



John (carrying our branch standard), Pearl, Norman and I attended a service of thanksgiving and commemoration at Norwich Cathedral on 24 April for the successful completion of the Le Paradis Memorial in the Cathedral Close, commemorating the 97 men who were massacred by the SS during the retreat of the British Expeditionary Force to Dunkirk in 1940. I wrote a piece about the massacre in the May 2021 Newsletter as Ray Pigg of Pulham St Mary was one of the 97, and we are pleased that Kathleen, his niece, has joined our Bun, Cuppa and Chat group, as her late husband was in the services. I don't usually include anything too political in the Newsletter, but given that Partygate is again making headlines, I thought you might be amused by Brian Bilston's witty poem.

My thanks to Jenny, Norman, Chris and Bob for their contributions to this issue.

A Message from our Chairman

Pearl and I hope you are all keeping well and enjoyed the Easter holidays. We also hope you are staying free from Covid; Pearl has had her 4th vaccination (now called the spring vaccination).

I am sorry the last branch meeting had to be postponed, but am looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible at the branch meeting on the 27th April when I will bring the new promotional banners for you to see. Pearl and I have purchased a new pop-up gazebo which we will use in conjunction with the banners and promotional material which I have obtained from Ann Rogerson our county recruitment officer. Our plan is to be on site for the Queen's Jubilee at Dickleburgh on Friday and Long Stratton on Saturday. We will have the new Bun, Cuppa and Chat banner at the Village Centre on Thursday 28th April, when we look forward to seeing our regulars and perhaps a few visitors too.

Rosemary and I recently attended a training course on Office 365 and the RBL Membership Administrative Portal (MAP) at Feltwell (my very first posting in the RAF), which we both thought was helpful.

As Rosemary mentioned above, four of us attended the Le Paradis memorial service at the Cathedral on 24 April; there was a piece in the EDP the following day. The Royal Anglian Colour Guard plus 20 other standards were in attendance. It was good to catch up with old friends in the standard bearers' fraternity as it has been over two years since many of us have seen each other.

Hope to see you soon.

Best wishes, John



RBL Family News

Congratulations to all those celebrating birthdays, in particular Juliet who has reached 80 (and says she has rather enjoyed reaching the milestone; the celebrations were obviously very good!), Jan who has just celebrated her 85th birthday, and Kathleen who was 90 in March. Many happy returns to you all.

Flight Sgt Laurence Lloyd Ruddock

by Jenny Jones of the Diss Family History Group

In 1992, in the days before the Internet, Jenny started to search for information about her great uncle who was killed during World War 2.



It was the unsaid words that spoke to me when I was a child growing up in the 1950s. The break in my father's voice when talk turned to Laurie, his brother, and the silence that followed. Flight Sgt Laurence Lloyd Ruddock was the youngest of his large family and the nearest in age to my father. He was killed in action at the age of 24, two years before I was born, but he has occupied a place in my heart ever since I can remember. I knew so little about the good-looking young man in the photograph on my grandmother's front room wall, but I do remember her saying proudly that he was a tail-end-Charlie - a rear gunner - as well as a wireless operator. She also spoke bitterly of Laurie's young widow who had detached herself from the family shortly after his death. I was to find out that there was more to that story.

It was the beginning of a journey that would unite past and present and bring reconciliation and new friends, but originally my objectives were simply to find out about his flying career. I acquired a copy of Laurie's service record and discovered that he joined up in 1941 and, after various postings in England, joined 292 Squadron in May 1944. He died on 13th October 1944. It was a start. A chance encounter a year later with a retired Wing Commander who had been a POW in the War brought new hope when he offered to submit an enquiry to an RAF monthly magazine.

Three weeks later, in the early evening my phone rang. When I answered a cultured male voice said "Hello, is that Jenny?" This is Cliff, Laurie's pilot." In half an hour I knew the whole story of the circumstances which led to Laurie's death. In late May 1944, Cliff, Laurie and the rest of the crew were writing their wills prior to being deployed on Beaufighters on operations over the Mediterranean when they were pulled out and told they were going to Jessore in India to join 292 Squadron - Coastal Command. This squadron had been formed in February as a dedicated air/sea rescue squadron, equipped with Walrus flying boats, which were carried underneath the aircraft. In April 1944, the squadron had received several Vickers Warwick aircraft. They were twin engine planes, designed in parallel with the Wellington and of the same geodetic construction. Ultimately, they would prove to be unsuited to the climate as the fabric had a tendency to disintegrate.



