



The newsletter of the 202 Squadron Association



Handley Page Hastings TG517, a former 202 Sqn airframe, rests in the sunshine at the Newark Air Museum.

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The President's Piece

After a year's hiatus, I'm proud to say that the 202 Squadron Association was once again represented at the Remembrance Day Cenotaph Marchpast in Whitehall on Sunday 14th November.

Despite losing two of our number at the very last minute, through health issues, we fielded a 12-strong team on the day. From the start, there were one or two organizational issues, not of our making I hasten to add, such that arriving formed up in front of the Downing Street gates was a bit of a scramble. So much so, that one of the team didn't catch up with us until we were actually on Whitehall! But it all worked out eventually and, instead of being right at the back as previously, we were the 3rd contingent in the parade with the band just in front (very useful for staying in step!). And we were one of the first veteran contingents to lay a wreath.

On the return, as we approached Horse Guards to disburse, we discovered that the "Royal" taking the salute was none other than Prince William, Duke of Cambridge. When his right-hand man announced that the contingent "eyes-righting" at the time was 202 Squadron, a grin spread over his face. Whether he was thinking, "Where the are 22 Squadron?" or just pleased to see fellow SAR boys, we'll never know.

We've had one new recruit to the "Cenotaph Gang" this year and it would be nice if we could build up to a solid 20 or more. It's a great day out and a poignant occasion. Why not join us? We form up on Horse Guards at 0930 on Remembrance Day, march through to Whitehall to witness the wreath laying, then march past the Cenotaph ourselves, laying our own wreath. On our return to Horse Guards, we disperse and head for the Royal Air Force Club for a few drinks and lunch.

If you'd like to join us but are dubious about being able to march these days, don't be. The whole experience is very enjoyable and makes you proud. Please let me know if you fancy it.

In Comradeship,

Pete Chadwick

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202 Squadron marching contingent, 14th November 2021



Update from the Chairman

On the one hand, it doesn't seem like a year since I wrote my last piece for *The Mucky Duck*, but on the other, the year has been an eternity, as the impact of the Covid virus seems to go on and on. And on. Covid continues to restrict the Association's activities and, more seriously, affect us all. My thoughts and best wishes go out especially to those who have lost family and friends to the virus, and to those directly impacted by the virus.

After a period of hospitalization, during which many Members sent her well wishes, Irene Bakewell died in February 2021. Unfortunately, due to the 'Covid rule of 30', attendance at Irene's funeral was limited. Subsequently a memorial service was held in RAF Halton Church on 3 August 2021, which many Association Members attended. Geoff has also stated publicly (at our AGM) how much he appreciated the numerous messages of condolence and support that he received from Members.

Association Members also rallied around when one of our ex-Hastings members had been in hospital for major surgery. Members were encouraged to write to him to speed his recovery...and you did! Many thanks, as I know all the letters of support were much appreciated. Keith Vernoum, who had previously been the Senior Engineering Officer on 202 Squadron (as well as spending time on 84 and 203 Sqns, and on SAR Wing at RAF Finningley), died in February 2021.

Continuing with people, Donal McGurk took over command of RAF Odiham and the Chinook Force at the end of August 2021. Donal is not only an ex-member of the Association but also is the first ex-SAR station commander of Odiham. Donal's letter of congratulation and best wishes from the Association was the first formal letter he received (other than one from Chief of the Air Staff appointing Donal as the Delivery Duty Holder for Chinook). In his reply, Donal promised to rejoin and noted "I have a Sea King Sqn print, winch hook and AHT [auxiliary hover trim] handle on display in my office."

Our Membership continues to dwindle and, as a result, cause concern. As you know, we have tried various initiatives over the years to entice new members. As you can see from the table, our current membership is around 117, which is a reasonable number, but the reality is that this represents a reduction of almost one-third in our membership since its peak in 2016. Any ideas for attracting - or even active assistance in recruiting – new Members would be very welcome. Ian Stephenson’s diligence and energy in chasing current Members to remain active is to be commended.

