

# 'SPLASHDOWN'

## ON THE EQUATOR

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T6579 'LAST TAKEOFF' 1ST MARCH 1960  
ROYAL AIR FORCE STAGING POST, KATUNAYAKE, CEYLON.

ON TUESDAY MARCH 1ST 1960 SEVERAL ROYAL AIR FORCE MEN WERE BEING REPATRIATED TO THE UNITED KINGDOM AFTER THEIR TOUR OF DUTY IN THE FAR EAST, THESE MEN WERE MAINLY STATIONED AT ROYAL AIR FORCE STAGING POST KATUNAYAKE (KNOWN BY ALL AS 'KAT') IN CEYLON, THERE WERE TWO ROYAL MARINES AND TWO ABLE SEAMEN FROM THE ROYAL NAVY ALSO RETURNING TO THE UNITED KINGDOM. TOGETHER WITH THE COMMANDING OFFICER OF KAT, WING COMMANDER GEOFF ATHERTON D.F.C. AND A FLIGHT LIEUTENANT FROM PAY ACCOUNTS THESE SERVICEMEN MADE UP THE COMPLEMENT OF 14 PASSENGERS WAITING TO BOARD A HANDELY PAGE HASTINGS T6579 A C1 AIRCRAFT OF 48 SQUADRON CHANGI, SINGAPORE FOR THE 600 MILE TRIP TO ROYAL AIR FORCE GAN IN THE MALDIVE ISLANDS.

THE HASTINGS WAS DELAYED FOR A LONG PERIOD OF TIME DUE TO TECHNICAL PROBLEMS, ALTHOUGH STEW AND TONY THINK THE CREW MAY HAVE MADE A RETURN TRIP TO GAN THAT DAY AND WE SHOULD HAVE BEEN EN ROUTE TO GAN BY MID MORNING, HOWEVER DUE TO THESE DELAYS THE PASSENGERS AND CREW DID NOT EMBARK UNTIL 1700HRS LOCAL TIME AND EVENTUALLY LIFTED OFF FROM RAF KATUNAYAKE AT 1734HRS. THE KNOWN PASSENGERS WERE CORPORALS BILL GRUNDY A

FIREMAN, (BILL) MURRAY AN ENGINE FITTER, SENIOR AIRCRAFTSMEN TONY GREEN AIRFRAME MECHANIC, STEWART TUCKER AIR RADAR MECHANIC, TONY MEALING AIR WIRELESS MECHANIC(?), DAVID BLOOMFIELD AN MT DRIVER AND JOHN 'GARY' COOPER AN ENGINE MECHANIC, LEAVING ONE PASSENGERS NAME WE CAN'T REMEMBER.



THE CREW NUMBERED SIX, THE CAPTAIN AND FIRST PILOT WAS FLIGHT LIEUTENANT R.T.D. SCOTT A HIGHLY EXPERIENCED PILOT WITH OVER 3000 FLYING HOURS ON HASTINGS AIRCRAFT ALONE AND WAS A HOLDER OF A MASTER GREEN INSTRUMENT RATING CERTIFICATE, HIS CO-PILOT WAS FLIGHT SERGEANT G.F. APPEGARTH MUCH LESS EXPERIENCED ON TYPE WITH APPROXIMATELY 500 FLYING HOURS, I AS A PASSENGER UP TO THIS DATE HAD 97 HOURS FLYING EXPERIENCE IN HASTINGS AIRCRAFT. THE REMAINDER OF THE CREW CONSISTED OF A NAVIGATOR, SIGNALER, FLIGHT ENGINEER AND AIR QUARTERMASTER (LATER KNOWN AS LOADMASTER) WHOSE NAMES ARE UNKNOWN.

