



PJI Canopy Club Winter/Spring '16 Newsletter

General Sec. update

As you can see I am trying a new layout –Hope you like it!

The Annual Reunion & Dinner will take place at RAF Brize Norton over the weekend of 21-22 Oct '16 with the dinner taking place in the WO's & Sgts Mess on Friday 21 Oct. The paperwork will, as usual, be attached to the Summer Newsletter.

WOTG. 2016 is a significant year for Weston as it marks 100 years as a Military asset and 70 years as a DZ. Planning is under way to celebrate the joint occasions with a PJI 'Big Way' planned for the 13th of May followed by a BBQ late afternoon/evening. I will keep members updated as further details are announced

Nigel Rogoff. In view of former PJI Nige Rogoff's recent world record-breaking row across the Atlantic, The executive Committee voted on your behalf to donate £250 to the charity **Row2Recovery**

Remember this?



The 'World Famous" - See view from the Chair

MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT

GROUP CAPTAIN (Ret'd) PETER WATSON FCMI

Welcome to the 2016 Winter/early Spring Newsletter – and it comes as a bit of a shock that I'm now well into my fourth year as President of our Association. During this time, I've tried to steer things in what I consider to be the right direction; it's been an interesting and busy time which I've thoroughly enjoyed – even though my chest has been bruised on a number of occasions! That said, much has happened over this period; we now have an excellent overall team and our



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The upgrade of the **Toot Baldon memorial** has suffered a set back as the proposal was rejected by the Church authorities. The Oxon & West Berks PRAs are going back to the Church authorities to ascertain what would be an acceptable standard for an upgrade. Needless to say this will involve more planning and expense but they seem positive that funds can be raised. However, it is unlikely that it will be agreed in time for this year. Your committee is exploring options to close the funding gap and I will update you in due course.

Wayne Loxton has received an email from Richard Smith the nephew of **Wilf Finbow** who passed away last June. As executor for Wilf's Estate Richard contacted Wayne as he wanted to distribute Wilf's exceptionally kind legacy to the club of £2,000. Wayne has replied to Richard thanking him for the incredibly generous offer and asked if there were any specific wishes regarding how Wilf would have liked the money spent.

Obituaries. Since our last Newsletter we have sadly lost Ian Colquhoun, Ron Williams and Chris Simpson.

The turn out for Simmo was truly remarkable and they was much laughter as well as tears. In typical Simmo fashion he had made a couple of 'just in case' plans. Amongst them returning a well travelled plate to Owen Roberts and writing his own epitaph:

**Remove me from the register,
Take me off the nominal roll,
Delete me from the manifest,
Discount me in the toll.**

**Add me to your memories,
Remember me when you can,
Include me in your histories.
Take me for what I am.**

membership has continued to grow, despite the natural loss of some of our older stalwarts, and in some cases, somewhat younger ones, who have sadly passed away.

In my last Foreword, I reminded you of the composition of our highly competent Committee; latest arrivals include the redoubtable WO Martin White (ADW Chief Instructor) and Sgt Tony Brookes (ADW Rep) who have succeeded WO Ian Charnock and FS Ed Massey respectively. (Thanks Ed for your superb support, duly recognised with the PJI Association Award of Merit at our last Reunion Dinner). However, I'd also like to add my thanks to our Vice-Presidents, the last 3 of whom have been appointed during my Presidency: Mervyn Green, Jim Hurford, Peter Keane, George Sizeland, Seamus Byrne, Henry MacDonald, Glan Evans, George Long and Graham Hand. They continue to be a great source of helpful advice and assistance, and I'm keen to involve them as much as possible in matters associated with the Association.

Our Facebook page has continued to attract a mass of interesting material, including photos, the inevitable stories – and younger members. Older members have also responded wholeheartedly, and without wishing to embarrass him, our distinguished author Ed Cartner is a prime example – well done, Ed! (We owe a big vote of thanks to the Threlfall father and son duo for getting it all started in the first place). Simon Jarvis, our very capable Web Manager, has come up with some interesting ideas for improving our website (currently: <http://pjicanopyclub.bravesites.com/>). It is at present a somewhat limited content 'freebee' one (albeit with several useful related links), but for a comparatively small fee, the site could be considerably expanded to include all sorts of extra information. Once Simon has had the chance to present his ideas to the Committee, I'm sure we'll see further progress in due course.