2016	166
2017	155
2018	149
2019	145
2020	135
2021	117

Covid has affected all the Association’s activities. For most of 2021 we deliberately delayed planning a reunion, due to the ongoing pandemic. As summer progressed, the Committee started to make tentative ideas to hold a Reunion in October. We weighed the ongoing impact of the virus against the effort needed to plan this event and the need for up-front payments, and decided that the event was too risky. Next we decided that a lunch in the RAF Club in December was a reasonable option, as it could be cancelled readily and did not require payment up front. Pete cracked on with organising this event; however, with only 16 people signed up to attend and Covid continuing to influence many people’s views about travelling and attending functions, we took the decision a few weeks ago to cancel the event. As someone who is currently recovering from a ‘mild’ dose of Covid, despite being double-vaccinated, I understand people’s concerns about transmission and infection. Let’s just say there’s a lot of catching up that I hoped we can do in 2022.

Much more positively, as it was an outdoor event, we decided that we would attend the Cenotaph parade on 14th November. My thanks to Pete Chadwick for (again) organising our attendance at this event and for writing about it in his *Mucky Duck* piece.

To prove that ageing canines can learn stuff, we have used Zoom to continue some activities, although some perhaps more successfully than others. The Committee held a meeting on 28th January 2021 using Zoom. One Committee member described the event as being “a bit jerky, like using a voice-activated microphone”.

Nonetheless, the meeting was overall successful, allowing 'business' to continue, and we plan to hold another such meeting this month. Throughout Ian Stephenson has continued to organize and host Zoom meetings for Hastings members, and is even managing to attract new members to these events.

We held our AGM by Zoom on 18th April 2021. The date was rearranged at short notice, as the funeral of Prince Philip clashed with the previously arranged date. The change resulted in a lower attendance than hoped, with only 15 members taking part. OC 202 Sqn unfortunately had a clash with a prior engagement, so Sgt Tom Wilson gave us an update about the Sqn's activities (Tom was subsequently heading to officer training at Cranwell, so we wished him well). Before the formal AGM, Dave Wells of Historic Helicopters, and an ex-RAF helicopter engineer, gave a presentation about the refurbishment of Sea King HAR3 XZ588 carried out by Historic Helicopters, which returned the aircraft to flying condition.

And it seems apt to end my piece with an update about another Sea King Mk 3, in this case XZ587, which was installed as the new gate guardian at RAF St Mawgan in July 2021. This was appropriate given St Mawgan's long association with Sea Kings and even longer association with RAF Search & Rescue.



After trawling the Association Membership for stories about XZ587, I sent OC St Mawgan a short note detailing various people's memories of the aircraft. XZ587 is a very significant aircraft, as Pete Chadwick wrote: "XZ587 was the first Sea King to be delivered to RAF Sea King Training Unit (SKTU) at Culdrose. I flew it on an acceptance check on 19 January 1978. It stayed at Culdrose for the whole of the initial conversion of the four Flights of 202 Sqn, namely Lossie, Boulmer, Coltishall and Brawdy. Below is a photo of the final formation before SKTU was reduced to only two aircraft." (XZ587 appears to be in the Number 5 position but it's hard to say for sure! – Ed)



Finally, I hope very much that 2022 will see an improvement on the last two and enable us, at long last, to get together and catch up.

Steve Garden

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Farewell

In the last 12 months your committee has been notified of the death of the following Association members:

February 2021: Irene Bakewell

May she Rest in Peace.

Please tell me if you hear of the death of any of our comrades, so that both the Association and individual Association Members can send their condolences to the next of kin.

Derek Whatling

Almoner

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News from 202 Squadron

Christmas is here again already! How did that happen? All of a sudden Charlie Logan is reminding me that I owe him an article for the Mucky Duck and for once I have some sort of excuse as to why I haven't provided it yet.....we are busier on 202 Sqn! Progress had been painfully slow since the new contract began in April 2018 but in Summer 2021 we finally began delivering the maritime syllabus that we are here for. The first 406 Cse (RN Observers) and 456 Cse (RN Pilots) commenced training in the final week of August 2021 while the first 446 Cse (RAF & RN SH Pilots) arrived in September 2021. From then on, the courses have been steadily coming in. Better late than never!

We have been live winching over water for boat transfers and scenarios (decks and sits in old money). The only element we are still waiting for is 'wets'. That is pending some trials here with our new sea tray fit in the Jupiter. The aircraft has been largely welcomed by all. The big change for us has been the winch op and trainee winch op position. One must be stood on the skid with a harness, leaning out to the boomed hoist. Warm clothing is required for this in the winter!



