



# NZ Bomber Command Association News

October 2016

**Patron:** AVM Peter Stockwell ONZM, AFC  
**Honorary Chaplain:** The Venerable Neville Selwood Archdeacon Emeritus of Dunedin  
**President:** Ron Mayhill DFC (75 Sqn)  
**Vice Presidents:** Bunny Burrows (15, 622, 487 Sqn), Keith Boles DFC, pff (109 Sqn)

**NZBCA CHARITABLE TRUST 2561560**

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## From our President

Spring greetings to all and may it become warmer.

Peter Wheeler and I attended the 75 Sqn Centennial Reunion held at Classic Flyers, Mt Maunganui, a most fitting venue.



**Ron Mayhill at this month's 75 Squadron Reunion.**  
**Top left: John Swale, Ron, John Wakefield, seated Jack Meehan, Ray Tait, Alan John**

The squadron first formed in 1916, part of the RFC Home Defence. It became 75(NZ) Squadron in 1940 when our government presented 6 Wellingtons on order to the RAF. About a quarter of all NZers in Bomber Command were posted there. The most famous was James Ward VC who climbed out, kicking holds in the fabric to extinguish an engine fire.

Following VJ Day, the RAF presented Number 75 to the RNZAF which based it at Ohakea flying Venturas, then Mosquitos, Vampires, Canberras which saw action in Malaysia, and finally Skyhawks until they were disbanded in 2001.

The Queen's Colours depicting 8 Battle Honours, bestowed by the Queen Mother in 1958, now hangs in St Marks chapel, Ohakea.

The reunion was by far the largest I've seen for a long time,

some 220 sitting in down for dinner, six veterans included, in the large Classic Flyers hangar, the central SkyHawk and vintage aircraft hanging overhead creating a great atmosphere.

The reunion concluded with a moving Commemorative Service, the local ATC providing the Guard of Honour. I am sure everybody was impressed with their calibre and bearing, our most worthy successors representing the future.

May many of our veterans be able to attend our future functions, the next 27 November.

Best wishes to you all, **Ron Mayhill**

## Lancaster Survey

It's been over thirty years since our Lancaster was taken out of the weather and given the treatment by Jon Barton and the BC Boys. As we were all told 'rust never sleeps' and it is time for the aircraft to be given a 'full med'. Luckily at MOTAT we have two very experienced aircraft engineers and for weeks they have been looking into every hatch, panel and structure. Rex and Frank reported they have found two areas of corrosion that are significant and need repair. The main one being the structure attaching the outer starboard wing. A repair will cost some hundreds of dollars, so just like the old Save the Lancaster Fund days, please send us your 'fivers', dollars will do as well.

The Lancaster does need attention if it is to last another 70 years so please help. Donations are tax deductible. Receipts will be sent. Direct credits can be made to NZ Bomber Command Charitable Trust (Reg. 2561560) Please contact us for the account number.



**Rex Stanners (left) and Frank Hannay.**

## Invitation to Our Pre Xmas Lunch

RAF Bomber Command Luncheon

**When:** Sunday November 27, midday for 1pm start

**Where:** Commercial Club, 33 Ohinerau St, Greenlane – off the Southern Motorway, Greenlane East exit.

**Cost:** \$30.00

**RSVP:** to Karen by **Phone:** 09 8373311 (business hours) **Email:** [spirits.hbcl@xtra.co.nz](mailto:spirits.hbcl@xtra.co.nz) **Post:** PO Box 317-111, Hobsonville 0664

*All friends and family most welcome*

## Roy Montrowe DFC – A Wednesday Boy

Roy closed his flying career with 21960 hours logged having flown everything from Tiger Moths to Boeing 737s.



**Ray on 148 Squadron in the desert.**

Squadron Mosquitos he scattered 4000lb cookies across Germany and Berlin finishing his 95th op year in February 1945.

Roy knew that flying was to be his post war career and joined Union Airways (soon to be NAC). Faced with a second dickeie role besides less experienced but better placed captains, he just bit his lip. Progressing through Electras, Loadstars) and Dominices he progressed to Captain and spent over 12000 hours on DC3s flying NAC routes.

A typical day involved hours flying, Whenuapai to Tauranga then Gisborne, Napier, Palmerston North, Paraparaumu, New Plymouth and back to Whenuapai, a ten hour day.

Many other Bomber Command boys found a new home at NAC including Davy Smith, Allan Alexander and Reg Dear and John Curtis. There was even room for Smoky Schrader, a 486 Tempest ace! 'a great time without the restrictions of today'.