Next, I want to fine tune our Constitution so that it most accurately reflects latest developments – nothing too drastic, I hasten to add, but I'll be circulating suggested improvements to the Committee and V-PS in the near future before letting you all know in due course, via the Gen Sec, what we propose so that the update can be ratified at our next AGM.



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Finally, I am conscious that our Chairman, Vice-Chairman and Gen Sec are all busy people, so as a 'working' President I've tried to do my bit to help with Association business when necessary. Indeed, if you ever feel the need to make a forceful point, don't hesitate to let me know rather than get at them if that also helps! But enough from me; Wg Cdr Jamie Simmonds' ADW update follows, with illustrations once again, and I'm sure you'll find it interesting reading. As usual, Mick Threlfall adds the rest, using Chris Heathershaw as the 'default mechanism' back-up – always a wise precaution!

Best wishes

Peter Watson

Notes from the Chair

Since the Summer 2015 Newsletter ADW has continued to maintain a very high tempo of support to parachute training and exercises across all departments. Whilst that opening line is something you may have seen in an Annual Report, it is TRUE! I will start by reporting on a main focus during this recent period. The now annual PJI Air Concentration Exercise held in January 2016 in Blythe, California. Although the exercise could be considered a success an incident involving Corporals Rob Bugden and Brook Stebbings during which they suffered serious injuries has had a considerable emotional impact for all involved across the Wing. They were involved in an under canopy, mid-air collision and subsequently suffered serious injuries. Brook is now convalescing at home and Rob is currently in RCDM Birmingham. We continue to offer support to both Rob and Brook and their families, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank you for the kind messages we have received from serving and ex-serving members.

The RAF Falcons had a foreshortened end of season leave to enable them to participate in the Seoul Airspace and Defence Exhibition in November 2015. This included conducting displays for the duration of the Exhibition using a local CH-47 as the jump platform. As you can imagine their dynamic display was well received by all. Their transport to Seoul was as passengers in the 70 Sqn, A400M transport aircraft, the first 'live' passengers they had been tasked to transport. The A400M subsequently dropped the team off in California for their winter training camp. They have now completed their overseas pre-season training and are well on the way to completing their preparations for ratification in April and their Launch Day on 29 April at RAF Brize Norton. You can follow their season via Facebook- (RAF Falcons), Twitter (@RAFFalcons) or their website (<http://www.raf.mod.uk/falcons>).

Parachute Support Squadron continues to support an extremely high exercise tempo with almost monthly overseas exercises. The recent switch of command and control of 16 Air Assault Brigade across to Land from Joint Helicopter Command has seen the welcomed return of the Pegasus badge replacing the 'screaming eagle'. This has underlined the fact they have all returned from Op HERRICK and they continue to press hard to regenerate their para capability across the Bde. We are doing as much as we can despite most of the PJI horsepower being used to look after the SF group activities.



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Closer to home we are in the middle of refurbishing the ADW crewroom to cope with rejuvenated use by all of the Brize based ADW staff, we hope to introduce Wi-Fi and modern seating very soon. In the meantime, we have some 'chill out' bean bag seating, a clean carpet (evidence of a few too many beer calls were taking its toll!) and a new stereo system. The social functions this year are detailed below feel free to drop us a line if you wish to attend any of them.

Finally, I am pleased to report that Terra Firma team, have risen from the ashes and continue to play a variety of friendly fixtures in the locality. The picture below is of the team showing off their new strip.



So it is March already and time seems to fly by on the Wing, we still have a busy year ahead with an Inter-Schools completion in Portugal to look forward to, scores of RAF Falcons displays to do and endless exercises to support. If you are in the vicinity, please feel free to drop in and see a bit of the action.