It's great to see more immersion suits being worn around 202 Sqn – a good sign that there is a shift towards predominantly maritime sorties being flown now. Recently I found myself driving a sortie for rear crew grappling ('drums' in old SAR speak) training just off South Stack on a beautiful day and it reminded me how lucky we are to live and operate in this part of the world. A seal and some dolphins even popped up to say hello! As many of you will know, we tend to get to see a bit more on the ground/sea from a helicopter and it's nice to steal a moment every now and then to appreciate it.

We said 'goodbye and good luck!' to Sgt Tom Wilson who started IOT in May. Some of you will have met him on a Zoom call a while back. He quickly found himself teaching navigation to his fellow cadets. He then returned to us on successful completion of IOT as Fg Off Tom Wilson and has been holding with us prior to his next mission. Keep an eye out for him as a future RAF Valley Stn Cdr!



August also saw the first use of the winch trainer by 202 Sqn staff at RAF Shawbury to prepare the 406 Cse for the live winching that they are doing here at RAF Valley. The students concentrated on cabin exit and entry techniques using an adjustable platform to create a safe 'ground level' as all overland live winching is conducted with any persons on the wire being kept to 20 ft or less from the ground. Once the winchman is on the wire the helicopter can climb or descend as required whilst the winch operator adjusts the length of the cable to keep them in that safer zone closer to the ground.





Mr Duncan (Woody) Woodward (QHCI) and Flt Lt Al Conner (QHI) both reached the huge milestone of 8000 flying hours this summer, rewarded with some 'media' attention and cheap fizz. They have amassed these hours over long careers, much of it in the SAR role with many stories created along the way. Flt Lt Conner will be

able to spend more time regaling these stories to his family and friends now as he retired in October.



Mr Mark O'Leary (Molly), a very well established member of staff ('old git' in his words) at 202 Sqn, also reached the milestone of 8000 helicopter flying hours in November. Over a quarter of these have been in the instructional role. We think he gets his energy from the mountain of sweets and snacks that can always be found on his desk. Look closely at the Jupiter in the sunset picture – Molly is upside down checking his kit – or at least that's his excuse. *(This beautiful photo is on the back page of this edition – Ed).*

We thoroughly enjoyed our Christmas function at the Sandy Mount House in Rhosneigr having missed one in 2020 for obvious reasons. We're not out of the Covid woods yet, but it's lovely to have had some social functions to look forward to again. Hopefully we'll be able to catch up with some of you in 2022. Take care and have a safe and very Merry Christmas.

Nadolig Llawn!

Flt Lt Josh Ryznar



The *Samson* Rescue – 12th December 1987

In March of this year, John Rattenbury got in touch with the Association via our website. John wanted to give the Association a panel that comprised a postcard with a first edition RNLI stamp that was carried on the rescue from the *Samson* barge on 12 December 1987, an account of the rescue, and a photo of the helicopter crew.

John had come across the panel in Devizes Collectibles Market in 2010 and had only just re-discovered it while turning out at home. John is keen on RAF collectibles, but also Brawdy is near where he lives in Pembrokeshire. He is a member of the 10 Squadron Association following his time as a Victor co-pilot in the 1960s. John is “really pleased that I seem to have found a 'home' for the panel”. I’ve already told him that I’m also pleased, and I’m sure that you all will be too!

I currently have the panel stored safely, but a photo of it is shown below. To save you all searching for magnifying glasses, the text on the postcard with the franked first edition stamp is reproduced on the next page, as well as the longer report.



“British Forces Postal Service 12 December 1987.

Flown in Sea King Mk 3, ZE368 of ‘B’ Flight, No 202 Squadron from Royal Air Force Brawdy on a SAROp to the floating crane *Samson* adrift between the Smalls Lighthouse and the Eire coast. Transit made under IMC [Instrument Meteorological Conditions]. The crane was located on radar at 30 nms range and a descent to VMC [Visual Meteorological Conditions] carried out at 10 nms range with the aircraft breaking cloud at 400 ft. Visual sighting of *Samson* made at 4.5nms; wind speed 25-30 kts [knots], sea state 6. After 20 minutes over the drifting crane 2 crewmen were winched to safety. The Sea King then flew to Cork making an ILS [Instrument Landing System] approach to land.

Captain: Flt Lt M J Brett RAF

Co-pilot: Flt Lt P A Jones RAF

Winch operator: Flt Sgt G M Holmes

Winchman: Sgt M W Tait”

REPORT ON SAROP FLOWN BY ‘B’ FLIGHT 202 SQUADRON ON 12TH DECEMBER 1987:

This report covers the SAROP flown by a B Flt 202 sqn crew in the early hours of 12 Dec 87 to the floating crane *Samson*.