Roy moved onto the Fokker Friendship training flight, later onto Viscounts (loved by all NAC crews) and eventually to Boeing 737s as a Senior Captain.

Retired at 55 Roy continued contract flying for Charter airlines for another six years.

Founding membership of the Pathfinders then Bomber Command Associations led to Roy becoming one of the first of the Lancaster restoration team, one he hasn't yet retired from and remains a fully paid up MOTAT volunteer.

And his favourite aircraft? Well it's a ... or maybe a ...

He made twenty three raids on Tobruk in a clapped out Wellington 1C cutting Rommel's supplies in 1942. In true Air Force fashion he was rushed back to UK via express flying boat via Lisbon, then posted to fly fighter application at 11 OTU Oakley for months.

Once back in ops, this time in 692



**Captain Montrowe 737 Senior Pilot.**

## The Wednesday Boys

It's been thirty years since the Association took on the restoration, housing and financing of the Lancaster now on show at MOTAT.

In the early days there were the Sunday and Wednesday teams, John Barton with his workbook and 40 veterans paint stripping, building and painting.



**The Wednesday Boys.**

In the team from the start was Roy Montrowe now 94 and until this year a Wednesday regular. The volunteers were so numerous that the tearoom was used in shifts and even ten years ago shared with the Solent Boys. There were some real characters on the team, Alf Drew and his pranks, Doug Taylor and his endless supply of jokes, Tom Whyte's never end supply of nuts and raisins, while Roy's quota of cheese on crackers seemed endless and his paint splattered, grease stained once white lab coat was legendary amongst the team.

## CONTACT US

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Contributions to the NZBCA news are always welcome.



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**AT THE-NEW-ZEALAND-  
BOMBER-COMMAND-  
ASSOCIATION**

## ***Onto PRC, OTU and HCU***

With Canada over, and white flashes replaced with at least sergeants stripes, UK beckoned, finally to war the boys thought. But wait, a spell at a holding camp perhaps Brighton for weeks or even months for some 'unlucky' lads, and the endless parades, courses and the odd commando one thrown in.

Finally posted to an APU or nav or gunnery station for just more training. Some like Bill Simpson and Keith Boles, did so well they were kept on as instructors, sidelined for at least another year.

For the others, off to OTU, more courses and that strangely British system of crewing up. Perhaps lucky to pick up a good pilot or nav in the days before, the rest were left to find a crew from the mass of people milling around in the Westcott's hangar. Many met up with mates known from ITW, a serious business as your life was going to depend upon those mates.



***Marking time in Brighton.  
Ron Noice and Frank Prebble.***

11 OTU Westcott became established as the usual place Kiwi crews were posted. Later in the war it was also home to instructors who had done a tour and had a rest helping sprog crews learn the ropes while avoiding the inevitable prangs.

Finding a crew of six was perhaps pot luck, flying tired Wellingtons on circuits and later on cross country exercises. Until finally at the end of the course a posting to a Heavy Conversion Unit and the mighty Stirling.

1653 HCU at Chedburgh was often a favourite stop for RNZAF crews bound for Lancaster squadrons or 1658 HCU at Riccall and its Halifaxes if you were destined for a Yorkshire based squadron.

A quick month of training, picking up an RAF Flight Engineer on the way but not onto squadron just yet as a five day Lancaster Finishing School slot was waiting.



***Beam Approach Training.***



***Gone West.***

So a year after arriving in Canada and sometimes the same in UK, a year and a half after joining up, ops on a real squadron finally arrived.



***Westcott 11 OTU, John Putwain crewed up.***



***1653 HCU,  
our President's  
ground loop right  
to the MU doors.***

***'Sprog crew,  
green as hell',  
John Barton (left)***





## 11 OTU Westcott

This airfield and its satellite at Oakley was home to the Operational Training Unit from its move from Bassingbourn in September 1942 until the last course on September 18 1945.

Post war the airfield was closed and converted into the top secret Rocket Propulsion Establishment. The site was omitted on maps and even aerial survey photographs were doctored. Immediately post war a great deal of work was carried out on the captured German missiles that were much more advanced than any Allied type. With German scientists 'recruited' Westcott was the UK centre for all rocket engine development for decades.

While totally secret, locals for miles around could hear the roar of rocket engines being tested.

Sold to British Aerospace in 1987 Westcott then became a more open business park but with certain areas still restricted as rocket manufacturing continues, while the runways are covered by a large solar electricity farm.