THE WEATHER ON LIFT OFF WAS FINE AND STILL DAYLIGHT, THIS AIRCRAFT, APART FROM ITS PASSENGERS, WAS CARRYING SOME AIRCRAFT GROUND EQUIPMENT IN THE FORM OF AIRCRAFT HYDRAULIC JACKS AND THE EQUIPMENT NECESSARY TO EQUIP THE DENTAL SECTION AT RAF GAN IN THE AIRCRAFTS FUSELAGE AND ALSO PERSONAL EFFECTS OF THOSE ON BOARD IN THE LUGGAGE HOLD, THE PASSENGERS HAND LUGGAGE WAS SITUATED IN RACKS STOWED ABOVE THE PASSENGERS HEADS. I WAS SAT FACING AFT ON THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT ADJACENT TO A PORT HOLE WINDOW AND DIAGONALLY OPPOSITE THE MAIN PASSENGER DOOR, A MATE AND WORK COLLEAGUE TONY GREEN, SAT ALONG SIDE ME, WE WERE TAKING PHOTOGRAPHS OF THE LAST IMAGES OF CEYLON AND THOSE BRILLIANT SUNSETS ENCOUNTERED IN THAT PART OF THE WORLD, CHATTING ABOUT GOING HOME AFTER TWO PLUS YEARS AND LOOKING FORWARD TO A GOOD OLD ENGLISH PINT OF BEER.

IT WASN'T LONG BEFORE IT GOT DARK AND THERE WAS SOME TURBULENCE, WHICH IS USUALLY FOUND ON MOST AIRCRAFT TRIPS, THIS TURBULENCE INCREASED IN INTENSITY OVER A PERIOD OF TIME, WE WERE INFORMED TO FASTEN SEAT BELTS AS RECALLED BY TONY, AND ON APPROACH TO GAN THE TURBULENCE WAS EXTREMELY SEVERE, I MYSELF HAD NEVER ENCOUNTERED SUCH BUFFETING AS THIS BEFORE, LIGHTNING COULD EASILY BE SEEN LIGHTING UP THE CLOUDS, ONE WONDERS WHY THE PILOT CANNOT FLY ABOVE THE STORM BUT OFTEN CLOUD BANKS IN INTENSE TROPICAL STORMS CAN RANGE FROM A FEW HUNDRED FEET ABOVE SEA LEVEL TO HEIGHTS OF OVER 30000 FEET, THIS HASTINGS AIRCRAFT DID NOT HAVE THIS CEILING CAPACITY AND TO MY KNOWLEDGE DID NOT CARRY OXYGEN OR MASKS FOR SUCH AN EVENTUALITY ( ALTHOUGH SOME HASTINGS WERE FITTED WITH MASKS AND OXYGEN ESPECIALLY WHEN USED IN THE CASEVAC ROLE ) , NORMAL FLYING

HEIGHT WOULD BE APPROXIMATELY 8000 FEET FOR A TRIP OF THIS SORT. IT IS INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT AT GAN THE AIRFIELD MEASURES JUST OVER ONE MILE SQUARE AND THE LENGTH OF THE SINGLE RUNWAY EQUALS THE EXACT LENGTH OF THE ISLAND WITH NO UNDER OR OVERSHOOT FACILITIES (APART FOR SOFT CORAL BELOW THE HIGH AND LOW TIDE WATER LEVEL), THERE ALSO WAS (IN 1960) NO OTHER AIRFIELD WITHIN HUNDREDS OF MILES OF GAN TO DIVERT TO IN THE EVENT OF AN EMERGENCY, APART FROM A RETURN TRIP TO KATUNAYAKE AND THERE WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH FUEL ON BOARD THE AIRCRAFT TO MAKE THIS RETURN TRIP IF DEEMED NECESSARY.

