

**PJI CANOPY CLUB ASSOCIATION**

**Winter 2015 NEWSLETTER**

**MESSAGE FROM THE ASSOCIATION PRESIDENT**

**GROUP CAPTAIN (Ret’d) PETER WATSON FCMI**

Welcome to our slightly delayed 2015 Winter Newsletter! As you’ll see from Wg Cdr Wayne Loxton’s excellent ‘Notes from the Chair’ article which follows, Airborne Delivery Wing (ADW) continues to flourish and develop, with some impressive achievements in 2014 both operationally and administratively. Much of what has occurred has also given our Association and the PJI world in general some great publicity – not least the presentation given by OC ADW and Peter Hearn at the RAF (Air) Historical Branch Seminar. Lack of space does not allow us to reproduce it here, but we’ll get the detail put on our website in the near future. Furthermore, this year will be a particularly busy one for the PJI and Airborne world as you’ll see in the next article.

Wayne Loxton also mentions how our Facebook page, set up as a trial following a presentation by Cpl Adam Threlfall at our last AGM, is now proving very popular and drawing in our younger serving PJI generation. I agree with Adam’s father, Mick (our Gen Sec, who is still working virtually full-time incidentally!), that this has to be a good sign for us, and will undoubtedly help in the recruitment of new Association members! Conscious that our website will still appeal to the majority of my generation of PJIs and beyond, though, it has been updated so that those of you who wish to keep abreast of latest happenings and contacts can do so via this medium.

Clearly, there is a place for our Facebook page **and** our website (they are of course complementary). Nic Martin has given us some sterling administrative support and James Bruce (now also at Hereford) did an excellent job in setting up our website initially. However, they are both extremely busy, so some timely and welcome volunteer support has been received from Simon Jarvis. Now retired, Simon has offered to become our Webmaster. He is highly experienced in this area and well-equipped to take our website forward to a change in visual appearance and greater heights. Accordingly, your Committee has endorsed his appointment. So, many thanks to James and Nic for your help, and welcome Simon! Our old website has therefore been closed, but there is a link to the new one just in case! Old website: <http://pjicanopyclub.wordpress.com/>), new website: <http://pjicanopyclub.bravesites.com/>.

The Vice-Chairman’s slot on the Committee has been vacant since Clive Hillman’s resignation towards the end of last year, but (Wg Cdr) Glynn Allcock has kindly agreed to fill the post. No-one else has stepped forward, and whilst Glynn is still serving, we anticipate that he will be retiring from regular service fairly soon. At present, our constitution earmarks this post for a retired PJI for reasons previously discussed when reforming our Club as an Association. However, unless anyone objects to Glynn’s appointment, we feel that he would be a huge asset in this capacity – and he will fully meet the appointment criteria in the near future. The Committee will therefore endorse Glynn’s appointment ‘in exception’ unless we hear any powerful objection to the contrary by the end of April 2015.

Still on the volunteering theme, you will be aware from the AGM that George Long has been our stalwart and efficient Treasurer for some years now, and has been looking for someone to take over the reins. After much research, we do have a volunteer to take over in the late Autumn; details to be released in due course.

Given all this information, I have no doubt that our Association **is** moving forward in every way, and looking around at the happy smiling faces at our last Reunion Dinner, I was particularly encouraged not only by the sheer number of both serving and retired PJIs attending, but also the presence of members we had not seen for some years. But, enough from me; to bring you fully up to speed with all our news, read on……!

Best wishes

Peter Watson

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 **Notes from the Chair**

Life at ADW is as busy as ever and last year we almost topped 20,000 descents which is the most we have completed for many years. The main contributing factor was once again the Skyvan aircraft, which along with a slight increase in C130 availability ensured delivery of the 4th SF course in a row. The BT380 parachute has also significantly increased the tempo at RM Poole and whilst we still have on-going governance and funding issues, I am confident of the future and the role that we play. The next hurdle is of course not far away, and the 2015 Strategic Review will no doubt have an impact. However, I do not envisage it having a negative impact and surmise that we will either stay as we are or increase in liability if the long awaited 16 Air Assault Brigade requirement is finally endorsed! It’s a big “if” though so I won’t be holding my breath!

