

755392 Master Signaller Norman (Jock) Cameron  
1917-1981

was a life member of the ASRA

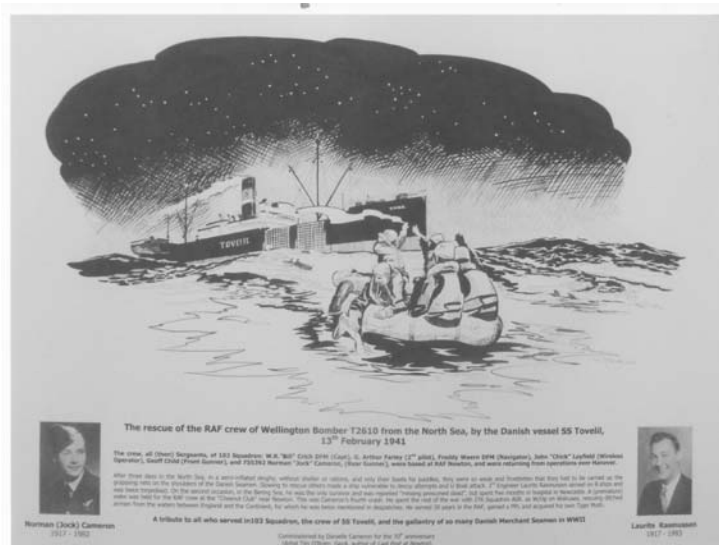


With the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Britain, as ever the public is being reminded about the exploits of Fighter Command (to the neglect of Bomber Command), with the usual emphasis on the Spitfire pilots. Yet, there was a branch of Fighter Command in which *"gallant men flew the Walrus amphibian single-engined bi-plane. Men who daily risked their lives to save others from a very hostile environment. .... the "Shagbat" and its crew enabled trained aircrew to live and fight another day.....From 1941 to 1945 the men and machines of the UK based Walrus ASR squadrons rescued or helped to rescue more than 1,300 downed airmen, many of whom would otherwise have perished in the icy cold water. The courage of the men who came to their rescue, often in atrocious weather and under a hail of enemy fire, and always in a race against time, was of the highest order."* This is how Norman Franks describes the actions of the men of ASR squadrons, in what he called in his book, "Another Kind of Courage", published by Patrick Stephens Limited. The cover shows a Walrus crew member standing by to haul in an airman in a dinghy; from a painting by Michael Turner, an excellent depiction of a scene repeated many hundreds of times.

Jock Cameron had joined the VR's (Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve) in 1936 and was posted in 1940 to 103 Squadron of Bomber Command where he was A/G on Fairey "Battles", shortly thereafter converting on to Vickers "Wellingtons". He was initially a very reluctant member of ASR, yet it was very appropriate that he should be searching for, and rescuing, ditched airmen, as he himself had not been found, and had been left to drift in the freezing North Sea for three days – when ASR was in its infancy. He went on to advise the dinghy manufacturer RFD, with the benefit of his experience of surviving in one of their dinghies (at that time without shelter) and of rescuing others. Modifications were made as a result. At that time ASR was very primitive in its equipment, techniques and co-ordination. Most crews who survived a ditching, died of exposure before they could be picked up.

On 10<sup>th</sup> February 1941 he took off from RAF Newton, as Rear Gunner, in "Wellington" T2610 of 103 squadron, Bomber Command. The aircraft was hit by flak on the way back from action in Germany, the engines failed and the pilot had to "ditch" in the North Sea. Jock's life was saved by the second pilot, Sergeant G. Arthur Farley, who pulled him out of the rear turret as the plane was sinking. This was his fourth crash since joining the RAF. (A month earlier, on the way back from bombing Germany, his pilot, Bill Crich, DFM, and the same crew had crashed in "Wellington" R3215, near Abergavenny, in Wales.)

A "Wellington" appeared making a square search and passed at less than 1,000 feet but did not see them despite attempts to attract it, using a mirror as a heliograph. Back at Newton, a wake was held for the crew at 103's "watering hole", *The Chestnut Club*. On 13<sup>th</sup> February, miraculously, they were picked up by the Danish ship SS Tovelil, which was off course on its way back from Canada.



*Drawing for the 70<sup>th</sup> Anniversary by Jim O'Brien G.A.S.A., author of "Last Post at Newton", where the story is featured*

After weeks in hospital, Jock was no longer fit enough to fly operationally with Bomber Command because of frostbite damage to his feet and hands. In June 1941, he was transferred to the newly formed ASR unit, 276 Squadron at Portreath and Warmwell. His squadron went on to serve in France, Belgium, Holland and Norway before it was disbanded in 1945. A non-swimmer, he had seen enough water to last him a life time, but he was about to see a lot more of it. He had loved being a Bomber Boy, flying in Fairey "Battles" and Vickers "Wellingtons", but he soon became very fond of the "Shagbats"(Supermarine "Walrus"), and every day presented a different drama and always a challenge to land on treacherous seas. He was greatly distressed by retrieving dead and decaying bodies of airmen from the sea, which gave him nightmares for the rest of his life. When an LST was hit by a mine off Ostend, his "Walrus" was scrambled, and they found the sea full of dead bodies, but it was too rough to land. Heavy seas even prevented vessels going to the rescue and most perished quickly in the icy North Sea. Of the 263 officers and men only 32 were saved. The beaches on which the bodies were washed up were mined. On a number of occasions whilst he was trying to haul survivors on board the "Walrus", he was shot at by the Luftwaffe from the shore and/or the air. He was twice mentioned in dispatches.