AS PASSENGERS WE WERE ALL GETTING PRETTY ANXIOUS, SOMETHING I HAD NEVER EXPERIENCED BEFORE WITH FLYING IN BOTH CIVIL AND MILITARY AIRCRAFT, WHEN SUDDENLY THE LIGHTS OF GAN AIRFIELD APPEARED BELOW THE AIRCRAFT, SOME EYE WITNESSES (CORPORAL ANDY MUTCH AN AIR WIRELESS FITTER OF SASF (STAGING AIRCRAFT SERVICING FLIGHT) GAN AWAITING THE ARRIVAL OF THE AIRCRAFT) COULD HEAR THE AIRCRAFT BUT NOT SEE IT DUE TO THE EXTREME WEATHER CONDITIONS PREVAILING, OTHERS INCLUDING MIKE BUTLER COULD SEE THE AIRCRAFT AND ESTIMATED ITS HEIGHT AT 80', I FELT THE HEIGHT WAS 400', WE KNOW FROM THE OFFICIAL ACCIDENT REPORT THAT THE CLOUD BASE WAS 420' AND THAT THE HASTINGS OVERSHOT THE RUNWAY, STEWART AND TONY THOUGHT THE AIRCRAFT DID TOUCH THE RUNWAY, DAVID AND I AM CERTAIN IT DID NOT, OTHERS CLAIMED THAT THE AIRCRAFT FLEW IN FROM THE WEST (FEDHOO DIRECTION) INCLUDING FIREMAN ROGER 'STEVE' STEVENS WHO WAS IN CHARGE OF THE FIRE STATION THAT NIGHT AND WHO HAD TAKEN UP A POSITION ADJACENT TO AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WITH HIS CREW IN THE FIRE ENGINE WHICH IS NORMAL PROCEDURE, IT IS KNOWN THAT THE AIRCRAFT MADE ONE SINGLE LOW LEVEL APPROACH, EXACT HEIGHT UNKNOWN, OVER THE ISLAND FROM THE EAST AND BANKED TO PORT. THE ACCIDENT REPORT RECORDS THIS TIME AS BEING 2034 HOURS LOCAL TIME, EXACTLY THREE HOURS AFTER LIFT OFF FROM OUR HOME BASE IN CEYLON, (THESE TIMES WERE ORIGINALLY QUOTED 'ZULU' TIMES AND HAVE BEEN READJUSTED TO LOCAL TIMES FROM CORPORAL HARRY HEYWOOD STATIONED IN GAN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL THE NIGHT OF THE INCIDENT AND EX SQUADRON LEADER NEIL JONES AN EXPERIENCED EX HASTINGS AND HERCULES TRANSPORT PILOT).



HASTINGS TG579 FLEW OFF FOR ANOTHER TWENTY MINUTES AND ACCORDING TO THE ACCIDENT REPORT 'MADE A VERY LONG LOW APPROACH TO LAND IN MARGINAL WEATHER CONDITIONS' IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT THE WEATHER WAS STILL RAGING, WHEN WITHOUT ANY WARNING THERE WAS A MIGHTY CRASH AND JUDDERING AND SILENCE FROM THE ENGINES, IT IS KNOWN THAT THE UNDERCARRIAGE WAS DOWN AND ON THIS FIRST IMPACT BECAME DETACHED FROM THE HASTINGS, BOTH WHEELS STILL INFLATED, WERE RECOVERED THE FOLLOWING MORNING BY THE MARINE CRAFT SECTION WHEN FOUND TO BE AFLOAT DRIFTING IN THE LAGOON, THESE WERE RETRIEVED BY ROD VENNERS USING A DAVID BROWN TRACTOR. IT IS THOUGHT THAT ON THIS FIRST IMPACT AT 125 KNOTS THAT NUMBERS ONE AND TWO HERCULES ENGINES WERE TORN OUT OF THE BEARERS AND DETACHED FROM THE BULKHEADS, WE KNOW THAT THESE TWO ENGINES WERE DEFINITELY MISSING, IT IS ALSO THOUGHT THAT NUMBER THREE ENGINE ALSO BECAME DETACHED AS REPORTED BY ALL FOUR SURVIVING PASSENGERS. DEFINITELY NUMBER FOUR ENGINE WAS STILL ATTACHED. ALSO AT THIS POINT IT IS THOUGHT THAT THE AIRCRAFT SWUNG ROUND 180 DEGREES FROM ITS EASTERLY APPROACH AND WAS NOW FACING AWAY FROM GAN (TG580 CRASHED ON LANDING AT GAN IN JULY 1959 AND PREVIOUS TO THIS TWO OTHER INCIDENTS INCLUDING ONE ON THE GREENLAND ICECAP INVOLVING A HASTINGS, EACH TIME THE AIRCRAFT SWUNG 180 DEGREES), A FURTHER THEORY IS THAT THE GAN CHANNEL WHERE THE HASTINGS CAME DOWN IN THE SEA, THAT THE CURRENT HERE FLOWS AT A VERY FAST 7-8 KNOTS AND IT IS THOUGHT POSSIBLE THAT THE AIRCRAFT SWUNG ROUND ON THE CURRENT. NEXT THERE WAS ANOTHER CRASH, NOT AS SEVERE AS THE FIRST BUT TOO HARD FOR ANY NORMAL LANDING IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT A FIRST AID BOX BECAME DETACHED FROM ITS STOWAGE FLEW ACROSS THE CABIN AND HIT GEOFF ATHERTON FULLY IN THE FACE, WE LATER DISCOVERED THIS BROKE HIS NOSE. THERE THEN WAS A THIRD ALMOST GENTLER CRASH ALMOST AS THOUGH THE AIRCRAFT HAD LANDED ON THE RUNWAY. I DISTINCTLY REMEMBER LOOKING OUT OF THE WINDOW AND SAYING TO TONY GREEN THAT I COULD NOT SEE ANY RUNWAY LIGHTS (TONY RECALLS THIS EVENT), IT WAS NOT OBVIOUS TO ANY OF THE PASSENGERS AT THAT TIME BUT WE HAD HIT THE SEA AND OUR FIRST KNOWLEDGE OF THIS WAS WHEN THE AQM (AIR QUARTERMASTER) OPENED THE MAIN ENTRANCE/EXIT DOOR WHEN WATER RUSHED IN. HERE WE WERE HAVING JUST CROSSED THE EQUATOR BY SOME 41 MILES AND OUR BAPTISM WAS ABOUT TO BE REALISED.!



