



## Cannon Capers

In the late 1950s / early 1960s, I was the leader of the RAF Kinloss Mountain Rescue Team. In those days we did not have the luxury of counselling, and it was generally left to individuals to overcome the effects of being involved in often unpleasant situations during rescue operations. This sometimes resulted in team members getting up to some escapade or other to relieve the tensions. Although I must admit I was not involved and had no prior knowledge of the following incident, I felt it had the comparability of events which could have happened at Halton.

In October of 1960, a group of Mountain Rescue personnel made plans to take a cannon from the Nelson Tower at Forres and 'relocate it' at Kinloss. Setting off late one evening in a van owned by one of the team, a total of six members made up the party. They proceeded up the steeply wooded slopes of Cluny Hill, Forres, until at the top of the hill they could just see, dimly outlined against the night sky, the Nelson Tower, built in 1806 to celebrate Nelson's victory at Trafalgar in October 1805. Guarding the doorway of the tower were two old four-pounder cannon, which had (it was said) been used by one of Nelson's ships at the bombardment of Alexandria 150 years previously.

The van was backed up to the tower and the cannon was loaded. They then returned down the steep hill and back to RAF Kinloss, a few miles away. Swinging in through the gates only an hour after they had left, they gave the guard-room the customary wave, then drove to the Mountain Rescue section and parked the vehicle. There it was left, its cargo well out of sight. Nothing more happened until after midnight and then the six met up again to complete the operation.

Early in the morning, an airman up earlier than most, glanced casually across the empty parade square as he often did. Then he took another look for there, right in the middle of the wide expanse of tarmac, was an old cannon.

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Soon someone on Cluny Hill had noticed that a cannon was missing, and had come to the conclusion that a party of ratings or officer trainees from the nearby naval air station at Lossiemouth, celebrating the Admiral's famous victory, were the guilty ones. The police were told and agreed. Angry telephone calls were made along sizzling lines to Lossiemouth. The officers at Lossiemouth, embarrassed, had to admit the logic of the argument and apologised, promising to find out who was responsible and to return the cannon once it had been located.

In the meantime, the SWO at RAF Kinloss, not in the best of moods so early in the morning, was himself faced with three problems. Who did it? Where did it come from? How do we get it back there? Someone thought he recognised the cannon and told the SWO. Reluctantly he picked up the telephone and spoke to those in charge of the Tower.

Despite his most diligent enquiries, he was unable to ascertain who was responsible. It seems strange that he did not immediately pin it onto Mountain Rescue with its reputation for outrageous behaviour. Nobody admitted to having heard, in the early hours of the morning, a van being unloaded on the parade square; not a common occurrence.

The Admin Flt/Sgt was assigned to the task of returning the cannon, and seven 'volunteers' were subsequently detailed to manhandle the cannon (all seven hundredweight of it with its carriage) onto a Bedford truck and it was then driven back to where it had been undisturbed for many years. In the meantime the SWO was still trying to find out who was responsible. He never did. The indistinct tyre marks found at the scene by the police were not enough to give them a real clue.

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The smoothness of the whole operation must be a credit to Mountain Rescue training. A proper operations order was drawn up with the duties of the key personnel properly defined.

**Ian Martin 56<sup>th</sup>**

I had my Demob medical in 1975 and the S.M.O. gave me a thorough check over. You should avoid postings to cold climates" he said, "as your skin tends to be dry and a cold climate could exacerbate it." ("Goodbye Goose Bay!" I thought) "I haven't any more postings!" I exclaimed. "This is a demob medical."

"Ah!" He said, "I'm afraid I can't pass you!" (Panic began to set in: thoughts of Ely Hospital and Nocton Hall ran around in my head.) "You see," he said, "I have to certify that there has been no significant change in your physical being whilst you have been in the R.A.F." "Yes?" I enquired. "Well", he replied, "your records say that you are 5ft 5 inches and 7 stone 11 lbs and I've just measured you at 6 ft and 13 stone, so I would say that's a pretty significant change, so in theory I can't pass you fit" We had a good laugh and he did pass me: these S.M.O's have to have their bit of fun!

