

THE DROPZONE

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Holmewood Hall

In the last issue of The Dropzone we published a brief history of OSS Area H and the important role in the Carpet-bagger operations played by the personnel of Holme. We now follow on with a potted history of the Holmewood Hall estate and future developments.

Holmewood Hall was built by William Young for Mr William Wells between 1873 and 1877. It is constructed of red brick with terra cotta and limestone dressings and occupies the site of an eighteenth century building that was destroyed by fire. It is described as being in the Elizabethan or 'Tudoresque' style.

In 1902 Holme Estate, comprising over 6,000 acres, was sold by Lord de Ramsey, to Mr John Ashton Fielden. Mr Fielden (1859-1942), only son of Samuel and Sarah of Todmorden, Lancashire, became head of the Fielden family in 1893 on the death of his uncle John Fielden. The Fieldens were successful cotton mill owners in Todmorden with merchandising businesses in Manchester, Liverpool and London. John Ashton Fielden was already in possession of property on the death of his father; this final inheritance meant that he was one of the richest men in the country.

Educated at Harrow and Jesus College Cambridge, he lived for a time in Lawrence Court, Princes Street, Huntingdon, a property that he had bought in 1890 from Archdeacon Vesey for £2,800. (The Vesey family, many of whom were local mayors, appear to be local to Huntingdon). At the time he was also renting rooms of St James Street, London and later in Cavendish Mews, during which time he was a member of the Junior Carlton and Raleigh Clubs (political clubs in London). Fielden thought Todmorden, 'damp, dirty and dull with no society, a

humdrum place which deadens the spirits'. He remained in East Anglia until his death in 1942, his last recorded visit to Todmorden being in 1910 when, on the death of his mother, he sold his parents' home to the town.

Having condemned Todmorden for its lack of society, it seems strange that Fielden spent the rest of his life in a somewhat solitary state pursuing his much loved sport of shooting and cared for by servants. (However, we don't know anything about his life when he visited London).

In 1900 he bought Debden Hall, near Saffron Walden, described as a large rambling house with a substantial park and estate of 4,000 acres. Within a year he had increased his estate to 5,300 acres, but Debden was not to his liking; he found it cold, badly lit and unsuitable for a single man not given to large scale entertaining.

Thus, in 1902 he bought the Holme Estate, situated in the parish of Holme some 8 miles to the south of Peterborough. He paid the sum of £120,000, which was considered cheap for an estate consisting of 6,362 acres, some 1,700 acres of fenland, part of which was the former Whittlesey Mere, drained in the 1850s, and Holmewood House placed in 9 acres of grounds, with a park of 680 acres and 20 tenanted farms.

The shooting in the park and coverts on the farms was excellent and in 1903 he wrote 'it is a very nice place and seems to suit me well', later saying he planned 'to settle down here for good' though in 1908 he complained the place was 'too low and damp'.

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However, he remained there until his death, despite being advised by his doctors, for reasons unknown, to leave as soon as possible.

Holme is derived from the Old Norse 'holm' meaning an island or raised ground in a marsh, and on an edge of the estate can still be seen traces of the docks used when Whittlesey Mere was the largest inland sea in Britain. There is also a reference to a herring gutting station in Holme parish. The land surrounding Holme and the estate which Fielden bought had evidently undergone considerable change in the preceding centuries, largely due to the efforts of the Wells family, previous owners of the estate, and in particular to William Wells who had drained the Mere in the 1850s at considerable personal expense.

John Ashton Fielden was shy, private and doof, as he aged he complained about his health and was somewhat prickly. He was, though, an excellent squire and landlord, respected rather than popular, the local children were said to be wary of him, running to hide when they saw him approaching. He was eccentric, enforcing strict rules on which days villagers could hang out their washing and shooting down with a 12 bore the offending linen if the rules were disobeyed!

He maintained the estate immaculately, employing a total of 100 staff consisting of a well-paid workforce of craftsmen who lived in the village, plus keepers and

estate workers, many of whom stayed with him until his death. He was said to be proud of his property and the good relationship he had with his tenants, who were told to pay what rent they could when times were hard and if his pheasants damaged their crops they were compensated. His Land Agent, John Looker, states in a letter to Bidwells of Cambridge (land and estate agents) 'he is not at all niggardly in these matters'. He also improved the drainage on the fens by building new pumping stations. Fielden was a very generous man and in 1892/3 met the £10,000 cost of building and furnishing Huntingdon Isolation Hospital, still standing in Primrose Lane.

Throughout his life he continued to follow his father's philanthropic interest in giving money to hospitals, donating £84,000 anonymously to what was at the time the largest hospital in Great Britain, the London Hospital in Whitechapel, that was maintained solely by gifts of charity and provided health care for the poor of London's East End. In 1903 he became a JP, though he never sat on the bench, and in 1908 High Sheriff for Huntingdon and Cambridgeshire, which he described at first as 'a great bother'; later he is said to have enjoyed it, 'doing a proper job': he also served as Deputy Lieutenant. He was patron of the living at Holme, though he did not attend church, claiming to be a Unitarian, as indeed were his family.

On the outbreak of the First World War, Holmewood began its military association that culminated with the

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Holmewood Hall 2007

development of OSS Area 'H' in 1943.

Fielden was deeply patriotic, stating in 1914 'I am of no use except for money, which is however useful in many ways in wartime'. During the First World War his old house in Huntingdon, Lawrence Court, became a hospital for wounded soldiers with a 'good matron' sent up from Whitechapel. Keen to help the war effort, he approached the London Hospital for advice and in November 1914 purchased, for £21,000, and fitted out as a hospital ship a large steam yacht, the *Paulina*, which he sold at the end of the war.

During the Second World War he gave £50,000 to the Treasury, telling a reporter 'money is the only weapon an old man like me can fight with' and in 1940 he paid for two Spitfires and two more to replace them when they were lost. He also gave six ambulances to the Red Cross and directed money to wartime appeals.

In 1942, the year of his death, he made a personal gift of £1,000 to Winston Churchill and invested sums of £40,000 and £50,000 in War Savings campaigns in Huntingdon. He wanted Holmewood to be used as a military hospital but as we now know, the War Office had other plans, namely for it to be the secret headquarters for American intelligence in the training and supply of spies and munitions behind enemy lines. However, before this took place Holmewood was being used to accommodate a number of women blinded in the bombing of Coventry and East London. What became of these ladies when the OSS took over is not known.