ON THE ACCIDENT REPORT ON THIS FINAL LOW-LEVEL APPROACH TO THE RUNWAY THE REPORT READS" ON THE SECOND APPROACH THERE WAS A BRILLIANT FLASH OF LIGHTNING AT ABOUT 2 MILES, CAUSING PILOT TO LOOK INTO COCKPIT TO RECOVER HIS VISION. SECOND PILOT THEN CALLED APPROACHING 50' AND ALMOST IMMEDIATELY AIRCRAFT HIT THE SEA. MINOR INJURIES WERE SUSTAINED BY ALL



MEMBERS OF CREW AND PASSENGERS" (INCIDENTALLY FROM BOTH BLOOMFIELD AND COOPER 'S MEDICAL RECORDS THERE IS NO MENTION OF THIS). IT ALSO SEEMS



INCREDIBLE THAT A TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT OTHER THAN A FLYING BOAT WOULD BE FLYING AT THIS LOW ALTITUDE FROM SUCH A DISTANCE FROM THE RUNWAY (1.5 NAUTICAL MILES), THE CLOUD BASE WAS WE KNOW 420' AND LATER A SHACKLETON MR1 DID A SARAH (SEARCH AND RESCUE AND HOMING), AND THERE IS NO WAY THAT THE SHACKLETON WOULD HAVE BEEN SEARCHING AT THIS ALTITUDE.

IN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL HARRY HEYWOOD RECALLS 'THE EVENING THAT THE HASTINGS DITCHED TO THE EAST OF THE ISLAND, I WAS ON DUTY IN THE ATC TOWER. IT WAS A QUIET EVENING WITH LITTLE ACTIVITY ON THE W/T CIRCUITS AND I WAS CHATTING TO THE DUTY CONTROLLER, FLIGHT LIEUTENANT MORGAN-SMITH, WHEN THE HASTINGS MADE HIS FIRST APPROACH THROUGH THE GALE AND LASHING RAIN THAT ENVELOPED THE ISLAND. THE AIRCRAFT ABORTED ITS INITIAL APPROACH AND ASKED FOR THE RUNWAY LIGHTS TO BE INCREASED IN INTENSITY. THIS WAS DONE, AND WE STROVE TO SEE HIS LANDING LIGHTS THROUGH THE STORM, BUT IT WAS IMPOSSIBLE-IT WAS LIKE A SCENE FROM A HOLLYWOOD MOVIE. THE DATCO (DUTY AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICER) ASKED HIM (THE PILOT) TO CONFIRM "THREE GREENS" - UNDERCARRIAGE DOWN AND LOCKED - AND THE LAST TRANSMISSION WAS HIS ANSWER, "ROGER, DOWNWIND, THREE GREENS, RUNWAY IN SIGHT".

