

NEWSLETTER

May 2020

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HMS MERSEY - ACF 13 CO - RAF 622 SQUADRON

Post-VE DAY: SERVICES NEWS MAY 2020

The Master writes:

On the occasion of VE day, on behalf of our Worshipful Company I sent messages of goodwill, encouragement and support to each of our three service affiliates.

Each of them responded, and I am happy to tell you that they are all in good heart.

This is despite the fact that all had had preparations far advanced for memorable VE75 celebrations, which sadly had to be cancelled.

I thought that you would like to see the news that I have received from all three, and so with the desktop publishing assistance of our Clerk I have put together this special Newsletter.

With very best wishes to everyone

Margaret Bickford-Smith QC

Master Arbitrator

22nd May 2020



HMS Mersey



HMS Mersey has continued to patrol in the English Channel, monitoring foreign warships and on fishery protection duties, and operating from her base in Portsmouth.

On 30th April it was reported in our national press that whilst on security patrol she was scrambled, after taking over from the French Navy, to track a Steregushchiy-class Russian corvette which sailed down the Channel, refuelled and transferred stores from a Russian auxiliary vessel.

Her Commanding Officer Lt-Cdr William Edwards-Bannon (Honorary Freeman of the Worshipful Company) replied to my email with the reassuring news that HMS Mersey and her Ship's Company were well. Will added:

"This has been a particularly challenging time for everyone: over 20,000 members of the Armed Forces are currently involved directly in supporting the fight against COVID-19 and the entirety of the Naval Service has been brought to 48 hours' notice to support this effort. MERSEY, however, has a different mission: we, along with our sister ships TYNE and SEVERN, have been tasked by the Fleet Commander to assist other elements of the UK Armed Forces with ensuring the integrity of the UK's maritime security throughout this challenging period."

"Whilst this has always been an occasional part of our routine operations, our primary purpose has traditionally been the fishery protection role that the Royal Navy has played such a leading part in since the days of Admiral Nelson. In the current situation though, the Royal Navy's role in ensuring the free-flow of trade both to and from the UK – over 95% of which continues to be by sea – has never been more important and so this is where our efforts are being prioritised."

Referring to the recent media coverage of high levels of Russian military activity around the UK, he commented that the coverage of MERSEY's role in this in the national media had helped concerned families understand what their loved-ones are doing.

As to COVID-19 and the lockdown, Will's account of what has been happening on Mersey makes interesting reading:

"... In order to achieve this mission safely we have been following the Govt's guidelines so far as possible, including screening everyone who crosses MERSEY's gangway to check for signs of the virus, shielding Ship's Company at home for seven days prior to returning on board and restricting all but the most operationally-essential visitors to the Ship. Where contractors have to come on board while alongside to help us keep MERSEY mission-ready, we apply strict social isolation measures to them. We also adhere to social isolating measures between ourselves on board so far as we can; we are blessed with a maximum of two-person cabins ... (which is a considerable advantage compared to the large mess-decks of other ships) but there is obviously a limit to what can be done while still doing our job for the Nation."

However, he noted that this is a problem

"... shared with many other key workers; total social isolation is just not possible while operating as either a healthcare worker or member of the emergency services, for example, and it is the same for us – but we are doing everything we can to minimise the risk so far as possible. Whilst none of these measures can ever be truly 100% effective, when combined with common-sense and high levels of personal hygiene they give us the very best chance of keeping MERSEY free of COVID-19 and ensuring that no-one brings the virus home with them on leave."

The onset of COVID-19 and the national lockdown was a particular frustration because Mersey was scheduled for a special role for the VE75 celebrations in London, which was to be outboard of HMS Belfast during VE week, and to act as the RN's focal point, entering London under Tower Bridge. I have replied to Will (commiserating on Mersey's cancelled celebrations) with our continued good wishes.

Will also mentioned that he is keen to cooperate in such activities as can be managed with the Company. Although current constraints evidently make that difficult, we will be pursuing this jointly as best we can.

Our Liaison with HMS Mersey continues in the capable hands of Court Assistant Clive Thorne.

13 Company, Army Cadet Force, Greater London South West Sector



The first post-COVID news that you should be aware of is that since mid-March the unit has been on effective stand-down, the cadets being in lockdown with the general civilian population.

Major Peter Oweh, their Commanding Officer (Honorary Freeman) kindly wrote on the evening of 25th March to let us know that he would be taking leave of absence with immediate effect, and expressing his good wishes to the Worshipful Company. **He has handed over command of 13 Company to Captain Karen (Kaz) Lorimer.** Happily both I and Court Assistant Peter King (our very active Court liaison) had already met Kaz, because she took excellent care of us at the Annual 13 Company Christmas Camp at Lydd, Kent last December (*see all three of us in visit photo above*).