It was obvious that Cliff and his crew had been a close-knit group who had enjoyed many good times together. On their way over to India, they had a stopover in Egypt. None of them had been anywhere that exotic before so Cliff decided he would create a small problem with the aircraft to enable them to have a good look around while it was being fixed. Shortly after arrival in India, Laurie and the crew were posted to Chittergong, on the Bay of Bengal. As usual the barracks were some distance from the airfield, so the men were transported there by bullock cart. Cliff said that the animals knew their way so the driver would frequently doze off on the return journey. Some bright spark would occasionally turn the cart around and the driver would wake up to find himself back at the airfield.

In the early hours of the 13 October, Warwick HG 125 X took off in the dark on a routine operation but experienced an engine failure at 1000 feet, just as Cliff was settling on course. The propeller would not feather, and he could not maintain height. He tried to get back to base but some Spitfires were taking off and on circling to attempt another landing he lost more height so had to put down in the sea just off Cox's Bazaar. Laurie remained at his set broadcasting distress signals while the rest of the crew got into ditching positions. Sadly, when the aircraft hit the water, Laurie was thrown forwards and, according to Wing Commander Eric Starling's weekly bulletin, Laurie was 'laid out by the impact' when the plane buckled under the force as they hit the water. Six of the crew of nine managed to get out of the plane and into the dinghy. They were picked up three and a half hours later, reportedly suffering no ill effects. Laurie and two gunners who were trapped went down into the depths of the ocean with the aircraft. Cliff assured me that Laurie was definitely dead because he checked on his way out of the stricken aircraft.

The Downing Street Exodus

After the advisers, it was the desk lamps.
These are dark days, they said as they made their way out
we are no longer prepared to make light of it all.
The filing cabinets filed out next, followed by
the laser jet printers, the adjustable footrests,
and the fridges stocked with wine.

In-trays went out. Tables turned, too.
Stationery cupboards unstationed themselves
and office chairs told him to swivel.
The wallpaper peeled itself off in protest.
Gilt-edged mirrors offered looks of resignation
as the clocks called time.

In every room, the Georgian panelling
unpanelled itself. Persian carpets curled up,
rolled out the door and down the street.
Along the staircase, the former Prime Ministers
made a dash for it from their portraits,
seeking sanctuary in the National Gallery.

We want nothing more to do with this,
hissed a radiator, tearing itself off a wall,
while the boiler exploded with rage.
In the entrance way, four Corinthian columns
withdrew their support, and the whole building
began to shake and crumble.

Brian Bilston



Students in an advanced biology class were taking their mid-term exam. The last question was, 'Name seven advantages of Mother's Milk.' One student was hard put to think of seven advantages. He wrote:

- 1) It is the perfect formula for the child.
- 2) It provides immunity against several diseases.
- 3) It is always the right temperature.
- 4) It is inexpensive.
- 5) It bonds the child to mother and vice versa.
- 6) It is always available as needed.

And then the student was stuck. Finally, in desperation, just before the bell rang indicating the end of the test he wrote:

- 7) It comes in two attractive containers and it's high enough off the ground so the cat can't get it.

Flight Sgt Laurence Lloyd Ruddock contd.

How I wish my grandmother had known that. A few days later all the Warwicks were grounded and replaced by Liberators.

This was not the end of the story. I was invited to lay a wreath at 292 Squadron's next reunion in Hampshire in April 1994 and I felt honoured, but there was another person to consider - Laurie's wife Florence, if she were still alive. She had remarried and my closest cousin knew her surname. Luckily, she was listed in the telephone directory, so I sent a letter. Within a few days she called me. She was thrilled but said she had something to tell me. She had desperately wanted a child, but Laurie wanted to wait until the war was over. When she knew that my parents were expecting me, she could not cope with their happiness and definitely did not want to see me, which was why she severed all contact. She gave birth to a daughter after remarrying in 1947.

She asked me a question. Did I have any knowledge of a gold cross and chain that would have been in my grandmother's possession? Laurie had bought it for Florence on his last leave and when the news came that he was missing, presumed killed, she had taken it off and hung it around my grandmother's neck to comfort her, saying she would like it back. It was never returned. I asked my cousin if she knew anything about it and she said that it was probably the one she had inherited from her mother but feared that it had been among the items stolen in a burglary a couple of months previously. I told Florence that I hadn't been able to trace it but some days later I got a call. It had been found tucked away somewhere, minus its chain. The next day I drove to Kent, collected it and knocked on Florence's front door. Fifty years after losing it she was reunited with her cross.