ADW Rugby. Sgt Phil Thomas has created an ADW PJI 7's Rugby team. There are already some fixtures in the diary in which we would like to compete and also raise money for Cpl Rob Bugden.

If you would like to purchase a kit or just the top, there will be an order link on the PJI Canopy Club Association website and the PJI Facebook page. The more orders the more competitive Phil can negotiate the cost. Part of the price will go to a charity of our choosing. There will be two designs, one is the new style of tight fitting kit. The other will feature the same design but made of a looser fitting material, aimed at supporters. Price is predicted to be £35.

All fixtures will be posted on the Facebook page as soon as they are confirmed. Looking forward to seeing as many of you as possible.





ADW Social Calendar

¥	Wednesday 23 March	Easter Beer Call, ADW Crewroom
¥	Thursday 7 July	ADW Golf Champs (club TBC)
¥	Wednesday 27/Thurs 28 July	ADW Summer BBQ, ADW carpark
¥	Thursday 13 October	PJI Cse Pass Out & Beer Call ADW Crewroom
¥	Monday 19 December	ADW Children's' Xmas Party, ADW Crewroom
¥	Tuesday 20 December	ADW X-Brief & Xmas Draw, ADW Crewroom

Doug Peacock has been kind enough to submit an article on Norman Hoffman that I have included unabridged, for which I make no apologies. I suggest the younger readers amongst us in particular, take a few minutes to study the life of a truly remarkable man who really did lead the way.

TALES OF HOFFMAN - MEMORIES OF A LEGEND

The first time I jumped with Norman Hoffman was a three-way launch from the Beverley tailgate at twelve thousand feet over Weston on 17 March 1962. Norman had just returned to the Parachute School after a four-year absence on PT tours at Yatesbury and Ternhill, and I knew him by reputation only. Closer acquaintance served but to enhance this reputation as the most pivotal figure (*pace* Alf Card) in the PTS/Sport Parachuting interface spanning the decade 1954 - 1964.

Joseph Norman Hoffman was born in Dublin in 1924 and came to the UK in 1947 to join the Royal Air Force. He qualified as a PTI on No 19 Course at Cosford, along with Ken Kidd. He was a natural athlete, with tremendous upper-body strength; a gymnast, balancer, and classic Greco-Roman wrestler, having completed some 400 bouts undefeated in his native Ireland before the age of 20.

Norman gained his instructor's brevet at Upper Heyford in June 1948, subsequently re-locating with the School to RAF Abingdon in 1950. It was there in 1954 that his destiny kicked in.

This was the year of the Second World Parachuting Championships at St Yan in France, when Sir Raymond Quilter, co-founder of GQ Parachute Company, approached No 1 PTS asking for jumpers to train from scratch for these forthcoming Championships. Initial jumps were 3 sec delays from a Hastings at Weston, subsequent training was carried out at Fair Oaks from GQ's DH Rapide, culminating in one twenty second delay for each team member. Thus "prepared" six instructors were selected for the British team at this second WPC. They were Flight Lieutenant Doddy Hay, Sergeants Alf Card, Danny Sutton, Timber Wood, Norman Hoffman and Tommy Moloney. The team returned from France without any medals, but having gained valuable experience in terms of freefall techniques, canopy handling and freefall equipment. Disappointment ensued as the then PTS establishment showed little interest in developing these new ideas, it being felt that there was no requirement for freefall jumping in the Service. The parachutes were returned to GQ, and the cadre dissolved. Norman, however, was undeterred and, irrevocably bitten by the freefall bug, he obtained his own parachute assembly and embarked on a part-time career, moonlighting as a solo display jumper. In May 1956 he



performed a 12 second delay at the Hucknall Air Display from 2,500 feet (today's opening height) using a GQ single blank canopy and followed up with a similar demo at Elstree the following month. . He also made contact with the Irish Parachute Club where he made demo jumps at Shannon Airport and Weston (Co. Kildare) outside Dublin.