"SUDDENLY THERE WAS WHAT APPEARED TO BE A FEEDBACK SCREECH, PERHAPS TWO MICROPHONES BEING OPENED AT THE SAME TIME, AND THE C/R D/F (CATHODE RAY DIRECTION FINDER) REACTED TO IT. THE TRACE ILLUMINATED ON THE SCREEN, ORIENTATED EAST, THE DIRECTION WHERE HE (THE AIRCRAFT) WAS EXPECTED TO BE. THE DATCO (DUTY AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICER) INITIATED A CALL; NO REPLY; CALLED AGAIN, NO REPLY, AND EXCLAIMED, "CHRIST, I THINK HE'S GONE IN" OR WORDS TO THAT EFFECT. AT THAT POINT CONTROLLED PANIC TOOK OVER AS THE SAR (SEARCH AND RESCUE) DRILLS WERE PUT INTO EFFECT, AND I KEPT OUT OF THE WAY. I HAVE A SUSPICION THAT ONE OF MY WIRELESS OPERATORS SENIOR AIRCRAFTSMAN RUSS TAYLOR, ON HIS OWN INITIATIVE HAD MADE HIGH FREQUENCY RADIO TRANSMITTER CONTACT WITH THE BOATS (AIR SEA RESCUE LAUNCHES) "



ROGER STEVENS, IN CHARGE OF THE GAN FIRE STATION WAS ALONGSIDE THE CONTROL TOWER WHEN INSTRUCTED TO 'ENTER THE ACTIVE AND PROCEED WITH CAUTION, BECAUSE WE THINK THE AIRCRAFT HAS CRASHED'. ROGER AND HIS CREW WERE DISPATCHED TO THE CHANNEL END OF THE ISLAND TO SEARCH FOR THE AIRCRAFT AND SURVIVORS BUT FOUND OR HEARD NOTHING. THEY WERE ALSO INSTRUCTED TO WADE OUT ON TO THE CORAL REEF BUT DECIDED AGAINST THIS COURSE OF ACTION DUE TO THE PRESENCE OF SHARKS AND MORAY EELS IN THE VICINITY. HOWEVER, THE SASF DUTY CREW WERE TAKEN BY VEHICLE TO THIS POINT AND DID WADE ON TO THE REEF TO LISTEN AND SEARCH FOR SURVIVORS BUT AGAIN FOUND AND HEARD NOTHING, THE STATION ADJUTANT STOOD THE DUTY CREW DOWN AND GAVE THEM A BOTTLE OF RUM FOR THEIR EFFORTS AS RECALLED BY ANDY MUTCH. ALL EMERGENCY TEAMS ON STANDBY WERE 'CALLED OUT', BY GREAT FORTUNE A SEARCH AND RESCUE SHACKLETON MR1 AIRCRAFT OF 205 SQUADRON INDEX NUMBER WB834 HAD BEEN DETACHED FROM CHANGI ON A TWO-WEEK ATTACHMENT TO GAN AND THIS AS FAR AS WE HAVE BEEN INFORMED WAS AIRBORNE WITHIN 20 MINUTES OF THE ACCIDENT OCCURRING. FLIGHT LIEUTENANT JOHNNY ELIAS WAS THE DUTY CAPTAIN AND FIRST PILOT. BILL BARKER WAS ON THE PINNACLE 1374 (ASR LAUNCH) AS A SENIOR AIRCRAFTSMAN MOTOR BOAT CREWMAN AND WAS DISPATCHED TO THE SCENE OF THE DITCHING, INCIDENTALLY THIS LAUNCH CAN STILL BE SEEN PLYING THE WATERS AROUND THE HOLY HEAD AREA.