Fielden bequeathed his estate to one of the hospitals (we don't know which one) and in December 1945 the hospital, not wanting to be land owners, instructed a company of land agents to dispose of the estate. Holmewood Hall was bought by the Sugar Beet Corporation - now British Sugar, and the land was sold to Crown Land (later Crown Estates) for £160,000. Since then Crown Estates have managed the land through Carter Jonas in Peterborough and British Sugar have remained in the Hall using it now as a very comfortable and pleasant Conference and Research Centre.

In a recent turn of events that nicely illustrates the circular rather than the linear progress of history, the Wildlife Trust has bought at a cost of £450,000, 556 hectares of land once covered by Whittlesey Mere and plans to turn it back into fen! This is part of the Great Fen Project intended to link Holme Fen and Woodwalton Fen into a vast area of managed fen landscape creating, according to their latest newsletter, 'a mosaic of open water, reedbed, wet meadow, woodland, grassland and perhaps a carbon absorbing peat bog'. A project as ambitious and far-reaching as that of William Wells himself in draining Whittlesey Mere in the first place.

Article Ref. Brian R Law 'The Fieldens of Todmorden' George Kelsale 1995

Hunts. Record Office Acc. 3621

CGT Project

The work goes on. Work on the new roof covering is nearly completed and the new facing boards get their final coat of paint.



Keith paints, Ron lends 'technical support'

OBITUARY

PEARL CORNIOLEY

Pearl Cornioley who died on February 23rd 2008 aged 93 was a war-time agent in France with the Special Operations Executive (SOE). We reported in the September 2006 issue of "The Dropzone" that Pearl had been presented with her "wings" which she should have received following her parachute training before the drop into occupied France in 1943.

She was born in Paris in 1914 as Pearl Witherington and in 1940 was employed as a shorthand typist to the air attache at the British Embassy. She evacuated her family through Spain to Gibraltar, finally arriving at Liverpool in July, 1941. She later joined the WAAF but became frustrated with her work at the Air Ministry and presented herself to the SOE in Baker Street, London where she was accepted and was sent on a seven weeks course in combat and sabotage methods.

Pearl was parachuted into France from an RAF Halifax on September 22nd, 1943 and joined a resistance group known as "Stationer". Her code name became "Wrestler", her "nom de guerre" in France

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was Pauline and in wireless transmissions to Britain she was called "Marie". She acted as a courier carrying coded messages, once cycling 50 miles to deliver a message and finding a bridge guarded by the Germans, waded across the river Cher carrying her bicycle on her shoulders.

Pearl Witherington had been close to a young Frenchman, Henri Cornioley before the war and working with SOE brought them together again – he had been captured by the Germans but had managed to escape. On May 1st 1944, the leader of the network, Maurice Southgate, was captured and Pearl assumed control of 1,500 resistance fighters although this number grew to 3,000 operating in the Loire Valley area. Henri was part of this group that harassed the Germans in the run-up to D-Day, blowing up railway lines and disrupting supply routes. Over 18,000 Germans gave themselves up in the area under Pearl's control. The Germans actually put a price of one million francs on her head.

Pearl and Henri were nearly captured on one occasion, being fired upon by the Germans when they were in the guard house of a Chateau. They escaped separately, but 32 hostages were taken and never seen again. Shortly afterwards she and Henri made it back to England where they were married in October, 1944. As recorded in the previous "Dropzone" article, Pearl was recommended for a Military Cross but, being a woman, she was not at that time eligible and was instead offered a civil MBE which she turned down. In 1945 she was appointed a military MBE and in 2004 the Queen presented her with a CBE at the British Embassy in Paris. Two years after that (as mentioned above) she was presented with her "wings".



Pearl Witherington 1914—2008

After the war they returned to Paris, Henri working as a pharmaceutical chemist and Pearl as a secretary to the Paris office of the World Bank. Henri died in 1999 and Pearl is survived by their daughter.

This obituary was first published in The Daily Telegraph, Feb. 2008

Operation Manna/Chowhound

Keith Taylor

Manna was the British name for the Allied food drops in Holland during April/May 1945, Chowhound being the American code name for the same operation. The British decided to get Biblical and took the name from a passage in Exodus, that tells how Moses received a message from his God during the long journey of the people of Israel through the desert; 'I will rain down bread from heaven for you. Each day the people shall go out and gather a day's supply.' The Israelites called the food Manna, and this seems an appropriate word to choose as the codename for food dropped from the air to the starving people of Holland.

When war was declared in September 1939, the Dutch people were probably hoping that their neutrality would protect them, but they were rudely awakened on May the 10th 1940 when Germany invaded. The Dutch Royal Family, Queen Wilhelmina, Prince Bernhard, the Princesses Juliana, Beatrix and Irene, along with the Government, had left the country. Rotterdam, Middelberg, and Rhenen and other towns lay in ruins. At first, the Germans did not seem to be too bad. They paid cash in cafes and shops, and to see were polite, but the climate soon changed. The Jewish inhabitants were rounded up and inhumanely treated, many being executed and others deported to extermination camps in Germany and other parts of Europe. Their homes were often burnt down.

This situation became worse and in May 1943, the Dutch workers went on strike in opposition to the German treatment of the Jews. Many executions followed, but the people continued to resist and cause disruption whenever possible.

In September 1944, after the battle of Arnhem, the Dutch workers called a general railway strike. The German Reichskommissar, the Austrian traitor Dr. Arthur Seyss-Inquart (later hanged at Nuremberg), retaliated by imposing an embargo on food supplies. This was very serious indeed as food and fuel stocks had already been reduced.

Queen Wilhelmina, now in London, asked President Roosevelt for help. He agreed to this, but

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only after the liberation of Holland. Queen Wilhelmina then wrote to Winston Churchill and King George VI. She also contacted the Red Cross in Sweden, telling them the Dutch inhabitants had been reduced to engaging in black-market dealings, looting and theft. Horses killed by shells and bombing were cut up and eaten, and some people were reduced to eating flower bulbs and sugar beet.

The Swedish Red Cross sent two small ships to Delfzijl, containing 3,200 tons of food and the Germans actually delivered a further 2600 tons of rye from Oldenburg. Welcome as this aid was, it was really just a drop in the ocean and it was later calculated that at least 2,200 tons daily would be needed.

The Air Ministry started the ball rolling by having talks with SHAEF, but General Dwight D. Eisenhower (Supreme Commander of SHAEF) was against the idea, but after the death of President Franklin D. Roosevelt on April 12th 1945 two gentlemen, one called Van Der Gaag, the other Neher, managed to make their way to London to talk to the Dutch Prime Minister, Gerbandy. They told him that the Germans would agree to a truce if certain conditions could be agreed upon and on April 14th Prince Bernhard flew to Reims to discuss these terms with General Eisenhower.

