

THE PROBUS CLUB OF CHRISTCHURCH (FOUNDED 1977)



NEWSLETTER

SPECIAL EDITION – SEPTEMBER 2014

This is a Special Edition of our Newsletter (usually issued twice a year in April and December) to mark **the recent 70th anniversary of the D - Day Landings in WW2.**

This follows a suggestion from Mike Penn, and the reason why it was felt appropriate to do so was that several of our members were actively involved in these operations – none more so than **David Wilkie**, who was a member of Bomber Command.

The following is an extract from a talk which David gave to the Club many years ago – I have the full text for those who would like a copy.

‘Our very first operational mission was on D-Day; it was the night of June 5th/6th in a Handley Page Halifax 111 Q for Queenie. In advance of the Normandy landings we bombed transport targets such as railway bridges from a height of 1,000 to 2,000 feet. Although we had no problems on this five hour trip, some crews did.

Returning home over the Channel, we saw an Armada of battleships, destroyers and landing craft heading for the beaches of France. Of course we had not been told that it was D-Day – it was still secret – but by then we knew! These pictures live crystal clear in my memory to this day. In our hearts we prayed for these brave soldiers, many of whom would not see the end of that day.

By the end of June we completed six more missions including some army support, attacking synthetic oil plants and several flying bomb sites. We continued to attack bomb sites as we entered July and made two trips to Caen in support of the army struggling to take over the German defences there. Our friend Eric (Chamberlain) was having a very tough time battling on the ground with the Middlesex Regiment trying to get the Germans out; so between us we succeeded.

Heroics, personal fears and stress experienced by air crew have been left aside as has damage to our aircraft. Flak holes in the fuselage and wings challenged the ground crew to repair them with speed and great expertise. More than once new engines were fitted after flying home on three. Flying through very heavy barrage of gun fire, dodging search lights was interesting; especially on

the bomb run when after ‘bombs away’ it was ‘steady steady’ until the camera had its picture!

Briefing before each operation was of major importance. It covered every aspect of the mission when crews sat together facing a screen covering a large map of Europe; only to have the target revealed which got either sighs of relief or horror from the assembled crews! Section leaders then discussed their topic – fuel required, navigation, bomb load and target detail, weather forecast, and from our Intelligence Officer fighter and flak hot-spots; finally times of take-off.

Then a respite with each crew member perhaps resting, or writing home, or a sealed letter to a loved one for the Padre to post if we did not return. Then there was the collection of flying kit and parachutes all in good time for the lorry to take us to dispersal, then a few words with our ground crew before boarding. For good luck some crews had a pee on an aircraft wheel.

After the trip, Intelligence debriefing wanted to know every detail, how close to target, state of German defences, did we see any of our own planes shot down etc; then to breakfast of bacon and eggs, a public rarity at that time! Only once did we have any personal injury when flak smashed through the windscreen and hit Bob the pilot leaving myself to fly the plane until he recovered.....’

At the end of David’s talk, **Eric Chamberlain** rose and said:

‘I was in a trench at Caen exchanging fire with mortar and shellfire with continuous noise; suddenly there was a different sound like thunder. Then across the sky wave after wave of bombers filled the sky and anti-aircraft guns, rockets and flares lit up the sky – the noise was terrific. As I watched I felt horrified as plane after plane exploded, spiralling down in flames or exploding in mid-air. David was amongst that attack which made it possible for the British and Canadian armies to advance from the Normandy breakout which had cost so many lives.

Thank you David and your comrades’

I think that we would all wish to join in that sentiment.

Membership

It is pleasing to be able to report that we have welcomed four new members to the Club since our April newsletter:

Maurice Dowling joined, having seen our notice in the Christchurch Eye. He was an electronics engineer who worked for various companies before setting up his own Company with a former business partner. Maurice lists his pastimes as swimming, gardening and D.I.Y.

John Enstone has moved here from Tewkesbury, where he was a member of Tewkesbury Probus Club for eight years. For six of those years he was their Programme Secretary, but apparently they have weekly meetings, so he was having to find a speaker EVERY WEEK (Graham – you just don't know how lucky you are!).

Norman Fensome was introduced to us via his wife Aprille, who is a member of Christchurch Women's Institute together with my wife May. Norman was a precision engineering toolmaker, and lists his hobbies as golf and gardening.

Richard Aylward was introduced to the Club by Mike Fay, having been friendly with Mike and Hazel for many years. Richard used to run his own business, and amongst other interests is now a volunteer warden at Stanpit Marsh Nature Reserve – could Richard possibly conduct a visit there by the Club? – Social Secretaries please note!

It is however necessary to report the sad demise of two members, both former Presidents of the Club:

Des Long passed away on the 29th May at the Macmillan Unit in Christchurch. Des was aged 82, had been a member for over 17 years, and was President in 2003. The very large number of members at his funeral bore testimony to the highest regard with which Des was held within the Club.

Bill Hale passed away on the 6th August, aged 96. President as long ago as 1988, Bill had returned to the Club last year, and was accomplished in many different spheres. Not only did he play the piano and the organ, but he also composed, and the music heard at his funeral service was composed, played and recorded by Bill.

Social Events

We have continued to enjoy a varied social programme, and highlights over the past few months have included a visit to Brooklands Museum in

Weybridge, a river trip on the Stour followed by a BBQ, and afternoon tea at Bournemouth Flying Club.

Then coming up, on 30th September, there is a tour and light lunch on the Emerald Princess whilst docked at Southampton. We've received no complaints at all about the cost of this.....er.....probably due to the fact that it's free!

President's Lunch

This will be held on **Friday 20th February 2015** at the Balmer Lawn Hotel in Brockenhurst. Further details will be advised in due course, but please make a note of the date now.

Future Speakers

Our April newsletter reported that the Speaker for our **October** meeting was still to be announced. I'm pleased to advise that this will be:

Nick Thomas – 'The Power of Humour in Everyday Life'.

And Votes of Thanks have also been arranged for the rest of the year, with many thanks to those who have volunteered:

2nd September - Ken Goodman

7th October - Mike Penn

4th November – Mike Fay

2nd December – Tony Garland

And finally.....

Des Long was always very supportive of the Club's newsletters, and earlier in the year gave me the following little story for publication. So, in fond memory of a good and helpful friend, I end this edition with Des's contribution:

Physical Exercises for Probus Members

Every day – without fail:

Up.....Down.....

Up.....Down.....

Up.....Down

And now the other eyelid.

Robin Haggett
Honorary Secretary