At 0050 SRCC [Southern Rescue Coordination Centre Plymouth] scrambled the crew to the floating crane *Samson* adrift [having lost its tow] between the Smalls Lighthouse and the Eire coats. The crew launched at 0130 and flew an IMC transit, locating the crane on radar at 0155 at 30nms range. A descent to VMC was carried out at 10nms range [with] the ac [aircraft] breaking cloud at 400ft. Visual sighting of the crane occurred at 4.5nms. The weather conditions on scene were a wind of 25-30 kts, sea state 6.

The crane was approximately 150ft high, 120ft long, with a draught of 8ft and lying cross-wind. Two crew were on board but they did not have radio contact with the towing tug *Zantug 2*; however, they could be seen on deck wearing lifejackets.

The crane presented the crew with a difficult winching problem as there was no obvious winching area. After 20 minutes' discussion, Flt Lt Brett chose to try and winch, from 50ft, on an area under the crane jib. A dummy approach was flown, but at 10-15m the movement of the jib and its associated hawsers above the rotor disc caused the crew to abandon their attempt in that area.

The barge was still steadily drifting towards the Irish coast so the captain assessed that a lifeboat might be needed. The Hook Point Lighthouse Keeper arranged for the lifeboat to be launched, but informed the crew that it would take two hours to reach the scene. The master of the *Zantug 2* informed the crew that, within two hours, the crane would be aground on a shore that had 200ft cliffs.

Given that fuel was approaching the minimum required for an approach at Cork followed by a diversion to Shannon, and the danger the crane crew would be in should they remain on the crane as it grounded on an inhospitable shore, Flt Lt Brett decided to try a further rescue attempt. Flt Lt Brett moved in to assess the winching references at 150ft on the bow with the height hold disengaged. Finding he could maintain the hover, he descended to a clear area and safe height to brief the rescue. Flt Lt Brett decided on a 3-man lift so that the winchman, Sgt Tait, could remain attached to the winch wire. The winchman was successfully lowered onto the deck and, as hovering was very difficult, Flt Lt Brett sensibly moved out of the overhead to gain improved however references, while Sgt Tait attached the two crewmen to the rescue strops. When FS Holmes could see that the survivors were in place, he coolly conned the ac to the overhead and winched them clear of the deck. Flt Lt Brett descended clear of the crane as the survivors were recovered to the ac. The crew then flew an ILS approach into Cork.

My thanks again, on behalf of all of us, to John Rattenbury for his donation.

The Reality of Rescue Reports

The above accounts of the *Samson* rescue were likely written a few days after the events, represent the crew's collective memories of the rescue, and subsequently might have been amended slightly by the chain of command – for whatever reason. Individuals' memories of events will differ at the time and afterwards, and individual crew members' perspectives will certainly differ. In the days before black box or even cockpit voice recorders, there was no objective recording of

information. Moreover, any account of even the most straightforward rescue – and this was far from a straightforward rescue – must omit much ‘flavour’.

We are lucky in that Glenn Holmes and Paul Jones, respectively the winch operator and co-pilot on the *Samson* rescue, are both Association Members. Glenn and Paul have generously provided written accounts that add flesh to the bones of the story above. Indeed, Paul and Glenn independently wrote that, 34 years on, they both remembered the rescue well, with Glenn noting it had “some heart in the mouth moments.”



Samson on the Irish coastline near Youghal Harbour on the morning after the rescue

As with so many rescues, the helicopter crew had been aware for several hours of the job ‘brewing’ and had offered their services earlier but been declined...until daylight had turned to night and the weather had worsened! For those not familiar with helicopters, any maritime rescue conducted at night is automatically an order

of magnitude more challenging than one conducted by day. (*It is noteworthy that the summary on the First Edition postcard doesn't even mention that the rescue was conducted in darkness, and the illustration makes it look like dawn or dusk rather than the small hours! – Ed*)

And the nature of the rescue and the conditions on scene were considerably different from what the crew expected. The helicopter crew had been informed that the crane on the vessel was only 70ft high. Arriving on scene in complete darkness, some 30nm southeast of Cork, the helicopter crew found the drifting barge but discovered that the crane jib was 150 foot high, and the barge was lying directly across the large swell, causing the vessel to roll violently. To complicate matters further the barge deck was completely cluttered, and the crane jib ran the length of the vessel. This left only one practical winching area which was under the tip of the jib, where the crane hook was attached to the deck, at the far end of the vessel, which was on the far right hand side of the deck as we looked. The accompanying photograph of *Samson* was taken the following morning but helps illustrate the hazards the crew faced.