Winston Churchill was not keen to negotiate with the Germans, but after listening to advice from the South African Prime Minister, Field Marshal Smutts, he agreed that the Allies should ask Gen. Eisenhower to meet the German Governor of Holland, Says-Inquart.

This resulted in the following orders being issued: 1) The German staff cars they were going to use had to have the Allied white star on the bonnets (hoods), boots (trunks) and side doors. 2) Failure to observe the conditions of the truce would render them unable to claim POW status and any act of sabotage or interference with the Allied operation would be viewed by the Allies as a war crime

The meeting took place in a village named Achterveld near Amersfoort. The Allies told the Germans there would be a cease-fire from 0800 hrs Saturday 28th April to 0800 hrs Sunday 29th April to allow the dropping of supplies. The agreement was made, but a further meeting was scheduled for April 30th to discuss the technical details such as distribution by inland waterways and road transport.

In the meantime, the RAF had been training and experimenting with the dropping of sacks and parcels at low speed and low altitude to minimise the potential damage to supplies. It was anticipated that these would be dropped from 200-300 feet and at speeds of between 160-180 mph. The decision to

commence the supply drop was actually agreed between the RAF and the USAAF before the details were finally agreed at the Achterveld meeting.

During the morning of 28th April, crews of No.150 and 170 Squadrons at Hemswell, Lincolnshire, were assembled in the briefing room listening to the Intelligence Officer, Squadron Leader Jones, telling them they would approach the drop zones at 500 feet and a speed of 150 mph. Oh, and as there was a cease-fire in operation the guns would be removed from all aircraft, but not to worry, as the Germans had promised not to shoot at them.

Remember, these were bomber crews who were taking a day off from their regular job of bombing German industry, they must have thought this was a belated April Fool joke! It must have been rather stressful for the crews, going in unarmed and not quite knowing what to expect.

In Holland people hiding in attic and cellars listened in secrecy to their prohibited radios. Then at 12:10 the message finally came through; 'A few minutes ago it was announced by the Air Ministry that the first aircraft carrying food for the Dutch people have just taken off.' Although people had been told to stay in their homes for their own safety, hundreds of them ran outside to witness the 'miracle' that was soon to unfold before their eyes.

Eighteen Mosquitos were the first to arrive, dropping smoke flares to mark the four drop zones. These were situated at Waalhaven airfield, Ypenburg airfield, Duindigt race track and Valkenburg airfield.

Then, above the cheering and waving people 246 Lancaster bombers came roaring in, some as low as 70 feet. One Lancaster crew flying very low, saw a group of nuns on the roof of a nunnery take off their white headdress and wave with them as they flew over.

Many other people were waving the red white and blue Dutch flag, an act that would have got them imprisoned or even shot a few days earlier. By 15:30 it was all over, and the last of the Lancasters turned for home. It had been a great success and also a great relief for the crews that the Germans had observed the truce.

The following day the agreement was signed at Achterveld and arrangements made for further drops of food in the coming days.



Operation Manna/Chowhound

Operation Chowhound carried out by the USAAF commenced on the 1st of May 1945. Four B-17s and one P-51 flew out on weather reconnaissance; the OK was given and 392 aircraft from ten group formations took off. They successfully dropped just over 767 tons of supplies. The following day the RAF dropped nearly 1,082 tons, while the USAAF dropped a further 767 tons. Four B-17s reported being fired upon, but this stopped after the crew fired green flares. Three B-17s received minor damage, while one aircraft sustained severe damage.

The drops continued daily up to and including the 8th May, when the war ended. The total amount of supplies dropped during the last six days of the war were as follows:

May 3rd, the RAF dropped 870 tons, the USAAF dropped 739 tons.

May 4th, the RAF, 200 Lancasters dropped about 500 tons, the USAAF did not fly that day.

May 5th, the RAF, 193 Lancasters dropped 436 tons, the USAAF, 402 B-17s dropped 745 tons.

One B-17 of No. 100 Bomb Group reported that it was fired upon by soldiers from Bergen airfield, causing slight damage.

May 6th, the RAF, no drops, the USAAF, 378 B-17s dropped 703 tons, with no incidents.

May 7th, the RAF, 543 Lancasters dropped 1,223 tons, the USAAF, 229 B-17s dropped 426 tons. Over IJmuiden, two B-17s, one from 95 Bomb Group, the other from 385 Bomb Group, were fired upon and the B-17 of 95 BG crashed into the sea. Only two out of the twelve crew on board survived. Full story below.

May 8th, the RAF, 143 Lancasters dropped 345 tons, there were no USAAF drops that day.

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Germany surrendered, the war in Europe came to an end and Operation Manna/Chowhound was successfully completed.

Total weight of supplies dropped 29th April – 8th May: the USAAF: 4,156 tons, the RAF: 7,030 tons. (All quantities rounded up to the nearest ton).

Except for a couple of isolated incidents the Germans observed the truce, the most serious incident happening on May 7th. B-17 Serial No. 44-8640 of No. 95 Bomb Group at Horham was returning home when it was fired upon. The Port inner engine caught fire and the pilot, who expected the aircraft to explode, ordered the crew to bail out and three managed to do so before the bomber ditched in the sea.

Staff Sgt. David Condon managed to release his parachute harness before being dragged under and also emptied a bottle of dye that was attached to his lifejacket. This fluorescent liquid could easily be seen by a searching aircraft and it happened that at this time, a Lancaster coded BQ-K²* of No. 550 Squadron, North Killingholme was returning to base. The pilot, Flying Officer Handley saw the partly submerged B-17 and switched on his IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) so he could identify himself to any other Allied aircraft in the vicinity.

Having seen the marker dye the crew scanned the sea for other survivors and saw an up-turned dinghy, then spotted another member of the crew floating a few yards away. A ship was seen about ten miles south of the downed aircraft and F/O Handley flew over to this craft, circling while the Wireless Operator signalled 'SOS Follow Me'. The ship then followed the plane to the wrecked aircraft where a small boat was launched to pick up the survivors.

F/O Handley then saw another airman in the water without a lifejacket, so he circled while the rear gunner threw his lifejacket down to the man. There was a moments anxiety then relief as the airman was seen to reach out and put it on, after which a flare was dropped to mark the spot. A Catalina flying boat then arrived on the scene and landed on the water, quickly followed by an Air Sea Rescue Walrus.

