

PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2018



Registered Charity Number 284146

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

Thanks once more to the enthusiasm and support of our volunteers we have just ended another successful 2018 season, with increased visitor numbers, including descendants, school visits and various club visits outside normal opening days. We continue to receive excellent reviews in our visitor comments books and on Trip Advisor. Generous donations, from our collecting boxes, the Moller Foundation, and many descendants along with funds gained by our hard working shop ladies and online sales allow us to cover our basic running costs and continue to make improvements to the buildings, displays and exhibitions.

A special thanks to Tim and Julie Brett on their retirement. Their enthusiasm and dedication has certainly helped put Parham Airfield Museum on the map over these past six years, and they have made our visitors feel so welcome. Tim's daily entries on Facebook have created discussion and awareness of the 8th Air-force and have helped ensure that the history of our 390th "boys" is preserved for future generations.



Presenting Tim with whisky glasses and a book

There is so much to report that we have taken the decision to aim to produce newsletters much more frequently. We hope this will allow us to stay in closer contact with our friends, members and supporters.

Peter Kindred

LeRoy Keeping

It is with regret that we announce the death of LeRoy Keeping on 6th November.

LeRoy was ground crew at Parham during the war. He met and married an English girl and after some time in America, they returned and settled in England.

LeRoy was a volunteer at the museum for many years and will be very much missed by his friends here.

There will be a Thanksgiving Service for LeRoy on 30th November to be held at the United Free Church, Framlingham at 2.30 p.m.

The family have kindly requested no flowers, but donations in lieu to Parham Airfield Museum

BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS

We continue to work on improving our buildings and have several schemes to enhance the presentation and preservation of our artefacts. The museum and its exhibits are held in trust for future generations so that the sacrifices made to defend freedom are never forgotten.

Preserving the Veterans Wall



The signatures of aircrew veterans on the chapel end wall are irreplaceable and attract much interest. Recently we have been concerned about their long-term preservation, given the effects of light and humidity. Close inspection showed rising damp. So last winter we set about improving drainage beneath the wall by digging a trench and connecting it to the airfield drains. Our President made the excellent suggestion that the wall would be even drier if it were no longer an external one. During last winter he led a project to extend

the Nissen hut by creating an extra space, to be entered through the door in the old end wall. This will become a new Prisoner of War exhibition - more on this next month!

The next task is the painstaking work of restoring the older signatures. This is being undertaken by Steve Smith and Kath Kindred.

Our New Building Project

Several of our buildings are in the classic wartime style of a Nissen or Quonset hut. They look and feel very reminiscent of the 1940s but have very little insulation and are prone to damp. During the winter the one which houses the Auxiliary Units' exhibits serves as a store for artefacts displayed in the replica underground Operations Base where humidity levels cannot be managed. Thus our focus has been on how we can improve our facilities without losing the authentic "feel" of Station 153 Framlingham in 1943-1945. Pressure for a solution is increased by the rate at which our supporters donate items for us to display! **Next month, we will reveal more details about our proposed building project.**

Peter Senior - Project Co-Ordinator

A REMINDER OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE - *Ralph Hartman's Memoirs*

This newsletter is about what we have been doing at the museum. However, as we write it, thoughts are turning to commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Armistice of 11th November 1918. The annual reunion of the 390th Bomb group has just taken place, with a talk by Frank & Kevin Drain about Parham then and now. Thus it seems right to include here memoirs from one crew of the 390th.

Ralph R. Hartman was 1st Lieutenant in the 390th's 570th Squadron who served as a bombardier. He wrote a detailed memoir entitled "*How I Got There and Back*". His crew completed their tour of 35 missions in just 88 days, from 23 January to 20 April 1945, which they claimed as a record.



Ralph Hartman and his Memoirs. His family gifted this special item to the museum during their visit in Summer 2018.