**Ted Cox 69<sup>th</sup> (C) UK**

### In Memoriam

It is with sadness that we record the death of the following member. We extend our heartfelt sympathy to family and friends.

**NZ 78880 Gary Ryan 86<sup>th</sup> Entry**

- on 6.6.09

### Obituaries and Comments

I am sad to report the passing of Gary Ryan. He was a keen follower of motor sports and was a Marshall for the local Motor Racing Club. His funeral, in Christchurch on 11<sup>th</sup> June, was attended by many MRC members. The RNZAF was also represented including two fellow Halton Apprentices.

**Derrick Hubbard 46<sup>th</sup>**

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## The Eagle Squadron – A Dedication to Billy Fiske

In our acknowledgement, once more, to the contribution made by those young airmen who fought in the Battle of Britain, which we commemorate on 15<sup>th</sup> September, I have singled out an American who was very well known in his native America before becoming a pilot and who made the ultimate sacrifice in the Battle for the freedom of Britain and, ultimately, the World. The young man nominated is William Meade Fiske 111. (Known to his friends as Billy Fiske.)

“Now why an American?” you might ask. “What has he to do with we ex-Brats here in New Zealand?” That is a very good question, particularly as it is a known fact that 126 New Zealanders fought with Fighter Command between July 10<sup>th</sup> and October 25<sup>th</sup> 1940; which was an outstanding contribution. Among these were the likes of the late Mick Shand, who was hastily trained with only 20 hours flying before flying in a Spitfire Squadron (54 Sqdn) as Wing-Man to ace New Zealander Al Deere. Mick Shand lasted just 3 days before being seriously wounded and grounded for several months. Sadly, others were not so lucky.

The reason that Billy Fiske has been chosen is that his sacrifice could be deemed to be greater than that of any other Battle of Britain pilot lost in that fight, because he offered his services as a man from a neutral country and was motivated by a deep hatred of Hitler and all that he stood for. Indeed, not only was he from a neutral country but he was acting in contravention of America's strict Neutrality Laws which would have meant being fined \$10,000, jailed for several years and stripped of his citizenship and passport, had he been caught by the Authorities. The US was so determined to stop breaches of the law that they put inspectors on all trains travelling to Canada (The usual route for volunteer fliers). These inspectors sought out likely suspects and one pair of clandestine volunteers were approached by an Inspector who said, “Where are you boys going and why?” After their cock-and-bull cover-story reply, he asked, “Are either of you fliers?” and one of the boys replied “Don't be silly! Do we look like fliers?” Meanwhile another inspector was checking their baggage and examined the top layer of clothing in one suitcase. Had he delved deeper he would have found goggles and a log book! Not only was there strict monitoring of trains but the influential US Press was hotly opposed to any breaches of the Neutrality Laws and determinedly defended them, but the biggest obstacle to any form of help to the Allies cause was the complete apathy of the American people, which would only change after the surprise attack on Pearl Harbour.

Apart from the above reason for choosing an American pilot, another compelling reason is that the role of the American Eagle Squadron was acknowledged by the Apprentices of RAF Halton with the presentation of a Spitfire MK XV1 (SL574) to the San Diego Aerospace Museum, California in commemoration of the role played by the Eagle Squadron in the war on Hitler's Germany. This Spitfire was lovingly restored by the Apprentices and was presented in 1989. The aircraft can be seen at the museum located in a replica Dispersal Area which is typical of the Battle of Britain period.

Billy Fiske was the first American to join the RAF in time to take part in the crucial Battle of Britain and, at the time, was just 27 years old. He was the son of a wealthy banker and the Fiske Family were American descendents of a titled English family. Billy's father decided to move his family to France some time before the Second World War, when Billy was quite young. The family used to visit St Moritz for the Winter Sports and Billy became a 'natural' at all sorts of activities in the snow. He excelled as a driver of the bob sleigh and became a member of the US Olympic Bob Sleigh Team at age 16. He won gold in two successive Olympics and at 16 was the youngest competitor to win an Olympic Gold Medal, a record which was only broken in 1992 by a Finnish Skier who, on the day, was only one day younger than Fiske. Billy could have gone on to win more Olympic medals but he refused to attend the 1936 Olympics being held in Bavaria 'for political reasons' and at which, he knew, Adolf Hitler would be in attendance.