The helicopter crew decided the only way the winching could be safely completed was as using a 'Mirror trapped deck' technique at a height of 170ft with the jib running 90 degrees away from the aircraft. To complicate Captain Mike Brett's decisions even further, Paul Jones was brand new out of training and did not yet have the proficiency to conduct a very difficult mirror deck winch in a high sea state, especially at night. The pilots therefore needed to swap seats to enable the captain to fly the aircraft from the left-hand seat. As Cork was too far away, an in-flight seat change had to be conducted. The aircraft was climbed to 500ft in IMC conditions and stabilized. Mike Brett climbed out of his seat and Glenn climbed in and took control. Then Paul unstrapped and climbed out of the left hand seat and Mike climbed in. After Mike took control, Glenn and Paul swapped seats (clear so far?).

Having settled themselves, the helicopter descended with the barge on the left hand side of the aircraft. A mirror deck at 170 feet was briefed and special attention was paid to the amount of roll and movement of the crane jib, which ran 90 degrees away from the aircraft orientation. The aircraft descended to a safe height of 50ft for the winchman, Mark Tait, to be lowered, and the aircraft was

then climbed to its operating height of 170ft. Despite the roll of the boat, Mike Brett's hover references were initially adequate during the run in; however, as the helicopter approached the overhead, all surface references disappeared due to a combination of the aircraft's height above the sea surface and rain obscuration, such that all Mike was left to look at was the pitching jib arm, some 20ft below him. Just at that point the winchman came over the deck and Glenn winched Mark onto the deck...but before Mark could stabilize himself or come off the winch hook, the barge violently rolled left (rearwards on the helicopter axis) on a huge sea swell.

With his only hover reference disappearing backwards, Mike struggled to maintain the hover and followed the motion of the jib as it then reversed its course and rolled quickly right (forward on the aircraft axis). With the winchman still attached to the wire, the aircraft pitched from 30 degrees nose up to 30 degrees nose down as the jib rapidly rolled in the sea state. To Glenn, watching from 170ft above, the winchman appeared at one point positioned below the cabin door and then in the next instant forward well above the sponson as Mike struggled to regain the hover from the nose down attitude. Instantaneously, Glenn winched out a large loop of cable and instructed to the pilot to move right, away from the barge crane and obstructions.

Paul, who was observing events as the non-flying pilot in the right hand seat wrote: "As the crane had such a shallow draft it was rolling all over the place and it took Mike quite a few goes to get anywhere near the deck. When Mike and Glenn did manage to get Mark onto the deck, the crane's jib rolled nearly to the water and we lost all references. Mike hit reverse just in case the jib came back up to hit us, I remember the Doppler showing 40 knots backwards, and as Mike tried to slow up, the aircraft adopted some rather alarming attitudes. I remember seeing the tug out of the roof window!"

The move away from the vessel enabled Mike to regain visual references. The loop of cable Glenn had paid out allowed Mark the winchman to stay safely on the deck while the aircraft stabilised its 170ft hover and calm returned. With deep breaths all around, the aircraft was repositioned back in the overhead where a 3-man lift was conducted.

But while the formal published account above simply states: 'The crew then flew an ILS approach into Cork', the reality was quite different...Paul continues: "Low on

fuel, we ran for Cork but went around twice off the ILS [because they couldn't see the runway at decision height], so we attacked the approach from below by flying up the river. I remember using an approach light stand as a reference to climb in the hover to reach the runway."

As a post-script, Paul noted: "We were stood down and ended up in the hotel with the blokes off the crane, one of whom had been taken off a cargo boat by Bob Griffiths [a winchman and another Association Member] a few years earlier. This bloke was a maritime disaster, as a few years later I picked him up from a BP tanker in the South Atlantic.

And finally, in a comment that perhaps epitomises the can-do, understated approach of all SAR crews, Paul Jones' final comment about the rescue was "The most scary thing that night was the moustaches of the other 3 crew members!"

My personal thanks to Paul and Glenn for sharing their insights into what was already a compelling tale.

Steve Garden



Editor's End

Huge thanks as always to the contributors for the time and effort you have invested in the articles. Happy Christmas to you all, and may I echo the Chairman's wishes for a better 2022.

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