Ed Andrews was one of many scientists employed at Westcott and today the 'Historic Westcott' group has established a museum and archive to be eventually housed in the old watch office.

### AND FROM ED ANDREWS:

Part of Waddesdon Parish runs through the airfield at Westcott and they are one of the few in England who still beat or 'perambulate' their parish boundary every seven years. They have been doing this since at least 1693 with breaks for wars along the way. Of interest is after a 10 year break for WW2 they resumed on the 7-8 May 1945 just a few day after VE day. Some of your group may have been there at the time, I was wondering if any of them remember a group of locals walking across the airfield?

I don't know if you have ever heard of this old custom before but if you haven't here is a bit of info.



**Westcott in 1944 and today**

### PARISH BOUNDARIES.

We can only guess at the way these were originally marked out. Taking the village and the manor as a centre the boundaries would probably follow ditches, streams and ancient roads and trackways. In places where there were no natural or obvious landmarked trees were often planted.

As time went by it became necessary to preserve the exact bounds so there sprung up the custom of 'the beating of the bounds'. Originally once a year on one or more of the three days which precede the Feast of the Ascension, a procession formed of clergy, church wardens and the parishioners, headed by a crucifer, went around the bounds of the parish. These days were known as 'gang days' or 'rogation days'. In an age before maps these regular perambulations were necessary for at least the avoidance of disputes.

In the parish of Waddesdon the bounds are now beaten every seven years. The distance covered is over 40 miles and takes two days.

On the first day they meet at a point where a stream crosses the Quainton Road. After a short service a cross is dug in the turf by the roadside. According to the old custom, the youngest boy of the party is held upside-down and beaten (symbolically these days – apparently it was to help him remember the occasion and the route for when the older generation passes away).

For the route through the airfield they enter the site near the officers mess where they were served tea and cake then across the fields to what I know as Hangar 4. Along the road to turn up by Hangar 3 then across the airfield to a point about 200 metres from the east end of the main runway then north up to the fence line to go the farm opposite. (Where Bulmer was killed).



**Beating the Bounds and the Main Gate**

# RAF BOMBERS BLITZ JIHADIS

*Times never change, a recent headline from the UK Express*

## ***A letter from 'Bomber' Harris***

Years ago, when the late Gp Capt. Hamish Mahaddie, visited New Zealand on a lecture tour, he passed on this letter from Harris which members might find interesting. Harris was getting old, hence the mistakes and amendments, but he said it as he saw it and nobody can deny that he was wrong.

Persuading Hamish Mahaddie to revert to his wartime Pathfinder role on behalf during his present itinerary, I welcome this opportunity to send my greetings and very warmest regards to all Bomber Command Old Lags, Aborigines, Maoris, and Whatevers or Whatareyou's. Not forgetting that forty percent of Bomber Aircrew and forty-nine percent of Bomber Pilots came to our aid from the Dominions and Colonies mainly as volunteers. I would assure them all, if they still need any such assurance, that their wartime efforts were the major cause of enemy's defeat in the Air, on Land and at Sea. If you want incontrovertible proof of that statement you can now read it repeated over and over again in the statements of Adolf Hitler, Goebbels and Albert Speer in the Goebbels Diaries and Albert Speer's two books. Not to mention Monty taking the opportunity of vast banquets in London and Cape Town publicly to assert that 'the Bomber did more than anyone to win the war'. Rommel, Germany's best General, informed his superior, once our invasion had got well established ashore in France: 'Stop the bombers or we can't win. All we can gain by going on is the loss of another city every night. If we the Atom Bomb, drop it, or make peace.' But they couldn't stop the bombing and they hadn't got the Atom Bomb because Hitler turned down the idea of producing one saying that it was all 'Jew Science', and you know what happened to Rommel for speaking the truth! General Sepp Dietrich commanding the armoured spearhead of the Ardennes breakthrough on which the success of the whole final enemy offensive had depended, help up at Bastogne, as so called 'history' relates, by an American General who, when called upon to surrender, replied with a mild four letter word which it seems so shocked those tough and so nearly victorious soldiers, that they gave up, burst into tears, and went back home to complain to Mother about that 'rude man' – or so 'history' infers! However, when Hitler's urgent messenger Albert Speer reached Sepp Dietrich's Headquarters and said 'the Furher's