On one particular day in April 1944, a "Spitfire" pilot had baled out, 75 miles out to sea. Jock picked him up in very rough seas and then the "Walrus", despite every effort and with the crew throwing over the side anything not attached to the aircraft, could not take off. 13 hours were spent taxying until the plane was so water-logged that it had to be towed back to land by a motor launch.



Left, at Knokke. Right: On 6<sup>th</sup> January 1945 in Bruges, Len Badger, Ken Butterfield DFM with 'Jock' - guests of his future family.

Every sortie was a fight against time. On 20<sup>th</sup> March, 1945 he was scrambled to "Walrus" L2220 with W/O Bowe and G. Du Rose to pick up a Spitfire pilot who had baled out. According to a newspaper cutting:

*"Just off the Hague. Cameron's Walrus was sent to the rescue." Despite very rough sea they landed within 400yds. To the crew's dismay the 10ft waves made it impossible to reach the dinghy and after repeated efforts they tried to take off to get more help. In the meantime the German shore batteries had opened up so the pilot started to taxi out to sea and smoother water, the crew were afraid that the plane would break up. Spitfires of their own squadron were circling the Walrus but they could do nothing about the shore guns constantly firing at them. A Catalina came out to them and they signalled it not to land – but the American did. The Walrus crew got into their dinghy and boarded the Catalina and one of the fighters set fire to the Walrus to prevent it falling into enemy hands. The huge seas broke the perspex panelling of the Catalina as it dipped a float under the sea, half flooding the aircraft.*

*With no food and wet through, the two crews spent a very uncomfortable night. After a seemingly endless night two naval meteor launches arrived from England at 9am, and took most of the crew off. The 'Cat' then taxied to smooth water and took off."*

(They had been at sea 21 hours under fire when they were landed at Great Yarmouth.)  
276 Squadron saved over 300 air crew during the short period of its existence.

In Belgium, at Knokke, in August 1944 he met his future wife Anne, a Belgian national. She had done resistance work, carrying messages on the pretext of visiting her sisters.



Then, in 1945, the Squadron moved to Norway. He was not impressed when, on exercises, he was put in a dinghy in a fjord and was forgotten about for several hours!



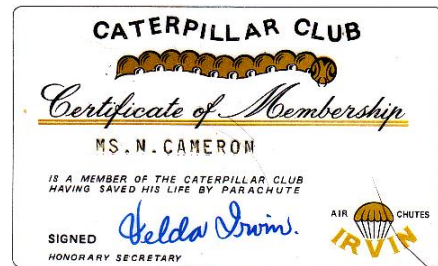
Part of the Norwegian exercise, when Jock was later abandoned

After the war he made a career in the RAF, serving as a Master Signaller. In Rhodesia and Germany he was Staff W/Op, ending back at RAF Watton, on Avro "Lincolns" while flying ELINT operations.

Not only was he a member of the Goldfish club, but he also earned a place in the Caterpillar Club. This was as a result of, when training Iraqis in 1949, his baling out of a "Wellington", NA827 a Mark X, on Bonfire night, after it was struck by lightning and caught fire.



Possibly the "Wellington" he baled out of.



In Africa he was in an Avro "Anson" which crashed in the jungle – but there he also fulfilled his dream to be a pilot. He gained his PPL and bought a RAF surplus de Havilland "Tiger Moth".



VP-YJO, the prized "Tiger Moth" with family and friend

He was party to the discussions about the ASR memorial window in St Mary's Dover, but too ill to attend the inauguration. However, he was deeply moved on seeing it, some time later, with his grand-daughters. Over the years Dover had become very familiar through countless crossings to Belgium to visit Anne's family.



After he left the RAF his war injuries caused a rapid deterioration in his health and he spent many months in hospitals in great pain and distress. He was very courageous and Anne devoted herself entirely to his intensive care. He died in Southsea, Hants on the eve of his

64<sup>th</sup> birthday. She died aged 94 and they were reunited in Warblington church yard, within site of Thorney Island.

The epitaph, composed by their son-in-law, reads:

“Adieu, honoured aviator, to such as you we owe our freedom.”



“Jock” Cameron was with 276 Squadron from inception to disbandment in 1945.  
(The badge did not receive Royal approval until August, 1944.)



Norman in 1981, wearing his Goldfish Club Tie



ASRA



AIR GUNNERS' ASSOCIATION

Extract from “W/Op on a Wing and a Prayer” - the RAF exploits of 755392 M/S Norman (Jock) Cameron

Posted by Dani (Cameron) and David Miles