

NEWSLETTER

Nov/Dec 2000

Compiled by A. McRae

Annual Dinner

attended by 96 members and their guests and was agreed, these are: judged by all to have been a great success. Owing to some unavoidable last minute cancellations we just missed, for the second year running, the 'magic' 100, but we shall try again next year! Thanks to all those who donated prizes for the raffle, and to our regular ticket sellers Ann and Jenny. The raffle, although taking up a fair bit of time, is nevertheless an essential part of the function as the proceeds go toward paying for the wine which is extra to the price of the dinner. Also a special mention goes to June Newman who flew in from Australia just for this event.

Meeting

The last meeting of 2000 took place on the following Sunday 29th and again there was good turnout. Bob gave his usual robust speech and as can be seen from the photo showing part of the audience there was plenty of debating going on.



The introduction of a membership card was agreed, this will also double as an ID badge to be worn at meetings etc. This will be approx. credit card size and members can obtain their own holders to suit what ever style they want. Wearing of the badges will not be mandatory but they sure do help when it comes to identifying someone you haven't seen for a good few years.

Diary Dates

The annual dinner, held on the 28th October was Dates for next years (2001) events were also

Meeting Sunday May 20th Annual dinner Saturday October 20th Meeting Sunday October 21st

Make a note in your diaries, more details in the New Year.

Birth

Heartiest congratulations to Michael and Maureen Davis on the birth of their baby son, Ben Michael Edward, who weighted in at 6 lb 4oz on the 20th October at 12.15 pm. Michael is quoted as saying "Perhaps this will give hope to all those who were at Duxford at the same time as me!"

Len Thorne

This is an extract from Len's local newspaper published earlier this year.

The wild blue yonder was the venue for some hair-raising fund-raising this week as former World War Two pilot Len Thorne kept an aeronautical promise. Len, from Astwood Bank, performed some aerobatics on Wednesday over the homes of his neighbours, something he vowed to do once he reached the age of 80, and the Alexandra Hospital League of Friends collected around £1600 for their Millennium Playground Appeal into the bargain.

Loops, rolls, dives and spins were all on the agenda for Len, who thoroughly enjoyed his time back in the cockpit. He said "It couldn't have gone better. The weather was perfect and as far as the manoeuvres were concerned, it all came flooding back to me. It was great fun, but then it does help when no one's trying to shoot you down like they did when I flew in the war!"

Sir Archie Winskill

We have recently received the news that Sir Archie who has been in hospital is now back home and recovering from his treatment. He would like to thank all members for the cards wishing him well and a speedy recovery.

Christmas and New year bit! For those of you who make their own Christmas crackers or cards here are a few jokes to put inside.	God and the Archangel Gabriel were discussing the newly-created world. God mentioned that he had made a beautiful country called Scotland, where the rivers ran cold and clear and were full of salmon and trout.
Age and treachery will overcome youth and skill You know you are getting old when you bend down to pick something up and you are thinking "What	There were magnificent mountains, lochs and glens, the finest natural foods, and best of all, the secret of how to make the most wonderful drink, Uisge Beatha, the water of life. Gabriel was duly impressed.
else can I pick up while I'm down here"	"It seems that you have been very generous to the Scots, oh Creator," he said.
Adam met Eve and turned over a new leaf.	"Not really "replied God "I haven't told them who their neighbours are going to be yet."
Money is better than poverty, if only for financial reasons.	Learn from the mistakes of others. You can't live long enough to make them all yourself.
I remember when sex was safe and motor bikes were not.	A wise man does not play leapfrog with a Unicorn!
A closed mouth gathers no feet.	Knock knock Who's there?
Change is inevitable except from a vending machine.	Cornflakes Cornflakes who? I'll tell you next week, this is a cereal.
Try saying this after a few drinks:	
A skunk sat on a stump and thunk the stump stunk, But the stump thunk the skunk stunk.	Q. What do you get if you cross a dinosaur with a pig A. Jurassic pork!
Q. What do you get if you cross a Daffodil with a	Whisky is the cure for which there is no disease.
Crocodile? A. I don't know but I wouldn't try sniffing it.	Why do 24 hour stores have locks on the door?

snowman

A. Frostbite.

Q. What do you get if you cross a vampire with a

A. I don't know but I wouldn't try sniffing it.

If at first you don't succeed, avoid skydiving.