BACK AT THE CRASH SITE, ORGANISED CHAOS WAS TO BE SEEN, WITH THE SUDDEN SURGE OF WATER INTO THE FUSELAGE AREA EVERYONE'S IMMEDIATE REACTION WAS

TO VACATE THE SINKING HASTINGS AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE, I CERTAINLY RECALL TAKING MY LAP BELT OFF, REACHING IMMEDIATELY ABOVE MY HEAD TAKING THE MAE WEST (LIFE JACKET) FROM ITS PLYBOARD STOWAGE, BEING AT LEAST ANKLE DEEP IN WATER, BUTTONING UP THE JACKET BUT NOT TIGHTENING THE STRAPS AND EXITING THE AIRCRAFT BY THE MAIN DOOR (I HAVE SINCE BEEN INFORMED BY FRANK OGDEN AN EX HASTINGS FLIGHT ENGINEER THAT IF INFLATING A LIFE JACKET BEFORE ENTERING THE WATER THERE WAS A GOOD CHANCE OF BREAKING YOUR NECK WHEN ENTERING THE SEA !), AT THIS POINT THERE WAS NO THOUGHT OF SALVAGING ANY OF OUR PERSONAL POSSESSIONS, IT WAS A QUESTION OF SAVING LIVES THAT BECAME THE PRIORITY. IT IS CLAIMED BY PILOT OFFICER COLIN VINCENT WHO WAS POSTED TO HQFEAF (HEADQUARTERS FAR EAST AIR FORCE) FAIRY POINT, CHANGI SHORTLY AFTER THE CRASH AND WAS A SERVING NATIONAL SERVICE OFFICER ATTACHED TO THE LEGAL BRANCH, SEEING THE BOARD OF INQUIRY REPORTS AND RECALLS THAT HE HAD MET WING COMMANDER GEOFF ATHERTON ON A NUMBER OF OCCASIONS AT FAIRY POINT AND RECALLED THAT HE WAS 'A MOST CHARMING AND COURTEOUS MAN' AND THAT IT WAS GEOFF THAT TOOK CHARGE IN HIS CALM AUTHORITATIVE MANNER WHICH ENSURED THAT THE PASSENGERS EXITED THE AIRCRAFT INTO LIFE RAFTS IN AN ORDERLY MANNER, THAT ALL THE CREW WERE ALSO SAFE AND THAT RAFTS WERE KEPT TOGETHER UNTIL RESCUED BY THE HIGH SPEED LAUNCH' I WOULD LIKE TO MENTION AT THIS POINT THAT NO INSTRUCTIONS WERE HEARD BY THE FOUR SURVIVING PASSENGERS ON EVACUATING THE AIRCRAFT, SOME MEMBERS OF CREW AND SOME PASSENGERS EXITED THE AIRCRAFT VIA THE MAINPLANE ESCAPE HATCHES AND STEPPED INTO THE INFLATED DINGHIES, WHILST AT LEAST ALL FOUR PASSENGERS MENTIONED EARLIER WERE IMMERSED IN SEA WATER, FUEL AND OIL WHEN VACATING THE AIRCRAFT. I ALSO RECALL OTHERS IN THE WATER, IT WAS EXTREMELY DIFFICULT TO HAUL MYSELF INTO A DINGHY, AS I HAD INGESTED A LUNG FULL OF WATER, OIL AND FUEL, ONCE IN THE WATER I PULLED MY RED EMERGENCY TOGGLE ON MY LIFE JACKET AND THIS BROUGHT ME TO THE SURFACE, I ESTIMATE MY TIME IN THE WATER AT LESS THAN FIVE MINUTES, I'M NOT SURE, BUT I WAS PULLED ON A LIFE RAFT BY A SAILOR OR MARINE AS I CERTAINLY ENDED UP IN THEIR DINGHY. STEW TUCKER HELD ON TO HIS LIFE JACKET UNTIL HE GOT INTO THE DINGHY AS HIS BUTTONS WERE ALREADY FASTENED UP, TONY ALSO RECALLS THE BUTTONS BEING FASTENED WHEN TAKEN FROM THE STOWAGE, DAVIDBLOOMFIELD RECALLS HAVING TO FIGHT OFF SOMEBODY HAMPERING HIS PROGRESS TO GET INTO A DINGHY.