The Lancaster continued to circle the area and another dinghy with a survivor nearby was found. Once again the crew threw down a lifejacket and guided the Catalina to the scene. F/O Handley completed a few more circuits then realising he could do no more, he turned for home.

In spite of all the effort put in by F/O Handley, the crews of the ship and the Catalina, only three of the twelve-man crew of the B-17 were found alive and sadly, one died on the way back to England.

A fourth body was found in the water some time later. Amongst the dead were two ground crew who had gone along for the ride as after the success of the first food drop it was considered safe to take along base personnel. (The RAF did the same). Unfortunately, in this case their first flight turned out to be their last.

During the food drops accidents weren't confined to aircraft, they also happened on the ground. People had been warned to stay indoors, but everyone was caught up in the sight and sound of the day and most wanted to be there when the long-awaited food dropped from the sky. Unfortunately, some got too close and were killed by the falling packages that were meant to sustain them.

One lady living at Boezemlaan on the boundary of Rotterdam, warned neighbours to be careful and made sure that she stood well back from the drop zone. Even so, she was struck by a sack dropped from an aircraft that was slightly off course and knocked to the ground. While German soldiers were trying to chase people away, the second wave of aircraft arrived and started their drop whereupon a young German soldier, seeing the danger this lady was in, threw himself onto her to save her further injury.

Sadly, he was then struck by a package and killed. The lady, who sustained a broken collarbone, spent many years after the war trying to trace the family of this brave soldier to thank them for what he did, but she was never able to find them. A total of ten people were killed that day.

The village of Terbregge lost five houses when they were set alight by the flares of Pathfinder Mosquitos that were slightly off course. In spite of these mishaps, the Dutch people were very grateful to all the aircrews who worked so hard to bring them food. Both the USAAF and RAF crews were completely overwhelmed by the gratitude displayed by cheering and waving people everywhere, and messages laid out on the ground that read: THANKS YANKS, THANKS RAF, THANKS TOMMY.

It was no doubt a great relief to the crews returning from the final food drop to discover that while they were out, the war had ended!

**The ² or sometimes a bar —, against the aircraft identification letter meant that the number of aircraft exceeded 26 and letters of the alphabet had to be duplicated. This was the second aircraft named K King, known as King Squared.*

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Units taking part in Operation Manna/Chowhound were as follows:

USAAF

No. 13 Combat Wing. No. 95 BG Horham. No. 100 BG Thorpe Abbots. No. 390 BG Framlingham.
No. 45 Combat Wing. No. 96 BG Snetterton Heath. No. 388 BG Knettishall. No. 452 BG Deopham Green.
No. 93 Combat Wing. No. 34 BG Mendelsham. No. 385 BG Great Ashfield. No. 490 BG Eye.
 No. 493 BG Debach.

RAF

No. 1 Group. No.12 Sqn. Wickenby. No.100 Sqn. Elsham Wolds. No.101 Sqn. Ludford Magna. No.103 Sqn. Elsham Wolds. No.10 Sqn. Hemswell. No.153 Sqn. Scampton No.166 Sqn. Kirmington. No.170 Sqn. Hemswell. No.300 Sqn. Faldingworth. No.460 Sqn. Binbrook. No.550 Sqn. North Killingholm. No.576 Sqn. Fiskerton. No.625 Sqn. Scampton. No.626 Sqn. Wickenby.
No. 3 Group. No.15 Sqn. Mildenhall. No.75 Sqn. Mepal. No.90 Sqn. Tuddenham. No.115 Sqn. Witchford. No.138 Sqn. Tuddenham. No.149 Sqn. Methwold. No.186 Sqn. Stradishall. No.195 Sqn. Wratting Common. No.218 Sqn. Chedburgh. No.514 Sqn. Waterbeach. No.622 Sqn. Mildenhall.
No. 8 Group. No.7 Sqn. Oakington. No.35 Sqn. Graveley. No.105 Sqn. Bourn. No.156 Sqn. Upwood. No.405 Sqn. Gransden Lodge. No.582 Sqn. Little Staughton. No.635 Sqn. Downham Market.

Note. No.105 Sqn. and No.109 Sqn operated with Mosquitos, all other squadrons listed flew Lancasters.

This article is was composed from material contained in 'Operation Manna/Chowhound' by Hans Onderwater published 1985, Roman Luchvaart, Holland.

Social Events

These snippets from Vera Tebbutt

On a bright, fresh morning in early autumn, a small group of members set off from Harborough Wharf for a cruise down the Grand Union Canal.

The outing was organised by Fred and Betty West and the 'crew' comprised myself, Ron and Mary Clarke, and Keith Taylor and his wife Sue. There would have been a few more, but due to bad weather during the previous week, the date had to be changed at short notice.



Betty, Sue, Fred, Mary, and Vera's knees
(Ron and Keith were driving)

We sailed to Foxton, where we stopped for lunch, and then proceeded along the Leicester arm of the canal for a few miles before turning around and heading back to Market Harborough.

We disembarked at Harborough Wharf at 4.45pm having had a very enjoyable time cruising through the Leicestershire countryside and observing the varied wildlife.



Third time lucky with mooring, Fred?

In late December Betty organized and prepared a very nice lunch to celebrate my birthday. This was held in Harrington Village Hall and was well attended by our regular volunteers and their partners.

EDITORIAL

John Harding

Another winter has passed and we are "going to press" yet again with our first issue of 2008.

As I write this it has turned cold again with some snow. As a result it must be said that admissions to the museums so far have been below normal, but with the prospect of better weather we are really hopeful of more encouraging news on this front.

During the winter months on most weekends our two stalwarts, Fred and Keith, have been working hard on general maintenance and painting and have made considerable improvements to the appearance of both the interior and exterior of the Operations Block. I believe that they also allowed Ron Clarke to help with plastering a wall and laying new carpets in the entrance.

While on the subject of volunteer workers – if any members know of any “younger blood” they think might be interested in joining the museum, we would certainly welcome any such newcomers.

Work on re-covering the museum roof has been carried out recently by outside contractors and this is now ninety per cent or more complete – this should ensure at least ten years of trouble-free leakage problems, good news indeed.

Time-consuming stock takes have been carried out during the past few months including everything from post cards to bullets.