***'Bomber' Harris in the Planning Room RAF Bomber Ground HQ High Wycombe.***

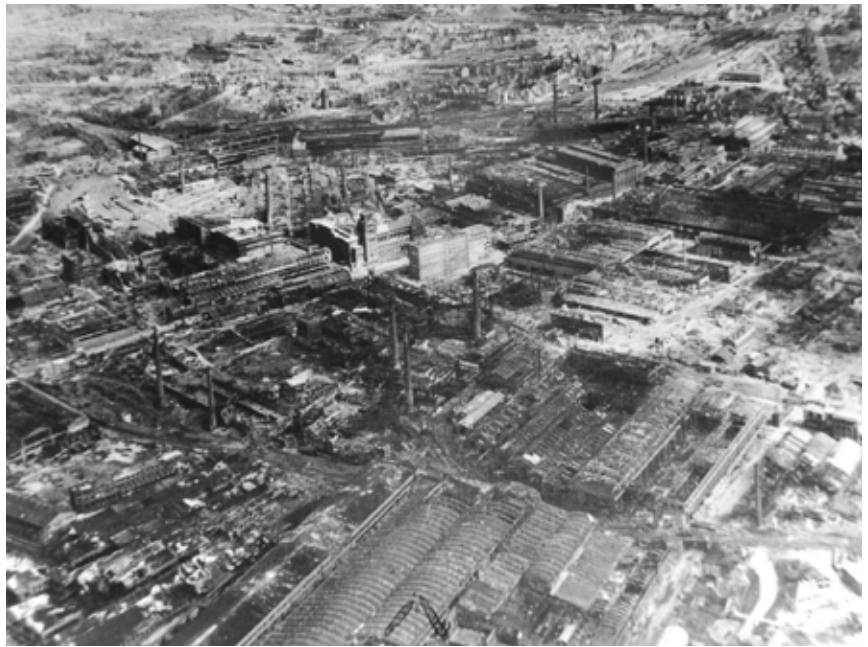
orders are that you must not stop you must go on at all costs', Sepp Dietrich replied, 'Go on! How can we go on? We have no ammunition left and all our supply lines have cut by air attack.' In the atrocious weather during those critical few days and nights only the night Bombers of Bomber Command were in continuous action, or at times at all. Tedder refers to that work

of the Bombers in his book as 'beyond praise'. Eisenhower said, in writing, 'Godammit they have achieved the impossible' and Sepp Dietrich confirmed it to Albert Speer that night 'as they listened to the continuous roar of heavy four-engined bombers overhead in the dark and mist' by saying, 'people don't realise that not even the best troops can stand up to this heavy bombing! After and experience of it they lose all fighting spirit.' (The Medicos call that shell-shock). The General who surrendered Boulogne with 8,000 fit men also confirmed that, by writing in his diary which was captured with him, 'Can anyone survive when a carpet of bombs has fallen. Once is driven to despair when at the mercy of the R.A.F without defence. All our fighting seems hopeless, all our casualties in vain.' Eisenhower also described Bomber Command as 'one of the most effective parts of his whole organisation, always seeking new ways of using their types of aircraft to help for the Armies forward.' As for Goebbels, he and Albert Speer repeatedly assert in their writings that the strategic bombing was 'the cause of all our set backs' and Speer further asserts in writing that all the Allied War Books he has read miss that obvious fact and conclusion. He refers to the Strategic Bombing as, for Germany, 'The greatest lost Battle of all'.

The bombing destroyed and/or contracepted hundreds more submarines and small war craft and more capital ships than the Navy. It also annihilated the enemy merchant fleet on which their heavy war industries depended for the import of essential Scandinavian Ores. In the air, bombing prevented the Germans from ever building up a worthwhile bombing force and made them concentrate almost entirely on the production of fighters and the training of day and night fighter pilots in a despairing effort, which failed to protect the Fatherland.

The anti-aircraft defence of Germany which failed to deter you Old Lags, deprived the German armies on all fronts of 20,000 i.e. half their vitally needed anti-tank – anti-aircraft guns and the 900,000 fit men needed to man those guns in Germany. Men who otherwise have manned those essential anti-tank weapons on every enemy front, a major cause of the German armies defeat on every front. Railway repairs to bomb damage kept another 80,000 fit skilled men fully employed in Germany and thousands more for repairs to bomb damage to essential war industries. All of those men, but for the bomber offensive, would have been additional highly skilled soldiers in the German armies in the field.