Many of you will be aware of the success of the new Facebook page that was set up by Cpl Adam Threlfall – It superseded the “page” that John Conrad tried valiantly to set up, but we now have a significant number of current PJIs involved and this can only be positive and hopefully it will inspire them to join the association.

The annual ADW Cross Brief was the biggest that we have ever had and with the introduction of PES, the Wing photograph required a wide angle lens. Last year we introduced a wind tunnel scrambles competition to the event and this year we had 17 teams, which included SE Fitts, and we also provided experience flights for 30 non PJIs from across the Wing. It would of course be wrong of me to mention that I was in the winning team….. or is it?

We also unveiled a truly fantastic display that records the names of all of the PJIs that have ever qualified and this now sits in the crew room. This project was the brain child of Cpl Freya Lees and she has done an outstanding job. I am sure you will examine it in great detail when you return for the Reunion Dinner, so when you do, and when you spot the inevitable error, be kind and remember that we are only as good as our records and if they are not up to date that may have been your fault in a previous life! Clearly I’m joking, and if you do spot any omissions then let us know and we will fix it.

This year we have 2 significant anniversaries: Firstly, it is the 50th Anniversary of the Hastings crash at Toot Baldon that sadly took the lives of 8 of our brethren. However, amidst the sombre thoughts of fallen friends, I am delighted to announce that the local parish wish to hold a village event to commemorate the day. I and the No 36 Sqn Association have agreed to support this celebration and the RAF Falcons will display on the day along with a C130 from the Station. Flt Lt Simon Owen is the Project Officer, so stand by for more detail nearer the time.

In addition, it is also the 75th Anniversary of the establishment of the Central Landing School at Ringway and we intend to join in the celebrations. The NW Region of the Parachute Regt Association are leading the local arrangement at Ringway and Tatton Park and once again we will be involved with a suitable representation, not only from ADW but also I hope from members of the Association. Stand by for more detail on the Tatton Park/Ringway events scheduled for 28 Aug 15. Sqn Ldr Mike Burch (OC 1PTS) is the ADW Project Officer and will be liaising with our Association over our joint arrangements. With this important Anniversary also in mind, I have asked Flt Lt Ben Lonsdale and FS Andy Gillett to organise a local event at ADW and the intent is to hold an all ranks Dinner in the Officers Mess on Friday the 23rd of October ‘15. In order to minimise costs and double book events, I would therefore like to propose that we combine the Annual Association Reunion Dinner with this event so that we can have a large turnout from both serving and retired members. It promises to be an exceptional night and with yours and the Committee’s blessing I would like to press on with a combined event on 23 October 2015. Unless I hear otherwise I will assume your agreement.

Finally and apologies for the longer that usual note, in April 14 I was invited to present at the RAF Historical Branch Seminar. It was a great experience until they asked me to produce a paper as well. I did my best to support them and the reduced version of the paper was published in Jan 15 in Journal No 59. It draws heavily on a script that Ali MacDonald sent to me last year, so if I have missed your valuable contribution out then I apologise, but in the meantime I hope you enjoy the article; as our President has already intimated, it will appear on our website for you to read, as it is rather too long to include in this Newsletter. I look forward to seeing you all in the autumn.

**UPDATE FROM THE GENERAL SECRETARY**

**General Update.** Colleagues; firstly an apology for you receiving this as Spring arrives. Once your committee had agreed to combine our 70th reunion with the 75th anniversary of the formation of the Central Landing Establishment, finding a suitable date and location for the combined event has not been easy and the Chairman has spent some time (and I’m sure many ‘beer tokens’!) convincing other Sqn Cdrs to move a number of their planned events for our benefit. I simply thought it prudent to send out this Newsletter with the latest information for advance planning purposes. I’m certain the combined event, with our Reunion Dinner in the Officers’ Mess on Friday the 23rd of October will be a fantastic occasion not to be missed and I look forward to seeing you all there. The paperwork will, as usual, be attached to the Summer Newsletter.

One of the pleasures of this job is receiving the written efforts of members on a range of topics and over the last 6 months I have had too many to reproduce all of them in this Newsletter. However in the Summer missive, be prepared to read of an appointment for a vasectomy whilst stationed in Hong Kong but the visit to the wrong address resulted in more swelling than anticipated! I have however reproduced the obituary to Bill Fell, for which I am grateful to Graham Hand.