Besides opening the museums at weekends we also open during the week by prior arrangement for parties of twelve or more. Some future bookings include four Secret War week-end groups of approximately 40, with the first group coming on Sunday April 27th (All hands on deck please!), Retired Union of Teachers on May 14th and lastly, for the moment, BMW Motor Cycle Club on June 8th.

We were recently asked by a visitor whether we give talks to groups or societies to which the answer was “yes”. The gentleman asking the question came from the Bedford Archaeological Society and he thought that it would be a good idea if his society had a talk about Harrington at one of their meetings and this could be followed up by a visit to the museums. Ron is actually scheduled to give a talk during April to the Weedon Historical Society that could possibly be followed up by a visit.

Tom Reeves reminds me that the Northampton Aviation Society is now 21 years old and their museum has been at Harrington for twelve years. In 1945 F/Sgt Prusac, a Polish airman, crashed his

Spitfire close to what was then the Finance Hut, causing some damage. In 1994 Tom and three associates began what was to be two years of hard restoration work on that Nissen hut so it could become home to the NAS Museum. Before then the artefacts had been kept in various locations around Northampton. The museum was opened in 1996 by Squadron Leader Parks.

I notice that in Social Events, Vera is too modest to mention the HAMS Christmas dinner. This took place at the Harborough Golf Club on the first Monday in December, 2007 and was very well attended by our members and guests. The meal was excellent and Vera is to be congratulated once again for all the hard work she puts in to organizing this event.

After the meal there was a raffle expertly run by Mick Gray, that raised over forty pounds for the Association.

Lastly, we feel that mention should be made of one of our long-term members who has been in poor health for the past three years. George White was always an extremely popular member but since suffering a stroke he has been in Park House Care Home in Wellingborough. We are thinking of you George.

MGM 2008

May is Museum and Galleries Month when Renaissance East Midlands stages various events to promote museums, galleries and heritage centres.

On the 19th April Northamptonshire Museums Forum are staging a Meet The Museum Event in Northampton market square where HAMS will have a stand. We will also have a display in Rothwell and Desborough Heritage Centres.

Our contribution to MGM is to hold a Night At The Museum event on two dates in May. On Thursday the 8th May and Thursday the 22nd May, the museum will be open from 6 pm to 8-30 pm for visitors to walk around, talk to staff members and have some refreshments.

Admission is free as are refreshments, and we are particularly interested in attracting families; Mum, Dad, Kids, and if possible, grandparents.

This will be an informal evening where people can look around the museum, with no film show or guided tour, and we will be very pleased if any of our members can come along, with or without their families and join in the fun. If the weather is kind it will also be possible to take a walk around the old airfield. Bring stout shoes!

THE WORK OF DAVENTRY 7000 IN THE OPERATION OF "GEE"

John Harding

Gee or Type 7000 was a British radio navigation system used by the Royal Air Force during World War II. It was designed to improve aircraft navigation accuracy, thereby increasing the destructiveness of air raids by Avro Lancasters and Handley Page Halifaxes.

The technology of GEE was developed by the Americans into the LORAN (long range navigation) system of which we have an example of the airborne equipment in our museum. LORAN was used by the US Navy and the Royal Navy during World War II and after the war came into common civilian use world-wide for coastal navigation until GPS (Global Positioning System – a satellite navigational system), made it obsolete.

Before going on to its development at Daventry I think a few words about technical details might be appropriate. The GEE transmitters sent out precisely timed pulses. There were three Gee stations, one master and two slaves that formed a "chain". The master sent out a pulse followed two milliseconds later by a double pulse, the first slave station sent a single pulse one millisecond after the masters' single pulse and the second slave sent a single pulse one millisecond after the masters' double pulse! Got that? Not too complicated I hope. The whole cycle was repeated on a four-millisecond cycle.

On board the aircraft, the signals from the three stations were received on an oscilloscope type display. The two slave signals were shown as blips and the equipment gave the difference in reception time of the pulses and the relative distance from the master and each slave. On a navigation chart with several curved lines plotted on it (Hyperbolic Positioning Chart) the navigator had to find where the two lines from the slave stations intersected.

Gee was highly susceptible to jamming since all the Germans had to do was to radiate surplus pulses but such jamming was effective only over their territory, the system remained usable over Britain and was thus a great help for returning aircraft.

The system entered service in 1942 and was accurate to about 165 yards at short ranges and up to a mile at longer ranges over Germany. Its extreme range was about 400 miles where it had an accuracy of 2 miles. Unlike the German beam system where the bombers flew to their targets along the beam, the Gee pulses were radiated in all directions, so even if detected, they would not reveal the bombers' likely destinations or position.

How did the term "Gee" come about? The majority of heavy and medium bombers in the early part of the war were fitted with gyro-automatic pilot equipment that enabled the pilot to fly on a set course without manual control. This equipment in the Service had been given the name of "George" so what more natural that a navigational device almost as automatic in its operation should be given the name "Gee" for "George",

Daventry BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) radio station was selected for the responsible task of operating and maintaining the Master station of the Eastern Gee Chain. A meeting was convened at Daventry around the middle of December 1940, to discuss the erection of a group of pulse transmitters. The Master transmitter controlling the group would be sited at Daventry.

During February 1941, various tests were carried out using mobile equipment and it was finally decided to go ahead with the scheme. By mid June, work on the necessary buildings was almost completed and on the 25th, a twenty-four hour service commenced and the BBC engineers at Daventry had only the vaguest ideas as to what it was all about!

The engineers who were to run it had been brought up from London where they had previously been working at Alexandra Palace which, before the war had seen the introduction of the first television service. This TV service was closed down with the outbreak of the war. This small group of engineers had also to get used to Service administration procedures.

The service trials lasted until the end of 1941, time being needed to smooth out initial difficulties and to make technical improvements where necessary. There was a constant delivery of equipment, especially valves (tubes) that appeared to arrive from all parts of the United Kingdom. Expansion plans were announced in mid-August 1941 for a new station to be erected on the Northern boundary of the existing BBC site and in November a new 325ft. mast was built to support the aerial arrays of the new station.

It was then learned that the target date for the equipment to be in full working order was early in February 1942. Before that date outdoor power transformers were needed, and trenches had to be dug across the site to take power and telephone cables etc. In addition, a rough road nearly a mile long was put down to give access to the site. (This road which remains to-day, was still referred to by BBC employees when all except one of the masts were taken down in 1992, as "The Air Ministry Road").