Billy was educated in Paris and then went on to Cambridge University. After graduation he decided to take flying lessons and mixed with well-to-do friends, many of whom were weekend fliers with 601 Squadron. Billy was desperate to fly with the RAF after hostilities started and eventually posed as a Canadian Citizen and, through the efforts of influential friends, had an interview with a senior RAF officer and was accepted and sent forward for flying training.

Like many young men in the war, Billy married and he lived in a manor-house with wife Rose, conveniently near to RAF Tangmere where he was stationed with 601 Squadron. He was flying Hurricanes and on one particular day was 'scrambled' to intercept enemy raiders. In the ensuing battle, his aircraft was badly shot up and set on fire. Billy, presumably, knowing just how precious each aircraft was, decided to bring the aircraft back and, as a result, suffered 3<sup>rd</sup> degree burns. After briefly rallying in hospital and looking bright and cheery, he succumbed to his wounds and was the first American to die flying with the RAF in WW2. On this anniversary of the Battle of Britain, I invite you to raise a glass to the memory of Pilot Officer William Fiske, who gave his life to help save civilisation as we know it. **David Sykes 68<sup>th</sup>**



Eagle Squadron Commemoration at San Diego Aerospace Museum (SL574)



San Diego Aerospace Museum showing passing model (Wife Margaret)



Lanc versus Vulcan at Waddington (kindly supplied by Trevor Danks)

## Christchurch 2009 Reunion



**Attendance List for the March 2009 Reunion in Christchurch (As at Aug 2008)**

<b>Entry</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Hotel</b>	<b>Dinner</b>	<b>Coach trip</b>
44	<b>Butler, Jim/Beryl</b>	1	1	1
44	<b>Cowham, Bill</b>	1	1	1
46	<b>Hubbard, Derrick/Vera</b>	2	2	2
46	<b>Welsh, Ian/Mollie</b>	2	2	2
56	<b>Martin, Ian/Clemie</b>	2	2	2
65	<b>Brooks, Alec/Margaret</b>	-	2	2
68	<b>Eves, Graham/Judith</b>	2	2	2
68	<b>Lamason, Don/Nat</b>	-	2	2
68	<b>Lawless, Laurie/Lois</b>	2	2	-
68	<b>Middleton, Allen/Fran</b>	2	2	2
68	<b>Sykes, David/Margaret</b>	2	2	2
68	<b>Tait, Norman</b>	1	1	1
68	<b>West, Sam/Doris</b>	-	2	2
74	<b>Laidlaw, Cyril</b>	-	1	-
77	<b>Francis, Gordon/Lillian</b>	-	2	2
80	<b>Firmin, Monty</b>	1	1	1
80	<b>Smart, Gus/Betty</b>	2	2	2
82	<b>Humphries, John/Uta</b>	2	2	2
83	<b>Gray, Don/Catherine</b>	2	2	2
84	<b>Edmonds, Peter</b>	-	1	-

If your above details are not correct, please let me know. For those intending to come along and not included above, please book and register and let me know as soon as possible. No definite booking has been made for a meal on Friday 20th after our "Meet & Greet" but within the compound of the Garden Hotel there is the Shirley Pub (bar meals) - Red Chinese Restaurant and a café with snacks, coffee etc plus the Garden Buffet, which is where we are eating on Saturday 21<sup>st</sup> (after the Akaroa trip) at approx 7pm.

Happy to hear from anyone: [vedek@clear.net.nz](mailto:vedek@clear.net.nz) / Tel (03) 3445876/ or 4 Grebe Pl .Wigram. ChCh.8042.  
Derrick Hubbard.