This archive also includes typed entries from the diaries kept by three of the crew. These were John Durkin, Ball Turret Gunner; Ralph Hartman, Bombardier, and John O'Brian, Pilot. The entries for one mission to Berlin on 19 March 1945 show the intensity of the action and how different crew members saw events. It was very late in the war over Europe but.....

John Durkin:

Today was the roughest mission I have ever been on. I know I will never describe in words the way I felt up there today. Before we got to the target we were hit by fighters, they shot down two planes out of formation next to us, then they started after us. I shot at an Me 210 that flew under us, but he was too far away. I think I might have helped to scare him away. Hartman shot at a jet that came in front of the formation. Then the P51 came and chased him away. Just about then the flack started. God I was scared, I don't know what to do so I just prayed. I don't see how we ever made it. The ship behind got the whole nose shot off, and caught on fire, he dove the fire out but he couldn't hold her up and he went down. Planes had holes all over them, and they just kept going. The flack was exploding right under our ship, and sometimes it would lift the tail right up in the air. We nearly got hit by another B17, he flew right under us, when he got hit by flack, and almost took the ball turret with him. When we got back to the field we had thirteen feathered props, and about five ships with wounded aboard. We carried delayed fuses and we had to sweat them out. Boy the whole crew was scared half to death when we got back. It don't make any difference how good a man you are, that flack scares us.

Ralph Hartman:

Target Berlin railroad marshalling yards. Bombs 6 1000lb delayed action fuses. Flying time 0715. Flack moderate very accurate. Don't know why we didn't have it. Fighters 4 or 5 ME262. Knocked down 3 planes from 95th Bomb Gr. Fired on one blow job just after target. Battle damage two holes in wings. Should have had more. Flew slot low of low. Altitude 24800. Ship 836 Chapel in the Sky. Visual. Primary. Lost three ships by flack in this group. One in 570th SQD, ship 265 MRHOZ, correction, all but MROZ came back.

John O'Brian:

Marshalling yards. 6 IM delayed action jobs. We hear from them in about 3 days. Alt. 24800. Flak from 1 to 12 o'clock intense, accurate, tracking, barrage, persistent and everlasting – 28 minutes. It was terrific all over. Jets in the area making passes didn't help matters any. Mroz went down right in front of us with #3 and the whole nose shot away. I was scared to death and no kidding. We all said our prayers today. It was 265 that went down. We flew it yesterday. Time 7:15. 836 Chapel in the Sky. I hope I never go to that place again.

We dedicate this piece to the memory of each of the 742 brave airmen of the 390th who never came back.

GIFTS TO THE MUSEUM DURING 2018

We regularly receive gifts to add to our museum collections. Our staff do not ask for them, kind people just bring items in or post them. Since January 2018 we have catalogued 71 separate artefacts. These include, for example: a 1940s doll's pram; a parachute; a wartime poster warning the public about the danger of anti-personnel butterfly bombs; two welfare biscuit tins from Chowhound Missions; numerous model planes; prop feathering cog from B17 42-31218 ETO-Itis; a smoke float box and another wooden box for Mustang P51 rockets. Readers will appreciate that there are too many to list here!

SOME OF OUR RECENT VISITORS



Left: David & Vikki Todd.

David's father was Pilot Robert Todd, who flew 35 missions with the 390th in *G.I. Wonder*, *Cocaine Bill* and *Bomboogie*, amongst other B-17s.



Above and right: Curt, Anna and Lorna Hartman.

Curt and Lorna's father Ralph was a bombardier with the 390th and used the esteemed Norden Bomb Sight.



FROM OUR ARCHIVIST

The 2018 season has proved very busy in the archive department. I have received several requests for research from veteran's families which is very exciting, especially if they are not aware of their relations part in the war. I will be writing more about this in the coming months.

A new innovation started in August, was a daily 'tweet' or Facebook post documenting the events of 75 years ago at Parham as they happened. Using the Station Bulletins, Tower Logs and Mission Reports I hope I am bringing to life the day-to-day base operations, both funny and serious.