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Incorrect sections were delivered for the Nissen huts that were to house the equipment with the result that when they were assembled they were not water-tight. Despite deep snow diesel engines, pulse generators and transmitter equipment were installed in the leaky Nissen huts before the end of January 1942. On February 6th, operations were transferred from the original solid and comfortable brick building (presumably on the original BBC site) to a draughty Nissen hut on an exposed site where personnel were knee-deep in snow.

Early in May, personnel who were to operate the new master station of this group were posted to Daventry for training. This was considered to be a very pleasant gesture on the part of the Service authorities for it appeared to indicate that earlier doubts about using civilian personnel had been replaced by a fair measure of confidence.

On the night of 30/31st May, the first thousand bomber raid took place (1,047 aircraft) with Cologne as the main target and the following



Main "GEE" building with concrete roof

Under the command of Wing Commander Phillips, the work of the 7000 "Eastern Chain" as it became known, now began. Its function was to provide visual radio navigational aid over an area including the North Sea, North West Germany and the Ruhr Valley and in this chain Daventry was the most important cog. It is on record that the facilities offered by "Gee" in the operation of the first large scale air attacks, created a tremendous impression amongst operational aircrews.

It was about this time that the term "Gee", although retained by operational aircrews, was re-designated to the ground organisation as "Stations Type 7000" and Daventry became known by a number – "Station 7111".

In early March 1942, work commenced on the erection of a new 7000 chain in the south of England to be known as the "Southern Chain" which would provide navigational aid to the Coastal and other aircraft operating over France and in the area of the Channel Approaches.

night there was another operation with 956 aircraft attacking Essen. A few days later a message from the Senior Air Staff Officer, Air Vice Marshall R. Saundby, thanked and congratulated staff working on the Stations Type 7000.

One very important but unspectacular job carried out by aircraft of Bomber Command that the "Gee" service greatly helped, was that of mine laying – before the days of "Gee" it could only be carried out under ideal weather conditions.

In August, work commenced on the erection of a new five hundred foot steel mast to carry new aerial arrays. At this time it was reported that ranges had decreased owing to enemy "jamming" of the system and this affected the Master Station to a greater degree than the "slaves" since the master was generally the weaker signal owing to its greater distance. As a result of this, power output of the Master Station was increased by some seven times

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compared with the original but this only became possible after considerable modifications to the equipment were made by the manufacturers. January 1943 marked the beginning of the daylight bombing offensive by the heavy bombers of the US 8th Air Force and that added to the growing list of "Gee" customers.

One of the main countermeasure techniques which evolved for the diversion of the German "jamming" facilities was the employment of multiple "Gee" chains, any of which could be switched on for a short period of time to coincide with the approach of aircraft to the target and their actual arrival over it – these were designated "XF" operations – an abbreviated version of the term "Extra Frequency". Later in the year a heavy mobile unit consisting of five heavy vehicles was posted to Daventry for a period of trial – this was destined for service overseas and came with a commanding officer and crew who had had previous experience with the workings of a "slave" station, but very few were familiar with latest techniques for the running of a Master Station.

January 31st 1944 was the date set for the provision of a full 24hours per day Grade A service and this involved the installation of an additional transmitter with the necessary buildings etc at every station in the Eastern Chain. Earlier it was mentioned that the equipment at Daventry was installed in a standard Nissen hut. However, with the new building programme this had been surrounded by blast walls and a concrete roof had been added. It was then decided to demolish the enclosed Nissen hut which was already inside four brick walls and a concrete roof. All essential services had to be stripped since these were supported on the curved walls of the Nissen hut.

Temporary lighting and cables had to be rigged as well as temporary provisions made in the event of failures, but despite this full service was maintained. So on the 31st January the third transmitter was brought into service, bringing the total strength at Daventry to seven transmitters available for "Gee" operations. During February and continuing throughout the following months the air offensive assumed such proportions that, by comparison, all previous operations appeared small. The biggest operation was, of course, D-Day when both the Southern and Eastern Chains were extremely vital to this great undertaking.

My thanks go to Mr. Roy Sharp of Daventry Town Council Museum for allowing me to see a restricted copy of "Daventry 7000" that was written in 1944 by Mr W.G.R Smith, the senior engineer, "Gee" service, Daventry. This article is based on Mr. Smith's original 50 page write-up of events covering the work of the BBC Station at Daventry relating to "Gee".

Note. *Although GEE was undoubtedly a very effective and accurate aid to navigation, as stated above, this accuracy diminished the further the aircraft travelled from the transmitter. At its maximum range of about 400 miles, the accuracy was reduced to two miles, which meant that it was not suitable for pinpoint bombing of targets. This was achieved by a device code named OBOE that was combined with GEE in 1944 to develop a blind bombing technique known as GEE H. The story of OBOE will have to wait for another time but it can be stated briefly that OBOE was only used by the RAF, while in the final year of the war the RAF and the USAAF both used GEE H.*

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Main building showing entrance doors

Lastly, a mention must be made of the crash of a B17 Fortress into a BBC mast at Daventry on the 15th December, 1944.

I had just finished school for the day and was talking to a friend in the High Street at Daventry. I remember that there was low cloud and drizzle at the time and watched two B17s fly over at less than five hundred feet. Unfortunately, one collided with the BBC mast and all ten in the crew were instantly killed. It was, apparently, the 500 ft "Gee" mast that was at the northern end of the BBC site, into which the B17 crashed. The second B17 arrived back at its base, the 305 BG, at Chelveston with some of the aerial wires still attached to it. "Gee" was put out of action for 24 hours as a result of the crash, and the mast was moved from its vertical position. It is ironic that this 500 foot mast which was intended to help and assist operational airmen would, in the latter part of the war, result in the destruction of a friendly aircraft and its crew.

The brick built building from which the "Gee" operation took place still exists at the northern end of the BBC site adjoining Daventry Golf Course and since writing the above I have visited the area to take some photographs. The main building referred to above is complete with its concrete roof (covered by decaying roofing felt). The main entrance was through two large steel doors that are now firmly locked. A small building about ten feet square is nearby and a little further away is a larger brick-built square with capping on the walls.

This evidently did not have a roof and was, most probably, a blast pen to house the outside power transformers. Partly buried in the ground are a number of concrete blocks to which the stays for the 500 ft mast were anchored.

Seeing these buildings made me think also of the Operations Room at Harrington; both had a similar type of construction and both were put up within a year of each other. At that time the expected life span of such buildings was in the region of six years and now, more than sixty years later, there are still a few remaining that have such a memorable war-time history.

Jersey Book Launch

Clive Bassett

"Young, Brave and Beautiful" is the title of a recently published book about SOE Agent Violette Szabo, written by her daughter, Tania and launched in Jersey, Channel Islands on Thursday 15th November 2007.