Speer also states that it was the very heavy R.A.F. bombs that did the 'irreparable damage' to industrial plants and he has also expressed his astonishment at the extraordinary and ever increasing accuracy of the R.A.F. bombers on such small targets as Benzole plants, sometimes bombed blind through thousands of feet of cloud during the final stages of the war. Our Official History describes the result of the Bombing of Berlin as 'not a failure, but a defeat'. But before any allied



***The ruins of Krupp's empire.***

soldier got within 50 miles of Berlin the Central Government of Germany had been virtually reduced by that bombing to two maniacs – Hitler and Goebbels, cowering deep underground beneath the widespread ruin of the Capital city, issuing voluminous orders to practically phantom armies which either no longer existed or were in such position and condition as to make obedience to such orders impossible.

Meanwhile, those two maniacs were testing poison pills on a dog to see if they would suit their purpose, which they shortly carried out, of murdering their own wives and children and committing suicide!

If London and the top Government of England had been reduced by German bombing to similar conditions and, say, Winston Churchill and Brendan Bracken to the same position, state and the intentions (which if of course inconceivable), I wonder if any German Official History would describe that bombing as 'not a failure, but a defeat'!

I leave that to your judgement, and to the verdict of real history. Take my tip and get those Goebbels' and Speer's books and when your grandchildren ask you what you did in the Great War tell them to read them. They'll get the true facts!



## Baling out of a Lancaster

Five of the seven crew were located under the cockpit canopy (or thereabouts) and to move aft you need to climb over the main spar which is about 28 inches high, in a narrow part of the fuselage, duck under the mid upper copula as you descend four steps at the end of the bomb bay then climb another big step to get to the rear door rim. Not easy to do quickly even in a static aircraft like ours. In the dark, or perhaps with flames plus g forces it would be very difficult.

In the cockpit there is an escape hatch in the glazing about the pilots seat, it's not big, maybe 24" by 12". Down in the nose is the forward hatch in the floor. This is about the size of the cockpit one and tapers out, so when released it is meant to drop out. But airflow pressure and any airframe distortion (from flak damage) will jamb this and there are many tales of crew jumping on this hatch to get it free.

When you consider the crew would have had flying gear on plus a parachute, escape would not have been easy through the front hatches, hence many moved to the rear to use the crew door. If they fell forward, or rolled out, perhaps ok, but if they jumped out horizontally, the tail plane would be, been, lethal...

Escape from the pilots seat would be most difficult especially if the aircraft couldn't be trimmed and he had to remain while his crew got away. I read that while overall BC losses were 30%, the losses of pilots exceeded 50%. I don't have any way of verifying that but it seems very possible.

I think the Halifax was much the same. I remember hearing an old Halifax pilot (although he was probably about 20 when he was in this position!) by the name of Charlie Chambers, who grew up in the valleys of Banks Peninsula near Motukarara, and had only ever driven a tractor before he tackled the Tiger Moth, then the Oxford (latter at Wigram). Having been shipped off to the UK in 1941 or thereabouts he carried out in succession the courses required of trainees for Bomber Command, and finally made it to an operational squadron. I think it was on his first war op that he was shot down, and spend the rest of the war as a POW. However his departure from the Halifax was rather traumatic (as it would be!) and as he dropped out of the under-nose hatch he hit his chin on the front edge of the door opening and was only semi-conscious for the first part of his fall, only remembering to pull his ripcord as he was coming round. I think he may have broken some of his teeth. Needless to say, the rest of his war was pretty boring, but at least he was alive. Have an idea that he might have been the only survivor from this aircraft. However this reminded me of a book that came out about 20 years ago on the fortunes of Bomber Command, and as I recall the author was at great pains to point out that the chances of survival after being shot down in a BC aircraft was only about half that of the crew members of the USAAF's 8th Air Force operating from British bases. As I recall he put this down largely to the difficulty of baling out of British bombers in general, and the fact that this usually occurred during the hours of darkness. However you would also have to consider that for much of the war the British bombers flew at considerably lower altitudes than the B-17s and B-24s, which not only meant that you would be receiving a lot less flak, but also had a lot longer to get yourself to an exit and actually bale out. This author went on and on about the miserable design

features of British bombers which made them so difficult to bale out of, and he considered (presumably by using BC statistics) that the Lancaster had the worst record of bale outs of all British bombers, by far. Now I could not comment on that, but this could well be right, but one hopes he measured his losses whilst taking into account the exposure to hazards of each operation and each aircraft type, by number of losses per 100 sorties or some such. Still it was quite a shock to some people that getting out of a night bomber in an emergency could be made so difficult. However as you have already stated, the difficulty of even finding your way to an exit in perhaps complete darkness, even if you did go to the closest available (which as you say was the on under the nose). Use of the main entry door down by the tail was greatly discouraged, although the reasons we, as I have already said, not stated. Incidentally the pilots overhead escape hatch (as with so many other British and American bombers) was only ever intended to be used after a crash landing or similar, and was definitely NOT for parachuting out of – probably too much in the way of obstacles to a fragile human body trying to escape by this method, including a maze of airdials and turrets! The Lancaster hatch was several inches smaller than the Halifax and the casualty rate was 25% higher.