About their current activities, Kaz reports that as a company HQ team, she and her colleagues are conducting virtual visits to each detachment, communicating live with them via video link on social media. Their Sergeant Majors are working very hard on the new online training platform. The aim is to offer support to the cadets and engage with them, and where possible progress them through their certification levels and the vocational offerings that are available through 13 Company. She and her Staff Officer are also looking after any mental health issues for both cadets and adults during the lockdown as required, ensuring that there are signposts and support as appropriate. Over the VE Day weekend cadets “made their own weekend”, individually from lockdown, as a mini-competitive event.

13 Company remains on standdown, anticipated to be until the 31st May, but they are starting to discuss the calendar for the remaining of the year. Kaz expressed the hope that we would be able to meet again soon: I have suggested that this would most likely in the short term have to be via Zoom meeting, about which she is keen. We will be trying to progress this with dates, as and when 13 Company’s own commitments allow.

In the meantime Kaz is happy to share with you

- 13 Company’s Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/13CoySWLondonACF/>
- Twitter names: herself [@OC_13COY](https://twitter.com/OC_13COY), or Training Sgt Major Notridge [@13COY_TSM](https://twitter.com/13COY_TSM)

so that those of you who would like to can follow the Company and see their doings, so as to strengthen our relationship.



RAF 622 Squadron



On VE Day very special salutations were due to 622 Squadron. The Squadron has a special wartime history to remember: during the final days of World War II it took part in Operation Manna, the humanitarian food drop into the then German-occupied Netherlands to feed the starving Dutch civilian population.

One of those on that mission was Bill Gould, pictured below, who celebrated his 95th birthday only recently, on 14th April 2020.

The Operation began on 29th April 1945. Flight records show that Bill, then a sergeant and flight engineer, was in an Avro Lancaster PA164 of 622 Sqn on the second day. He had only just had his 20th birthday. The courage shown by all involved can be understood when we realise that, whilst they were used to flying at 26,000 feet, on this occasion 3,000lbs of food was being dropped from just 50 feet.

Bill recalls flying down the wide road leading to The Hague and their drop zone, a horse race track, at 50 feet:

"People were in family groups and many had little pieces of cardboard with 'Thank you very much' and 'More cigarettes please' written on them."

Bill's comments in a recent interview can be heard via this short link:

<https://raf.imagencloud.com/record/~0735be6540>



Bill's last flight on this operation was on VE day itself; he went on to fly several repatriation sorties bringing back POW's from Germany in Operation Exodus. Still regularly in touch with the Squadron, he lists these two Operations as his proudest missions during the War.

In responding to this information, I asked that birthday congratulations and best wishes be passed on to him on behalf of the Worshipful Company.

622 Squadron was for obvious reasons to have played a special part this May in the celebrations for VE Day, and the commemoration of Operation Manna and the liberation of Europe, to which the COVID-19 lockdown put an unceremonious end. Plans had included a trip to the Netherlands visiting the drop zones used for food drops, a visit to the Hotel Wereld where the declaration of surrender was signed, and an overflight by a Lancaster from the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight, with tributes (as well as to the doings of our armed services and the nation), to the resilience of the Dutch people.

To update you about 622 Squadron's doings during the current emergency and lockdown, from their base at Brize

RAF 622 Squadron (continued)

Norton their Commanding Officer (and Honorary Freeman of the Worshipful Company) Squadron Leader Sqn Ldr Roisin ("Rosh") O'Brien MBE has commented that, as with VE day 75 years ago,

"... many of those in the services are still overseas in Cyprus, Iraq, Afghanistan, Africa, Falklands and Lithuania, as well as those supporting the fight against the current virus.

"In addition, the military have stepped up to the mark today with the COVID crisis, building hospitals, providing logistics support and manning testing centres.

"The RAF in particular have done medevacs from Scottish Islands and other areas where people need [to be] transported for more specialised medical care and also the transport of PPE from other countries.

"Personnel from 622 Sqn have been involved in many areas supporting these efforts from the Operations and Planning teams, to the Engineers, Aircrew and Air Traffic Controllers augmenting the Regular Force. We also have 2 individuals selected to assist NHS Gold Command in London.

"As with 75 years ago, the RAF and 622 Sqn stand by to ask what is requested of us whether at home or overseas. This year has already seen Flooding and Pandemic and as ever we will turn around and prepare for the next event that comes our way."

Our Squadron 622 liaison, Freeman Gillian Ekins comments:

"It is so good that WCA has developed its RAF association and that it supports all branches of the military as we do really owe them and their predecessors so much."

Members of the Company who visited Brize Norton in August 2019 will recall the splendid welcome we received from Rosh and the Squadron. We have all of us been looking forward to a repeat visit this summer. When circumstances permit, we will be arranging a visit, or such other contact as can be managed: we're confident it will hold interest for everyone.



We hope you have enjoyed this special VE75 edition of the Company newsletter. If you have any feedback or comment please email the Clerk, Biagio Fraulo, at clerk@arbitratorscompany.org