The Book launch was held in the newly opened Visitor Centre at the Jersey War Tunnels. This was formerly known as the German Underground Hospital and now re-named. The Museum is certainly a "must" for visitors to the Island interested in Military History; the displays are excellent, though I will never

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Blast pen on the right of the picture. Note concrete block on ground immediately to its left

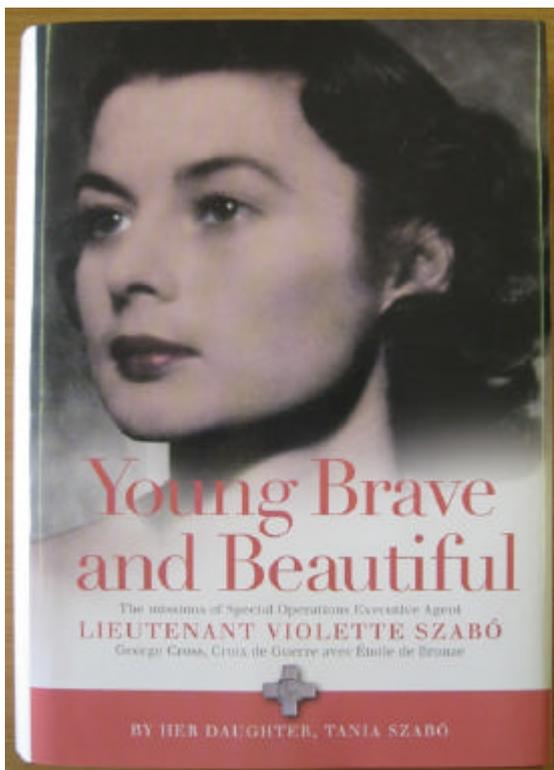
get to grips with a display figure of a German Soldier with a talking television screen for a head!

The guest of honour at the book launch was The Lieutenant Governor, Lieutenant-General Andrew Ridgway; he gave a fine introductory talk during which he said that the story of Violette Szabo was one that continued to inspire young men and women today. "In Afghanistan and Iraq young people are risking their lives in covert operations, although their stories are seldom told", he said "Violette's spirit lives on in them".

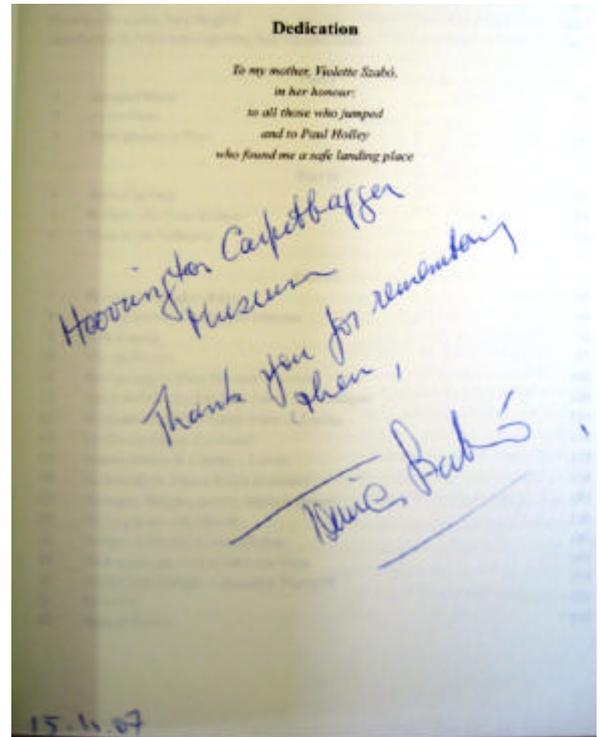
Among the guests at the launch was Leslie Jackson; he commanded a mine sweeper that helped to pave the way for the liberation of Jersey in 1945. It was Leslie who persuaded Tania to start writing her mother's story when they met at the 50th Anniversary of the Liberation of Jersey in 1995.

Also attending was former Flight Lieutenant Bob Large; he was the Lysander Pilot who picked up Violette in France on the completion of her first mission. He bought her safely back to England, through a hail of anti-aircraft fire from the Germans.

Other guests included family friend and former boxer Sir Henry Cooper, and his wife Lady Cooper; Jersey resident and author Harry Patterson, who also has written a forward to the book, and Tessa Coleman who led the singing of the well-known wartime song "We'll Meet Again". (I heard somewhere or other that the title also used for this song was "Whale Meat Again", something to do with rationing at the time!)



"Young Brave and Beautiful" was commissioned by the Jersey War Tunnels and is available directly from their visitor centre and by mail order. Those fortunate enough to have attended the book's launch were able to have their copy signed and dedicated by Tania, one such copy now resides in our Museum Library.



I have read the book and enjoyed it very much indeed. Whilst there is not too much in the way of new revelations regarding Violette's story, the approach taken by her daughter in writing it most certainly is. In addition the accounts are fuller, more frank and unbiased than a reader may expect, also an exceptionally fair view has been expressed regarding certain incidents and instances of her mother's life.



Clive and Tania at the book launch

A good example of this is the manner in which Violette was treated immediately following her capture and whilst in Limoges Prison. A television company showed a documentary-style programme a year or so back, for the first time, openly, mention was made of severe mistreatment, and witness corroborated, and this caused some discomfort and disbelief for many who were quite shocked by these revelations. Tania has tackled this, and other incidents, in a very fair, unbiased and frank manner.

There have been many books written about SOE Agents, perhaps more so regarding Violette Szabo, it seems very appropriate and more than fitting that her daughter should have the final word. Her book is to be commended.

Historical note: During the Second World War, and for some time afterwards, Britain received whale meat from Russia and snoek (an oily fish with many sharp bones) from South Africa. Neither of these 'delicacies' became popular!

Nancy

In the last issue of The Dropzone mention was made of Nancy Wake being parachuted into France in 1944 from a Carpetbagger B-24.

In her memoirs, she mentions the young Texan dispatcher who talked to her during the flight, and we wondered if he could be traced. We soon had a reply from Tom Ensminger, the historian of the 801st/492nd Bomb Group Association, who provided the following:

Please inform Nancy that her dispatcher Henry Hettinger, has passed away.

Harold Van Zyl (the pilot) is still with us. I continue to hold Nancy in my pantheon of heroic persons during WWII and always will.