What was the best thing before sliced bread?

The Air Race part 3.

As the first week progressed it was our team leader, Norman Ryder, on 15th July who achieved a London to Paris time of 47 minutes 45 seconds and a return time of 44 minutes 37 seconds which put him in the lead. However, before the week was out Squadron Leader Charles Maughan achieved 43 minutes 36 seconds only to be beaten by our 20 year old Cadet John Volkers with the best time to date of 42 minutes 34 seconds. As I had brazenly predicted in May, Duxford now held the first three places.

Even so I knew these times would be under threat when the Ryland's/Bedford attempt was mounted. It was early on Sunday morning 19th July when I witnessed the arrival of Eric Ryland's in his helicopter at Biggin Hill and his quick transfer into the shining Indian Air Force Hunter. Within seconds the aircraft hood was closed and Bill Bedford then made the fastest take-off to date. When I calculated Eric Ryland's time from stamping his card at Marble Arch and arriving at Biggin Hill, via the heliport at Battersea, I was astonished. It was obvious his motorcyclist must have been lucky with the traffic lights and probably evaded police detection, hence I was not surprised to learn that his official time of arrival at the Arc de Triomphe put their team into first place with a new record of 41 minutes 41 seconds. If such good fortune was to be theirs on the return attempt an even better time would be achieved and our hopes of winning shattered. This assumption was based on the proven fact that return trips were faster due to the excellent air traffic control and customs facilities provided at Biggin Hill.

At this stage it was clearly my responsibility to tell our operations room in London that unless Eric Ryland's was "unlucky" during his return motorcycle ride from Battersea heliport to Marble Arch, the Duxford team would lose. However, it transpired that his final leg did not match the exceptional time on his outbound run. Later that day Bill Bedford joined me in the Flying Control Tower at Biggin Hill and told me the traffic police in London had waved down their motorcyclist after he and Eric Ryland's had left the heliport. Bill estimated that had this delay been avoided at least three minutes would have been saved. He smiled at he look of relief on my face, which must have been very apparent, although we both knew their outbound time could still be good enough to win. The fact remained that Eric Ryland's had completed the round journey in 91 minutes! This amazing feat was achieved 39 years ago and as far as 1 am aware has never been equalled. If Mr Ryland's and his motorcyclist had avoided meeting the police on their return trip there is little doubt that they would have broken the 40 minute barrier.

As we had forecast our main opponent had achieved a remarkable pace and with only four days remaining for the Duxford team to do as ordered by the Chief of Air Staff – namely to win. Thankfully, we had enlisted the best technical experts within Fighter Command to obtain peak performance from the Hunter and Sycamore aircraft. Also, the young fighter pilots were briefed to fly their Hunters to the limit. To this end, the total fuel capacity of the Hunter was not used thereby reducing the weight of the aircraft with the objective of gaining more speed, but on occasions the introduction of this ruse invited danger. Pilots on the inbound flights to Biggin Hill were instructed to transmit their actual fuel gauge reading on VHF radio to the Biggin Hill Control Tower when they crossed a pre-arranged map position. If the fuel state was too low it was my job to instruct the pilots to "zoom-climb", reduce power and in this way save fuel, thereby aborting the mission. Plainly this was the last thing the pilot wanted to do, so on at least one inbound run I witnessed a Hunter of ours landing at Biggin Hill with not enough fuel to taxi back to the hanger. It certainly proved to me that these young men would acquit themselves heroically in war. Over 2000 years ago the poet Virgil was well versed in the will to win when he wrote "Possunt quia posse videntur." Perhaps a literal translation is "They can (do it) because they seen to be able."

During the second week of the contest the public demanded more and more news of all aspects of the race, inciting a vast increase in press and television coverage on an international scale. So it was not unexpected when the Members of Parliament entered the fray. Hence on the 22nd of July the Air Minister, Mr George Ward, who had praised the race, was questioned by the opposition. "As there has been a lot of public money involved in helping to advertise the Daily Mail can you tell us what you intend to do with the prize money?" The Air Minister replied, "I am delighted to inform you that only a few hours ago the RAF again took first place," and the announcement was cheered by MPs on both sides of the house. Mr Ward continued to say "As we have not won, it is purely hypothetical what we would do with the money."