2021 Poppy Appeal

We are delighted to report that we have paid a total of £3244.69 into the Poppy Appeal, covering the Dickleburgh and Long Stratton areas. We are most grateful to all who gave so generously to the Appeal and to all the shops, businesses and churches who supported us with tins and collections. We still do not have a Poppy Appeal Organiser for either Dickleburgh or Long Stratton though, so please let us know if you would like to fill either vacancy!

Norman's Chuckle Corner

- ✚ Two young men were hiking one day when they came across a disused mineshaft. Trying to find out how deep the mine was, they picked up a stone, threw it down the shaft and listened for it to reach the bottom, but there was no sound. They tried with a larger stone but still nothing. Looking around, they found a heavy concrete post with a metal spike and with an effort, pushed it down the shaft. As they stood back to wait for the sound of it hitting the bottom, a goat rushed between them and dived into the shaft. A little later a man came across to them and asked if they had seen a goat? "Yes" they replied "a goat has just rushed by us and dived into the shaft". "No that could not have been my goat" said the stranger "Mine was tethered to a concrete post"
- ✚ Thanks to the miracle of fertility treatments, a lady of 65 gave birth to a baby. "When she was discharged her relatives came to visit. Can we see the baby?" they asked. "Not yet," said the 65-year-old mother. Twenty minutes later, they asked again. "Can we see the baby?" "Not yet", said the mother. Another twenty minutes went by, and the relatives were growing impatient. "Can we see the baby?" "Not yet," said the mother. "Well, when can we see the baby then?" said the relatives. "When it cries," said the mother. "Why do we have to wait until the baby cries?" "Because I forgot where I put it"
- ✚ An elderly couple were lying in bed having gone to bed a little earlier than usual. The husband was ready for sleep when his wife gave a little giggle of joy as she lay reminiscing about the love they shared when younger. She said, "You used to hold my hand when we were courting." Wearily her husband reached out and held her hand for a second and then tried to get to sleep. A few minutes later she said, "Then you used to kiss me". Mildly irritated, he turned towards her and gave her a peck on the cheek and settled to sleep. Another tiny giggle some seconds later she said, "Then you used to bite my neck." Angrily he threw back the bedclothes and got out of bed "Where are you going?" she asked. "To get my teeth."
- ✚ A little girl made a cup of tea for her mother. "I didn't know you could make tea," said her mum, taking a sip. "Oh yes I boiled some water, added the tea leaves like you do, and then strained it into a cup." Her mother smiled and took another sip. "But", the little girl went on, "I couldn't find the strainer, so I used the fly swatter". "What!" exclaimed mum, choking on her tea. "Oh, don't worry, I didn't use the new swatter, I used the old one."
- ✚ Bored out of his mind, a little boy was playing up in church during the Sunday morning service. His constant chattering and whistling began to upset the congregation. Finally, his father lost patience and dragged his son out of the church. On the way out the boy called loudly to the congregation, "Pray for me!"

Please be assured that no goats, babies, elderly people or disruptive children were harmed in the making of these jokes!

Contributions or comments, please, to the Editor, Rosemary Steer, tel.: 01379 854245; email: rosemary@steerfamily.plus.com

Dates for your diary

Please note the new time for branch meetings and the new venue and day for Bun, Cuppa and Chat

Branch meetings,

Wednesday 27 April, 7.30pm, Village Centre, followed by a talk by John Roberts about Peter Harold Wright, VC from Mettingham (postponed from March);

Wednesday 25 May, 7.30pm, Village Centre

Bun, Cuppa and Chat

Thursday 28 April and Thursday 26 May, 2.30-4pm, Village Centre

Simonds Coach Trip to the National Arboretum

25 September 2022, £36, Contact Simonds directly: to book: <https://www.simonds.co.uk/home> or 01379 647300



RAF Regiment Memorial at the National Arboretum

If you have received this Newsletter, but are not involved with the Royal British Legion, don't worry, we just wanted to spread a little fun and humour around! Please contact me, though, if you would like your name removed from the mailing list.