And Warmest Regards,

Thomas L. Ensminger

Historian/Web/Newsletter
801st/492nd BG

This message was passed to Nancy along with a Christmas card at her place of residence, The Royal Star & Garter Home, Richmond, Surrey.

Nancy was one of four residents of the home who were invited to the 90th Birthday Celebrations of Dame Vera Lynn, held at the Imperial War Museum.

Connections

Return Issue 2007

AT THE HOME AT THE HOME AT THE HOME AT THE HOME AT

Residents Attend Dame Vera Lynn's 90th Birthday Celebrations

Four of our residents were delighted to receive invitations to the 90th Birthday Celebrations of Dame Vera Lynn in London. Neil Francis, Department Manager at Waitrose in Sheen Road, Richmond, came to the Home to present the invitations to residents before they were escorted to the Imperial War Museum for the celebrations.

We are proud to have been involved in marking this special occasion and hope they have a fantastic time joining in the celebrations.¹

Lucky residents Dick Martin (Royal Marines), Jessie Millard (Naval Voluntary Aid Detachment), Stephanie Karana (Women's Royal Naval Service) and Nancy Wake (Special Forces) gladly received their invitations. The birthday celebrations were also attended by special guests Baroness Margaret Thatcher, Jane Whitfield and Baroness Betty Boothroyd.

Dame Vera Lynn has been a devoted supporter of the Charity since the Second World War and many residents have had the pleasure of meeting her on previous occasions. The Royal Star & Garter Homes would like to say a big thank you to Waitrose for providing this wonderful opportunity for residents who thoroughly enjoyed the occasion.

Waitrose provided a grand three-tier celebration cake and organic red and white wines for the 100 guests attending the party. They felt our residents would appreciate the opportunity to attend this wonderful event and kindly donated their tickets. Neil Francis commented, "We could think of no more deserving members of our community than residents at The Royal Star & Garter in Richmond."

Above: Waitrose Manager Neil Francis with Jessie Millard

Below: Left to right - Dick Martin, Neil Francis, Nancy Wake, Stephanie Karana and Jessie Millard proudly display their invitations

Reproduced above is a page from The Royal Star & Garter newsletter. Nancy is front row centre.

Tom Ensminger was also able to confirm that two agents, Wake and Farmer, were parachuted into France on the 29th April 1944, and not as stated in the book 28th February 1944.

It is fitting that in this issue of The Dropzone we pay tribute to three of the great heroines of the Second World War: Violette Szabo, Pearl Witherington and Nancy Wake. It is to these brave ladies, and all who gave service and often their lives in defence of our country, that we owe our present freedom.

On both sides of the Atlantic there are groups of so-called intellectuals who seem to have a great deal of influence in shaping modern society. They believe that order, discipline, self-sacrifice and patriotism are all outmoded ideas and need to be stamped out. Any praise of past glories is branded as jingoistic or abhorrent triumphalism.

There is also a move to ban the teaching of certain aspects of history in our schools, especially that dealing with wars.

We must see to it that this doesn't happen!

OBITUARY

Si Sizemore

HARRINGTON AVIATION MUSEUMS

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Phone: 01604 686608

Email: cbaggermuseum@aol.com



Wer'e on the Web!
www.harringtonmuseum.org.uk



Richard T. 'Si' Sizemore, 85, died Friday, November 16 of cardiac arrest at Mid Michigan Medical Center.

He was known personally to Ron, Roy, Clive and a number of other HAMS members through his work as the vice-president of the 801st/492nd Bombardment Group Association. He also edited their newsletter.

Si was born February 10, 1922 to Nellie Renard Sizemore and Jesse Sizemore in Muskogee, Oklahoma. When in grade school he moved with his family to Parsons, Kansas. He graduated from Parsons High School and Parsons Junior College where he excelled in sports. He received letters in tennis and basketball and he also played amateur baseball. He was very active in Boy Scouts and earned the top Eagle Scout award.

When World War II started he joined the Army Reserves while he was attending Kansas State College. While at K-State he was on the varsity basketball team.

He was called up in early 1943 and was put in the Combat Engineers. His basic training was at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. Later he went into training in then top secret radar.

After marrying Bernice Miller December 1944, he was sent to the European war zone to the top-secret United States Army Air Corps Airbase at Harrington, England. The 801st/492nd Bombardment Group was stationed there and the clandestine operation's secret code name was "Carpetbagger". It was so secret the men were told not to talk about their work or ask questions or they would be shot! Si was not allowed to fly over enemy territory because of his knowledge of radar.

He received the medals VICTORY, WORLD WAR II, EUROPEAN-AFRICAN-MIDDLE EASTERN CAMPAIGN, AMERICAN CAMPAIGN, GOOD CONDUCT MEDAL, ARMY OF OCCUPATION, and from the French Government, the unit citation of the FRENCH CROIX de GUERRE.

After the war ended in Europe he was on his way to the West Coast of the United States in preparation for the invasion of Japan, the war ended.

When he was mustered out of the Air Corps with an honourable discharge, he went back to school at Kansas State College with his wife.

Si graduated from K-State in 1948 with a bachelors degree in Architecture and one in Architectural Engineering. He then accepted a job at Dow Corning and he and his wife moved to Midland.

He was in the Lions Club for many years, once serving as president. He was one of the charter members of the Unitarian Fellowship of Midland and was a past president.

Si designed several of the buildings at Dow Corning Midland Plant and was a Project Manager for many years at DC Headquarters. He also became a registered Civil Engineer.



Si visiting Harrington museum

Si was an accomplished artist, and many of his pencil drawings depicting Service life hang in the museum. These simple but powerful drawings make a valuable contribution to the history of the Carpetbaggers.

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Vote for your favourite below and return this form to a participating museum to be included in the voting. The awards will be presented at a county ceremony in July.

Name:

Address:

Please tick the box next to your favourite museum (tick one box only):

- 1) Oundle Museum
- 2) Harrington Aviation Museum
- 3) Wellingborough Museum
- 4) Irchester Narrow Gauge Railway Museum
- 5) Northampton Lamport Railway
- 6) Northampton Museums
- 7) Sulgrave Manor
- 8) Delapre Abbey
- 9) Kettering Museum and Art Gallery
- 10) Rothwell Heritage Centre and Desborough and Rothwell Art Gallery
- 11) Piddington Roman Villa
- 12) Daventry Town Council Museum

Entries must be completed and handed in by 20 June 2008

Hand this form into a participating museum or send it to
Renaissance Heritage Awards, MLA East Midlands, 56 King Street, Leicester, LE1 6RL