On the evening of that same day Charles Maughan, who headed the field, was interviewed on the TV programme "Tonight" by Mr Geoffrey Johnson-Smith.

Charles appeared on the screen resplendent in his RAF flying suit and prepared to do battle with Mr Smith who was renowned for his shrewd and controversial interrogations. As expected the 35-year old vindicated the reasons for our participation by explaining in detail how the race had afforded us first class operational training. Furthermore he continued to outline how this unique event had given his Hunter Squadron the opportunity of developing new techniques which were essential to cope with the severe pressure of competition when every second counted both in the air and on the ground. As a result of this live TV. inquisition the RAF gained the best recruiting advertisement of the year at no expense. Perhaps Mr Smith had unwittingly sweetened the Air Minister's contretemps in the House earlier that day when Mr Ward emphasised that the final outcome of the race had yet to be decided.

The hundreds and thousands of people following the contest knew that there was one day only remaining for competitors to beat Charles Maughan's time of 40 minutes and 44 seconds. His record being just 57 seconds better than achieved by Eric Ryland's on the previous Sunday morning. Nevertheless there was still the opportunity for someone to smash through the 40 minute barrier – given a favourable wind and a bit of luck this goal was just 45 seconds away. All serious competitors had to do to achieve this aim was to complete this tortuous journey of some 230 miles by saving a fraction of a minute.

Our Duxford team were well aware that, by vigorous planning throughout the night of Wednesday 22nd July, the French could re-mobilise their enormous resources and counter-attack with a last day challenge. As mentioned earlier Colette Duval, a

national heroine, had the support of a French Air Force squadron of Vantour jet bombers capable of 700 mph. Unfortunately for Colette on 21st July her pilot, instead of landing at Biggin Hill, touched down at RAF Kenley which was some seven miles west of Biggin. To the dismay of the pilot Kenley was a disused Battle of Britain airfield with only an 800-yard runway, hence the flight ended in disaster with near fatal results. Despite this accident the French resistance fighter, who emerged unscathed from the crash, could not be ruled out because 'Colette was France' and the event was to celebrate the enormous success of Louis Bleriot. Also, the French press had reported that their Air Force with the full support of the Sud Aviation Company would ensure that this brave lady was given another chance to inflict the final coup de grace. So, as expected, this heroine made a further spirited effort on the next day but failed to win by about three minutes.

Although our team leader, Group Captain Ryder, was relieved that Charles Maughan had marginally beaten the time set by the Eric Ryland's/Bill Bedford effort, he could not resist having another attempt on the last day of the race. His objective was to achieve a return passage from Marble Arch to Arc de Triomphe in under 1 hour 30 minutes and thereby show our youngsters that when the chips were down the 'old man' was willing to fight to the end. At this stage the competition police motorcyclists were keeping a close watch on Norman Ryder. Firstly, because he was the public hero as far as the crowd were concerned and secondly, because they knew that one of our spoof competitors might lead them down Park Lane while Norman took the route through Hyde Park or vice versa.

Unfortunately, for the reasons outlined above and for other unexpected delays our team leader only achieved a disappointing outward journey of 45 minutes 23 second. Not disheartened he quickly completed his time check at the Arc de Triomphe and was back on the pillion with his expert motorcyclist Corporal Barry Mehaux accelerating towards the Place d'lena when the moment came that everyone had feared – at speed he crashed into a taxi that suddenly shot out in front them Although it could not be proved, it seems that this particular vehicle had been waiting for the purpose of spoiling the final challenge of the RAF. The accident resulted in both Norman Ryder and Barry Mehaux being rushed to the British Hospital in Paris.

As I remember, it was our C.O. that took the brunt of the collision and eventually had to recuperate in hospital for two weeks. Nevertheless, despite a painful injury to his ankle, Norman discharged himself from the clutches of the doctors, returning to Marble Arch that same evening. Naturally he wanted to be there to congratulate Charles Maughan as the winner and collect his well deserved third prize, which he had won by making a time of 42 minutes 6 seconds four days before. Also, he wanted to be with his wife, Jan, to join in the celebrations which were being arranged through the generosity of Lord Rothermere, Chairman of Associated Newspapers