I have been sent a request for old parachuting photographs, as ADW are in the process of refurbishing the crewroom. If possible please send the photos to me by Email. If that is not possible, I am assured that anything you send to me by post will be copied and returned to you.

The initiative by Mervyn Green to resurrect the ‘members’ details’ database (ie more than a simple list of names, addresses and contact details that I hold at the moment) is sadly less than 25% complete. Yet again I urge you all to fill it the proforma (included below) and send to Mervyn. For all of us on Email and with access to Microsoft Office, you have previously been sent an attachment that will allow you to reply using Excel. If at all possible please use it. If that is not possible Merv’s address is 18 Ock St, Abingdon, OX14 5BZ. His Email is m330green@btinternet.com

**Obituaries.** Since our last Newsletter we have sadly lost, Bill Fell, Dick Mullins and Bob ‘Red’ Hind.

**Members updates**. Ken Mapplebeck is continuing to recover from having a lung removed; Colin Blyth is also making an excellent recovery following a heart by-pass operation; Jim Hurford has asked me to inform you of his and Val’s new Email address: valjim68@gmail.com

**AGM.** I have attached the Minutes of our latest AGM for your information. A copy will also appear on our website.

**Squadron Leader W B (Bill) Fell RAF (Ret’d)**

**1922 – 2014**

I first met Bill Fell in 2007, having just returned to my native Somerset. One of the great pleasures of being a Canopy Club Gen Sec is to meet so many remarkable parachuting people who until such time had been names on pages and faces on (mostly black and white) photos in the PTS archives and museum. My visits to Bill and Mary at their Taunton home were marked by their generous hospitality, interesting conversations –often interspersed by Bill’s unprompted renditions of his much loved Kipling -and insights into Bill’s remarkable RAF career (some 60 years of unbroken uniformed Service). Over time and innumerable cups of tea and coffee, Bill’s story unfolded thus:

From his earliest memory Bill had wanted to serve in the Royal Air Force. In 1937, at the age of 14 years and 9 months, he sat his RAF Aircraft Apprentices Exam and in January 1938 began his training as a Halton Apprentice. On qualification in May 1940, he was posted to RAF Coastal command as an aircraft fitter and the following month he volunteered for aircrew or parachuting duties. It was now wartime and a “Gen App” from a young and recently qualified aircraft technician to change trade may not have been well received. Thus he was posted to wartime desert service with No 73 (Hurricane) Sqn in North Africa and by 1942 he had been awarded his Rolls Royce Certificate (Merlin engines). At his pre Halton medical Bill had been told that he had a defective left eye that would preclude him from becoming aircrew. In 1943, to Bill’s pleasure and surprise he was posted to train with the Rhodesian Air Training Group as a u/t pilot and promoted to acting Sgt. As his course progressed he was further elevated to Cadet Officer but unfortunately at his commissioning board he was failed on medical grounds; his pre-existing eye condition being confirmed only following a second opinion. This did not sit well with Bill and neither did the prospect of returning to aircraft fitter duties. A subsequent frank exchange of views on the subject with higher authority resulted in Bill spending the next 14 days in the “glass house”. But even this enforced period of quiet reflection failed to deter him. Perhaps rather fortuitously, the war was coming to an end and he was repatriated to the UK and back to a rapidly changing RAF.

 Shortly after his arrival in the UK, his confidence (if ever really dented) was restored by achieving a promising result in a Commissioning Board for the RAF Regiment. Now in a peacetime RAF short of medics, Bill had managed to get his recorded eye defect to apply only to future employment in technical trades (as being unable to read micrometers etc) and so set about re-mustering to RAF PTI, his route into his new career aspiration, that of becoming a parachute jumping instructor. Having completed his PTI Course at Cosford, he was disappointed to receive a posting notice to RAF Hereford for station PTI duties. Possibly unrelated to his eye defect and more likely due to his single minded determination to become a pji, Bill “misread” his posting notice to Hereford and set out instead in the direction of Heyford . That meant just one destination, No 1 PTS RAF Upper Heyford. Bill duly and confidently reported to No 1 PTS to train as a pji just in time to join a regular basic para course. His log book shows that he trained under the experienced eyes of Sgts Val Valentine and Alf Card. Again fortuitously, he progressed well and thence to a place on the next u/t pji course. It appeared that RAF Hereford had not missed him.

