

PARHAM AIRFIELD MUSEUM

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2019



Registered Charity Number 284146

FROM OUR CHAIRMAN

It is my pleasure to introduce to you the April edition of our newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading it. Please pass on copies to your friends or ask them to sign up via the link on our website.

Preparation for the 2019 season continues apace. Major additions to our displays include the P47 Thunderbolt cockpit control panel and the new POW room. We are grateful for a grant from the Association for Suffolk Museums to assist with the POW project. There will be more details of this in future newsletters.



Visitors will also see various new external signs. These have been made as authentically 1940s as possible, so don't be put off if you are confronted with an army style 15mph speed limit warning, or a demand to show your pass to our new Military Policeman in the picket post!

Thank you to all those who attended our AGM on 17th March, at which the accounts were approved, and a new committee appointed. Peter Kindred was once more unanimously elected President, with Kath Kindred again Treasurer. It is almost impossible to list the amount of work they both do for the museum and we are all hugely grateful. I was asked to be Chairman, with Chris Pratt Vice Chair, so you may well be hearing more from us in the future!

Many thanks to all those volunteers who have helped us this winter. Our appreciation and best wishes also go to Tim Brett, who retired as Chair at the AGM and Julie Brett who retired as the Shop Manager.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible this year.

Peter Senior

FROM OUR PRESIDENT

After months of hard work behind the scenes improving our exhibits and adding new displays, we are very excited to be re-opening this month. We have a new committee and chairman, some new volunteers with great ideas and lots of enthusiasm and we are really looking forward to the 2019 season.

We have had some very generous donations from descendants and supporters during the past months which really are much appreciated. The money will help fund our new building project, with new exhibitions and extra space to display more of our memorabilia.

Peter Kindred

A REMINDER OF WHAT IT WAS LIKE- *Cabin in the Sky*

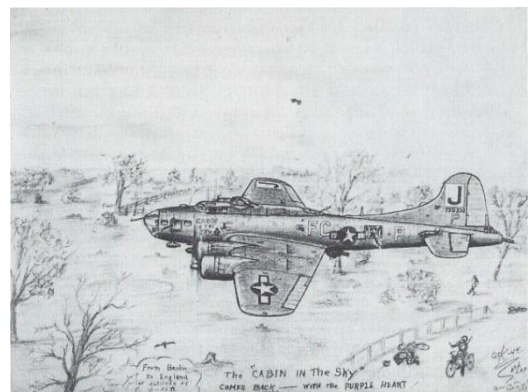
Cabin in the Sky was not usually flown by Lt. Van Houten and crew but on 7th May 1944 she was rostered for Berlin with William Hately in the co-pilot's seat. Hately was trying to make up his quota of missions after a hospital stay so he could fly again with his regular crew in *Decatur Deb*. He wrote an account of this mission years later, as did Charles O. Kemper, the left waist gunner.

Take off was normal and all went well until they met heavy flak between the IP and the target. Suddenly they experienced faults with 2 of the engines and also problems with the oxygen supply. They could not keep up with the group, so dropped their bombs and set course for home.



Top Row L to R:
B. Bouselmeyer, "PT"; Harold E. Peterson, Radio; Alvin D. Sparks, Tail Gunner; Thomas G. Richey, Waist; Don E. Wachs, Engineer; Charles O. Kemper, Waist
Bottom Row L to R:
Edward F. Cooper, Co-Pilot; Thomas G. Miller, Bombardier; Melvin P. Van Houten, Pilot; John P. Dryden, Navigator

The Van Houten Crew with their usual plane. Most of these men were on this mission.



