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## The Day a Fortress Bombed Framlingham



On 9<sup>th</sup> May 1944 a bomb was accidentally dropped on a house in the town. After local people had been evacuated, it was eventually identified as a practice bomb. Several instances of enemy bombs falling in the area were recorded, some causing casualties and real damage, so one can understand the concern caused. The official report by the local police makes interesting reading.

Many thanks to local historian John Bridges, who made this available to us, and to the Suffolk County Record Office.



The 569th squadron were given a black bear by Native Americans whilst they were on their final training in Montana. The bear went on several combat missions and was a familiar sight around the base. He would stroll around the village of Parham and once even ventured inside the church in the middle of a service to their vicar's astonishment!

More information about this special mascot can be found on display inside the museum.

## BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM

In preparing and cataloguing paperwork for the new Kindred Room I came across a file with a number of transcripts of interviews with veterans conducted by John Warwicker and other members of the museum. Some of the names will be familiar but others less so.

### **Major RF 'Henry' Hall MC Dorset Regiment & Auxiliary Units**

The papers included a memoir by Major 'Henry' Hall which starts in February 1941. Prior to that, in 1934, Hall had joined the Artists Rifles, a Territorial battalion. The battalion was mobilised on 3rd September 1939 and, after further training, he was commissioned into 4th Battalion The Dorset Regiment. The 4th Dorsets were part of General Andrew 'Bulgy' Thorne's XII Corps and Hall would go on to work with the men of XII Corps Observation Unit.

In February 1941 Hall was a Lieutenant with 4<sup>th</sup> Dorsets in 130 Brigade 43<sup>rd</sup> Division. Being ordered to form a Battle Patrol he and his sergeant were sent on an advanced Assault Course at the Irregular Warfare Training Centre at Inverailort. Before even arriving at Inverailort it would appear that the training began as, under a hail of machine guns and mortars, the train was brought to an abrupt halt and was surrounded by instructors. The men were ordered off the train and, under continuous fire, were doubled about a mile and a half to what was called the Big House.

Major Hall wrote of his first meeting with Fairbairn and Sykes who were there to teach the men 'dirty tricks'. He recalled how the trainees were gathered at the foot of a large staircase when *".....two old gentlemen, aged 58 and 56, dressed in battledress with the rank of Captain and both wearing glasses, appeared at the top of the stairs. They proceeded to fall down the stairs together landing in a battle-crouch position at the bottom with a handgun in one hand and the Fairbairn Sykes knife in the other....."*. Having learnt their trade on the Shanghai waterfront, Fairbairn and Sykes taught their students all the vulnerable parts of the body and the holds necessary to disarm and put down an opponent as well as the use of a handgun and knife.

Returning from Inverailort, Hall and his Battle Patrol *".....had a wonderful time swanning about Kent, testing security at Headquarters and Camps, disrupting communications and training my battalion and other units in dirty tricks"*.

One day Hall was ordered by Brigade to contact an unnamed Captain at a grid reference which turned out to be halfway between Canterbury and Ashford.

The unnamed Captain told him that he commanded the East Kent 'Observation Unit' whose job was to "*lie low and harass the enemy once they had landed*". He and Hall were to put on a demonstration to certain officers of 130 Brigade. Hall was invited 'unofficially' to help train these men of the Auxiliary Units. He wrote that "*.....he put me in touch with many men in Kent and I trained them in dirty tricks and helped them site and construct their hidey-holes*". Hall was obviously very impressed with the auxiliaries as he wrote "*All the men I came across were of the highest calibre - intelligent, very dedicated - real men of the soil and most efficient and I am sure that had the Germans invaded they would have caused havoc*".

Following his service with the Aux Units, in August 1943, Hall returned to his unit as an Infantry Platoon Commander to begin training for 'D' Day. 4th Dorsets landed at Le Hamel in the second wave. To recall Hall's wartime



exploits would require a dissertation of its own. For his service at Arnhem, in Operation Market Garden, he was awarded the Military Cross. Although in BBC's People at War he wrote *that "I don't really think it was for Arnhem, but that was what the citation said, I think it was because I had been responsible for killing more Germans than most people (we killed 17 Tiger/Panther tanks, some SP guns — never kept a score of men)"*.

Hall was wounded in the left side of his chest on 21st November 1944 but his memoir gave no details of the circumstances.

After the war Hall served in various capacities in Italy, Austria, West Africa, Hong Kong and the UK. He retired from the army in October 1956.

*Photograph whilst convalescing from his wounds.*

**Chris Pratt**

Further reading:

Memoir held at BRO Museum

[www.gallery.commandoveterans.org](http://www.gallery.commandoveterans.org)

[www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar](http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar)

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