RAF records and paperwork are sometimes misplaced but seldom totally lost, as Bill was to find to his cost. The RAF Police belatedly arrived at PTS and he was arrested for being AWOL from RAF Hereford. This event, just 2 weeks before graduating with his pji brevet, attracted the attention of his OC PTS who assured the RAF Police that Cpl Fell had performed well and that on graduation would be retained on his staff as an instructor. Consequently, all charges were dropped. In 1949, Bill married Mary, clearly a very good decision in his fast moving and eventful life. Later that year he was posted as acting Sgt to HQ 16th Airborne Division where he was to work alongside George Sizeland and Lofty Humphries. This was an intensely busy tour with virtually continuous weekday ground training and weekend parachuting from the balloon onto Wormwood Scrubs or Wanstead Flats. Bill’s contribution certainly impressed the Divisional Commander, General Lathbury, who recommended him for a commission in the RAF Regiment, soon to form an airborne squadron of its own. Bill was commissioned in 1952 in the rank of Pilot Officer. He was no longer a serving pji but was never to sever his links with military parachuting or his colleagues in the PTS Canopy Club which he had joined in 1948.

From 1952 – 56 Bill served with 54 Sqn RAF Regt in Germany, progressing to Sqn Adjutant and then to Squadron 2 i/c on his promotion to Flt Lt. On his return to the UK, Bill was posted to RAF Watchet (that’s in Somerset!) as OC Anti Aircraft Gunnery School. His next pre-employment training was at RAF Winterborne Gunner, attending the Atomic, Biological and Chemical Warfare Course prior to posting to RAF Changi, Singapore. Here Bill joined the Far East Parachute Rescue Team as an explosives expert making 14 descents with the team from Valetta and Hastings aircraft. In 1957 Bill records witnessing the dropping of the first British Hydrogen Bomb on Christmas Island. In 1962 he returned to No 1 PTS to complete a full regular basic course in preparation for taking over as OC 2 Parachute Squadron, RAF Regiment. It would appear from Bill’s career notes that the formation of 2 Sqn had been many years in gestation with many staff battles having had to be fought and won. Not the least was finally obtaining authority for the Squadron to wear parachute wings. Prior to that Bill had completed “P” Company at Aldershot in order to vet and select new recruits to the Squadron. In 1963 Bill was posted to RAF Jurby and subsequently RAF Feltwell as a Flt Cdr on Initial Officer Training. At Feltwell one of his charges was Officer Cadet Mervyn Green who having joined the RAF as a PFO was strongly advised by Bill.... “make sure you go parachuting”. History shows that to have been very sound advice!

By 1967 Bill was suffering with damaged hips and was told that his jumping days were over. By 1970 he had transferred from the RAF Regiment to the RAF Supply & Movements Branch and following pre-employment training, was posted to UK MAMS at RAF Lyneham. Promotion to sqn ldr soon followed and with that, a posting to the Services Booking Centre in London as OC Long Range Sqn. For a man so fascinated and enthused by flying this must have represented a personal nirvana. (Bill lists in his log book some 51 military aircraft, helicopters and gliders in which he had flown (as passenger or parachutist). On retiring from the RAF in 1977, Bill was appointed to the “J” Class Reserve and was appointed admin officer at the West Essex Air Training Corps Wing HQ and in 1982 to HQ Somerset Wing in Taunton until his retirement in 1987. But Bill had still not had enough and for the next 10 years served as a civilian instructor to the Somerset Wing, relinquishing his appointment in 1998; this at age 75 with a total Service of 60 years, 9 months.

Bill died in October 2014 and at his funeral service at Taunton Crematorium, the chapel was ablaze with the colours of the many Service Standards paraded, marking Bill’s long and distinguished Service in so many fields and specialisations. The PJI Canopy Club Association was represented by Peter Burgess, Peter Keane, Steve Percival and myself. There will be more glittering parachuting careers certainly, but it is hard to imagine there having been a longer Service career embracing our specialist field, marked by such versatility, energy, determination and optimism.

Graham Hand

**Finally.** If you are receiving this by ‘Snail mail’ and you have an Email address that I can send this and other correspondence to please let me know.

As Always

Mick Threlfall

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