Jennie Smith

ORAL HISTORY

Visitors often share their memories with our volunteers. Each month, we hope to share some of these stories with you to help keep the memories alive.

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My Dad was a Lieutenant in the local Home Guard. One night a Pathfinder B17 crashed in to the grounds of Glemham Hall and fetched up against the wall. My Dad and his lads pulled out all the aircrew they could. No one else would go near it because the bombs were about to go off. Dad dragged the pilot out and sat him up. All he kept asking for was a drink of water.

The pilot's name was MacGregor. Years later he visited the museum and I was there as he was looking through some old photos. "I would love to meet the officer who gave me that drink of water", he said. I was able to arrange for him to meet up again with my Dad.

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We lived just beyond the boundary of the airbase at Framlingham. One day my father was doing some tree cutting work on the northern part. They could hear that the bombers had started up but decided to take a short cut along the northern section of the perimeter track. Just as they got onto it, a line of bombers appeared, taxiing clockwise to take off on the main runway. The machine then stalled. They got off and turned the starter handle. Nothing happened. This happened several times as the planes grew closer. At the last moment Dad checked the wiring and found one of the plug leads had disconnected. He put it back on. The engine fired, and they just got out of the way in time. As the lead plane went past the pilot seemed to be saying something to my father and his mate. It did not look very polite!

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Please help us keep this chapter of history alive.

If you have any personal or family memories of the air campaign you would like to share, we would love to hear from you.

Peter Senior



BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM

The BRO Museum has welcomed many visitors over the season, several of whom have travelled considerable distances to visit our unique museum.

One visitor commented *“We had travelled 200 miles to see the replica Operational Base (OB). I wanted to experience and appreciate the cramped and dismal conditions that the Auxiliers had to work in. For me this was the highlight of the visit”*.

Other comments from the BRO guestbook include the following:

“The BRO displays were the icing on the cake”

“The Museum of the British Resistance was very informative about this little known story of wartime history”

“The museum has a rare and faithful recreation of the British Resistance Organisation, Auxiliary Units Bunker, this is certainly worth seeing as provides an insight into the role and hardships that these 'Secret' units would have played, had England been invaded”.

Chris Pratt



Left, BRO volunteer George Brown ‘selling’ Black Market cigarettes to some visitors and explaining pounds, shillings and pence!

The BRO Museum is looking for some extra volunteers to meet and greet visitors and man the museum during opening hours. Please do get in contact if you are interested in helping and have a few hours a month to spare during our open season, April-October.

AND FINALLY....

Trip Advisor

If you have enjoyed your visit to the museum can we ask you to please leave a Trip Advisor review? We love reading them and they encourage more visitors to the museum.

Some of our recent reviews on Trip Advisor:-

Parham Airfield Museum

43 Reviews #7 of 37 things to do in Woodbridge History Museums, Military Museums, Museums
Parham Airfield, Woodbridge IP13 9AF, England +44 1728 621373 Website Email

Review Highlights

"wonderful Museum hours of fun"

we really loved this museum and thoroughly enjoyed talking to the volunteers who are happy to show... read more

 Reviewed 3 January 2018
ac-senttraveller90, London, United Kingdom

"Of particular interest is the Muse..."

A fascinating collection of items connected with the base's role in WW2 - it is a direct link to... read more

 Reviewed 21 September 2017
SussexBloke, Bognor Regis, United Kingdom



"A fantastic museum and a lasting tribute to all who served there"

"We have visited 4 museums of this type recently and Parham is by far the best and most interesting of them all"

"A cracking little museum. The story of the airfield during the war is well told and represented. Standing in the control tower above the museum you get a great feel for what it was like during the period it was operational"

"An amazing museum run by a friendly extremely well informed group of volunteers. An incredible variety of memorabilia displayed in evocative surroundings"

Thank you for your continued support and interest.

If you have any news you would like to share,
please get in touch via parhamairfield@yahoo.co.uk

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