Sketch from Charles O'Kemper's Diary, May 1944

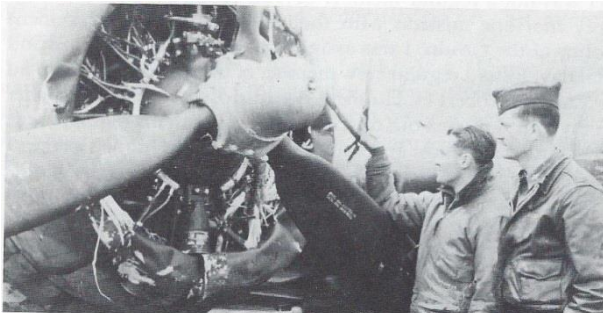
The pilots decided to make the run home at about 25 feet above ground to avoid fighters and being spotted on enemy radar. They had never been allowed to fly so low before because it was too dangerous. They were in for an awesome ride that brought thrills and scares, laughs and pain. As they hurtled along, skimming just above hedges,

trees and power cables, people flattened themselves on the ground as the B-17 roared by.

Then they came to what appeared to be a fortification but soon proved to be the dyke of a canal, complete with gunners on barges who hit them with 20 mm rounds. The ball turret gunner, Staff Sergeant Tierney, came out of his turret and stood in the radio room, thinking he would be safer in the aircraft. Somewhat ironically, he was the only crew member to be injured by the barge gunners. The gunners also severed the trim tab cables which caused the nose to drop. The B-17 would have ploughed in had it not plunged through the trees and lifted the nose as the pilots fought to recover control.

Fortunately, over the sea they saw a P-38 and a Thunderbolt who helped them home. As they arrived over Station 153 Framlingham Don Wachs, the top turret gunner, fired a red flare to alert the ambulance and the plane made a normal landing.

The ground crew had a lot of work to do. One propeller was split, the Plexiglas was shattered, the leading edges and engine cowls were smashed and there was holes and foliage everywhere. There was even broken glass and sea water in the ball turret. The rear gunner maintained that he could see the plane's wake in the North Sea.



The men all lived to fight another day. But Lt. Van Houten and most of his regular crew were killed on a later mission. A few became POWs. More details of this crash can be found in *The 390th Bomb Group Anthology, Vol. II*, and *The Story of the 390th Bomb Group (H)*.

Lt. Van Houten and Lt. Hately (right) inspect tree damage to No. 3 engine

Peter Senior

VISITOR COMMENTS

Each month we will be sharing some comments our visitors have provided verbally, in our guest books and on Trip Advisor. Please keep the reviews coming- you might see your own comments one month!



“Brilliant museum, very informative”

*“Truly thought-provoking stories and memories-
a superb memorial”*

*“A wonderful collection! Dad would be so proud of this place!
Thank you for honouring the 390th and the others”*

SO....WHAT IS A TOGGLIER?

Last month's issue of the newsletter featured a great article by Peter Senior about Robert Penovich's crew on their first combat mission.

The article refers to the Navigator and Toggler being trapped in the front section of the damaged B-17; but what was a 'Toggler'? Was it the individual responsible for putting the toggles on the winter duffle coats?! Or perhaps a grand name for the chef working in the officer's mess - you know - to give that air of French grandeur to the camp 'cuisine'?!

You won't be surprised that neither of the above have anything to do with the role of the Toggler. The Toggler was in fact responsible for arming and releasing the bomb load in lieu of a Bombardier and sat in the nose cone/front section with the Navigator behind him and to the left.

As the war progressed, the bombing formations would drop their bomb load when the lead aircraft dropped theirs and the need for skilled Bombardiers decreased.

The lead aircraft crew would include a skilled 'group' Bombardier who would use the Norden bombsight to accurately pinpoint the target. The Toggler in following aircraft had to flip a number of toggle switches to arm the bombs and activate the release mechanism – and above all – ensure the plane's bomb-bay doors were open, otherwise he would have blown the aircraft out of the sky. Sadly that did happen on occasion.

So there you have it - the origin of the title 'Toggler' is a combination of 'toggle' and 'bombardier'.

Below – a 390th crew photo including Toggler/Bombardier Pruitt Boyce who was killed in a mid-air collision over Germany on 14th March 1945



Pruitt Boyce

Coming Soon.....What was the 390th 'Bitching Post'??!