In the same year Norman and Alf Card founded the Abingdon Parachute Group, jumping at RAF Weston-on-the-Green from the 47 Sqn. Flying Club Tiger Moth. The fledgling club attracted a lot of interest, mainly from the younger staff members, although the number of parachutes available was limited, as was jump altitude. Most unfortunately this venture survived only for a few months before they had a fatality and the club was forced to close.

Shortly thereafter, Norman was posted to Yatesbury on a PT tour. Exiled as he was from mainstream jumping, Norman contacted fellow PJIs Jake McLoughlin, Geordie Charlton and Mike McArdle from A&AEE Boscombe Down and on his own initiative formed the most professional and successful Display Team of the era - the British Skydivers. In 1959 this team set an unofficial British team height record of 14,700 feet, with a delay of 77 seconds. Unofficial, as it would have cost them £100.00 for Royal Aero Club ratification. Throughout this period, the British Skydivers were in constant demand for demo jumps up and down the country; often jumping on the same day in two separate locations at Battle of Britain Air Shows. The British Skydivers were backed up by Norman's wife, May, as indefatigable Team Manager and secretary. All monies earned were re-invested by the team in kit and in training jumps. In the same year, Norman won the British individual Championships at Sandown Isle of Wight, captured here on vintage footage from Pathe News <http://www.britishpathe.com/video/sports-news-ellwood-trophy-parachute-contest/query/PARACHUTE+JUMPING+CHAMPIONSHIP> and followed this up by captaining the British Team at the European Championships in Leutkirch, Germany, where the team finished in third place. In 1961, he again captained the Brits to first place in the International Invitation Meet in Upsalla (Sweden).

In 1962 I was invited to join Norman's British Skydivers team of show jumpers and thus was able to observe the man in action at close quarters. One demo in particular stands out - the Hucknall Air Display. On this particular occasion, on the eleventh of June, the Skydivers were booked to jump at Hucknall; the official RAF team were also on the same show. Six of us flew up from Abingdon in the Beverley for the RAF team demo; Peter Hearn, Paul Hewitt, Snowy Robertson, Tommy Moloney, Jake McLoughlin and myself. Cloud base was low; we made a routine stick of six from 3500 feet and landed as directed on the target crosses in the middle of the airfield, on the far side of the runway and some three hundred metres from the crowd line. Team line up, salute, and into the Landrover aiming for the tea tent. Ho hum. Once across the runway Jake, Tommy and myself made for the car park where Norman and Geordie Charlton were waiting in Norman's Ford Zephyr. They had driven up from Abingdon to meet us, bringing our white British Skydiver jumpsuits, smokes and personal civilian parachutes. Norman had booked a Rapide and, unrestricted by RAF regulations, we laid out the target cross about five metres from the crowd line. We took off, climbed to 4500 feet in broken cloud and ran in parallel to and about four hundred metres behind the crowd. With Norman spotting, we exited in a close stick of five, each with smoke and swooped in low to hook turn and stand up



in a line five metres out from the spectators. The crowd were highly appreciative and we “civilians” were compared most favourably against the “RAF” on the previous descent. Peter Hearn, a sport jumper himself, took it all in good part...

Norman's international career continued later that year when the Irish team went it alone at the Sixth World Parachute Championships to be held in August at Orange, Massachusetts. In order to raise funds for the trip, Norman had organised