## ..... Standard Beam Approach

Is it a dot? Or is it a dash? What does the 'kicker' say?  
Do we come? Or do we go? Are we so far away?  
Nothing ever seems to tell just what it ought to say,  
When first attempts are being made, to cope with the S.B.A.!

In and out the twilight, up and down the beam,  
Dashes, dots and beacons are never what they seem.  
Is the aerial up, or down? Inter-com, or mix?  
Volume weak, or volume strong? What a box of tricks!

First along the Q.D.M, then the Q.D.R.,  
Plus or minus, more or less, near and yet so far!  
Big corrections into wind, small the other way,  
Counting more or counting less, add or take away!

Sitting in a pool of sweat, trying might and main,  
Drift has changed with loss of height, round we go again,  
Gremlins rap the perspex, thoughts flow thick and fast,  
Stick to the Sperry panel, or those thoughts might be your last!

Subconsciously, yet so precise, how easy when you know,  
Reactions are so rapid now, where once they were so slow.  
So now you fly in Q.B.I., and, whereas in the past  
You scraped above the undergrowth, now, through the overcast!



Before



and After.



**Short Stirling Mk III, December 1943.**

They felt a call to mount up high  
With valour fly the trackless way  
High in the vastness of sky  
Mere boys they flew by day and night  
Through cloud, through fire o'er land  
and wave  
From hell, this world they strived to  
save

So many fell  
Their lives their final sacrifice  
They died from cannon and flak  
For peace they fought, but what a  
price  
The homecomers bore wounds  
unhealed  
Of friends ne'er forgot and grief's  
forever concealed

So sadly, even they leave us now  
Their being lives on, if we  
Take this solemn vow  
Their love, their honour and courage  
be  
The heritage we carry all of our days.

Adapted from Neville Selwood  
The Venerable Archdeacon Emeritus of  
Dunedin  
8.5.2015

## Calendar

### Reserve the dates NOW!

**2017**

**Sunday 26 February:**

RNZAF 80 year celebration, we will  
run a chartered DC3 for the days  
flying at Ohakea.

## Old Codgers

As members of Associations of old wartime codgers we debated carrying on forever or as forever as it is likely to get or disbanding with a shrug. Except for eating and drinking, let's face it, reunions or meetings are without agenda or much point some may say. Our war is seldom mentioned because we know how it turned out. We used to talk about our children and now relate our grand-children's exploits. The shortcomings of the medical profession and the backslidings of Government are high on our list of conversational topics.

Though still recognisable no doubt, we have changed in appearance and possibly in shape but not in character. The Jeremiahs of a half century ago are still miserable and happy-go-luckies are still extroverts.

Why do we want to keep meeting? Nobody knows for sure. Maybe we're so old we've lost all ambition to outdo each other at anything and thus remain on easy speaking terms. We don't boast about then and now. We don't dig deeply into nostalgia. One of our members recently waxed enthusiastically about his visit to England and the old wartime airfields and slabs of concrete in a field. There wasn't a wet eye in the house!

Anyway, the last formal meeting reached a death rattle suggestion that all the trappings of a formal organisation be dropped and we become an association of friends keeping in touch by occasional lunches or whatever. Maybe that's as it should be.

*From founding President Bill Simpson 2002.*

### Reflections '42

We lived our life in the sunshine  
Then came the shadow of war  
We understood not the shouting  
Or what the fighting was for.

We heard ~~talk~~ of the blitzkrieg —  
Of Europe fighting the Hun,  
We feared invasion of Britain's Soil;  
So we left our place in the sun.

We'll fly up out of the sunshine,  
With hope we'll take to the air,  
Where-ever the war clouds gather,  
Then we'll be willingly there.

The German's wanted this warfare,  
Let's seek the Jap and the Hun,  
We'll win for now and for ever  
And hold our place in the Sun.

By E. S. Wilkinson and  
R. J. W. Hey.

**E Wilkinson (Tony) NZ417138 flew as captain on 75 Squadron Stirlings  
He was killed in action during a raid on Mannheim 5.9.43**