Steve Smith

FROM OUR ARCHIVIST

AIRMAN OF THE MONTH



MORRIS FREDERICK SWAVEL

10 SEPTEMBER 1921 – 13 APRIL 1944

Morris was born in Ohio and enlisted into the USAAF on 13 April 1942. He trained as a Pilot and flew 12 missions from Station 153.

On the return from Mission 86 to Augsburg Germany, #239819 'Anoxia Queen' was hit by flak at about 16.49 near Brussels. The plane fell out of formation and was last seen leaving the enemy coast 18km west of Ostend at about 10,000 feet. No parachutes were observed.

Three of the crews' bodies were subsequently washed ashore but Morris' body was never found. He is listed on the 'Tablets of the Missing' at Henri-Chapelle American Cemetery. He was 22.



Portsmouth Daily Times (Portsmouth, Scioto, Ohio) · 30 Jun 1941

Swavel Finishes Course

Morris Swavel, 3004 Scioto trail has returned from Cuiver, Ind., where he attended an American Red Cross national aquatic school directed by George Costello, national district representative of Washington, D. C., who has directed life saving classes here. The school had representatives from all the states of the union and while there Mr. Swavel passed his Red Cross instructor's course in water safety and life saving.

Jennie Smith

BRITISH RESISTANCE ORGANISATION MUSEUM

This is the third instalment from my conversations with members of the Stratford Auxiliary group, including my Great Uncle Herman and my grandfather Percy who farmed land around Parham Airfield.

Disbandment, secrecy and effectiveness



At the time of the AUS disbandment in November 1944, there were about 3,000 people involved. The risk of invasion had long since passed and it seems there was some frustration from the regular army: 'I am astonished to hear that Auxiliary Units are continuing to operate 40 motor vehicles... There is a very strong feeling in high places that the time must be approaching (if it has not already arrived) when Auxiliary Units will have ceased to justify their continued existence'.

Some of the bases were filled in (although Stratford was not and its location was identified by Herman Kindred in 1995- *more on this in a future edition*) and for many members of the public, they knew no more about the disbandment than they had done about the formation of these secret 'stay-behind' parties. Members of the groups kept secret their involvement until there was official MoD confirmation that they could tell their story.

How effective such groups would have been prompted some speculation. Herman stated 'I never fired a shot in anger or saw a German in uniform so I don't know how good we'd have been'. M.R.D Foot, an expert on resistance concludes that 'The greatest good that resistance did lay in the hearts of the people who took part in it'. Many feel that the well-stocked and trained units could have seriously hampered the enemy's advance. The irregulars might have delayed the attack and given the regular forces more of a chance. But even members of the group were realistic about what they could have achieved: 'We would have been a nuisance, that's it'. Even if the AUs could not have withstood the full might of the German army, they might well have slowed down its advance.

Judy Moore

Can You Help?

The BRO Museum is looking for new volunteers to meet-and-greet visitors, give tours of the underground bunker and man the museum, during opening hours (11-5 Sundays from April – end of October and 11-4 Wednesdays in June, July & August, plus occasional group visits). Please get in contact if you are interested in helping, have an interest in local history and have a few hours a month to spare.



AND FINALLY.... FROM OUR SHOP



We have a new range of personalised items in our gift shop, including biscuits, sweets and jam. If popular, we hope to extend the range. These make a wonderful memento from your visit or the perfect gift for a loved one with a connection to the museum.

Sorry these items aren't available online or by post.

We are also selling miniature B-17 lapel badges featuring a yellow tip, like the B-17s of the 390th. These can be posted overseas and are available from our gift shop or eBay store.

www.ebay.co.uk/usr/parham-airfield-museum



Apparently, the last bombs dropped in Suffolk in WW2 by a piloted German plane fell at Parham airfield, on 20th March 1945.



www.parhamairfieldmuseum.co.uk