an Irish parachute rally at a site known as Farmer's Cross, which was a large field about a couple of miles from the end of the main runway of Cork International Airport. The party was Norman, Jake, Dave Francombe, Mike Turner and myself. We arrived at the airstrip on the Sunday morning escorted by Irish Parachute Club members to find the hillside overrun by an estimated nine thousand crowd. To control the multitude, and vainly trying to collect car parking fees, were two volunteer stewards equipped with bus conductors' leather satchels. To keep the crowd entertained the Club had booked three motorcycle stunt riders riding through specially constructed tunnels covered with burning straw. As for sustenance there was nary a hot dog stand nor coffee stall in sight. Arousing equal interest were the three jump aircraft, two elderly Auster 9's and a vintage Tiger Moth. We had arrived about ten in the morning, the cloud base was down and the wind was a steady twenty knots. In between the wall of fire show, Norman also kept the crowd entertained by conducting an interview with Mary Lawlor, an Irish lady jumper. By three in the afternoon, the motorcyclists had had enough, the straw had all burned away, and Norman had run out of jokes. With still no jumping the crowd were becoming a little restless. Norman decided we had to get going, wind limits notwithstanding. We started the show with a formation mass drop from 4000 feet, Norman in the lead Tiger Moth, with Jake and Tommy in one Auster and Mike Turner plus one fortunate Austrian jumper in the other. Takeoff was delayed as the crowd were milling about all over the runway; they could only be dispersed by one of the Austers revving up and taxiing toward them. The bus conductors were nowhere to be seen. As Dave and I kitted up, waiting for the second lift we watched as the mass formation exited about one thousand metres deep. As soon as the chutes opened, the crowd surged toward the landing area, only parting reluctantly as the jumpers came in. Jake came in over a moving circle of humanity, which scattered just in time to allow him to touch down next to a perambulator complete with infant which had been left in the middle of the circle. A Hoffman-inspired experience, one of many, which lives long in the memory.

The British Skydivers continued jumping notwithstanding, in parallel, and in June of that year we competed as the British Team with Norman as captain in the European Championships again held in Leutkirch, Germany, successfully beating the United States Golden Knights to take first place in Team Accuracy. 1963 was also notable as it was in August of that year that the RAF Abingdon Sport Parachute Club was founded, with Norman as the first Chief Instructor. The inaugural jumpers were



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Norman Hoffman, Tommy Moloney, Jake McLoughlin, Geordie Charlton, Robbie Robertson ("Big Rab"), Mike Stamford and myself. In 1964 this RAFSPA team went on to win the British National Championships at Netheravon, and was also Norman's swansong on the International competition stage. In this, his final year he was once again Team Captain of the Irish Team at the Seventh WPC, held in Leutkirch; he also captained the RAF Team who competed in the inaugural CISM Parachute Meet at the French Airborne School (BETAP) in Pau.

In 1965 he was detached to the Kenyan Air Force along with three other PJs under the command of Flt Lt Pocock to build a Parachute School from scratch. In 1966 he was badly injured at the Nakuru airfield when he experienced a reserve wrap under a ParaCommander rotating malfunction. He suffered three compression fractures of the spine, fractures of the sternum and the sacrum and a fractured ankle. He was back jumping in five months. Norman returned to PTS in 1968 and resumed work at PTS and also JATE. In 1971 he was awarded the British Empire Medal for services to parachuting. He was medically discharged in 1979 at the age of 55, cumulative injuries having finally taken their toll.

Abiding memories remain of this most exceptional man: one routine, performed in order to entertain the troops, was to lever up into a hand balance on the guard rail ninety feet above the tanbark on the platform of the outdoor tower at Abingdon. He



would then transfer his weight into a one-arm. No safety belt. I was there. Equally spectacular was his wing-walking routine on the Rapide aircraft. If a jump had been cancelled, Norman would execute a flyby along the crowd line at about twenty feet, standing outside the aircraft holding on with one hand and waving with the other, smoke streaming from an 83 grenade bracketed to his ankle. No safety belt. He nearly came unstuck on one occasion when pilot Gerry Schellong had to climb sharply to avoid an obstacle, pulling several extra g. Sheer muscle power enabled Norman to cling on undeterred.

Idiosyncratic, anti-establishment, totally fearless, yet at the same time Norman

was the most generous and hospitable of men. A teetotal non-smoker, and always the best of company, Norman led from the front, a barnstormer of the old school. Norman died in September 2003 aged 79, having served a total of 31 years at No. 1 PTS. His ashes were scattered, most appropriately, in the target pit in the centre of the Weston-on-the-Green Drop Zone.

Rest in peace old friend.

Doug Peacock
Abingdon



January '16

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