ONCE WE WERE ALL IN THE DINGHIES A HEAD COUNT WAS ORDERED BY A FLIGHT LIEUTENANT PAY ACCOUNTS OFFICER FROM KATUNAYAKE AND STEW TUCKER TOOK ON THIS ROLE GIVING EACH PERSON A NUMBER, HE RECALLS NUMBERING HIMSELF LAST, IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT A MEMBER OF CREW HAD BEEN REPORTED MISSING AND WE COULD CERTAINLY HEAR CRIES OF HELP FROM WHAT APPEARED TO BE THE STARBOARD SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT, IT IS THOUGHT BY ALL THAT THIS WAS THE FLIGHT ENGINEER WHO HAD EITHER ESCAPED THROUGH THE EMERGENCY HATCH NEXT TO HIS STATION OR VIA THE STARBOARD WING, IT IS KNOWN THAT OF THE 20 OCCUPANTS ALL ESCAPED THROUGH EXITS ON THE PORT SIDE OF THE AIRCRAFT EXCEPT THE ONE PERSON ADRIFT. IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT GEOFF ATHERTON DIVED INTO THE WATER FROM A DINGHY AND SWAM AFTER THE PERSON WHO WAS ADRIFT. HE STAYED WITH THIS PERSON UNTIL RESCUED DESPITE RECEIVING THE FULL FORCE OF A WOODEN FIRST AID BOX FULLY IN HIS FACE SUSTAINING A BROKEN NOSE, WE UNDERSTAND THAT GEOFF ATHERTON WAS AWARDED A COMMENDATION

FOR HIS DEEDS THAT NIGHT AND JUSTLY DESERVED. IT IS ALSO NOTEWORTHY TO REPORT THAT GEOFF SHOT DOWN 5 JAPANESE BOMBERS AND FIGHTERS IN WW2 AND WAS AWARDED THE DFC AND BAR, HE WAS EVENTUALLY SHOT DOWN BY THE JAPANESE INTO THE SEA IN 1944 AND WAS RESCUED BY A CATALINA FLYING BOAT. SO TWICE HE ENDED UP IN THE DRINK!



SEVERAL MINUTES HAD PASSED SINCE THE INITIAL DITCHING AND WE WERE ABLE TO COLLECT OUR THOUGHTS AND PUT IN TO BEING A PLAN OF ACTION, THE FIRST THING NECESSARY WAS TO GET OURSELVES AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE FOR SEVERAL REASONS, WHEN THE HASTINGS WAS GOING TO SINK WOULD THE SUCTION TAKE US DOWN AS WELL, THERE WAS THE ADDED RISK OF HIGH OCTANE AVGAS FUEL AND ENGINE OIL IGNITING PLUS OTHER HAZARDS OF BATTERY ACIDS AND OTHER VOLATILE SUBSTANCES IN THE AREA. IT WAS AT THIS POINT THAT WE HAD FOUND SOME PADDLES IN THE DINGHIES AND I CERTAINLY WAS USING ONE OF THESE FRANTICALLY TRYING TO PADDLE THE DINGHIES AWAY FROM THE TWISTED ALUMINIUM OF THE WINGS AND TAIL PLANE, STEW RECALLS HOW HE HAD LEFT THE DINGHY BY STEPPING ON TO A WING TRYING TO PUSH THE DINGHIES AWAY FROM THE AIRCRAFT, WHAT WE DID NOT KNOW WAS THAT THE DINGHIES WERE STILL TETHERED TO THE AIRCRAFT BY CORD, STEW RECALLS IT WAS ME THAT HAD SPOTTED THIS AND ASKED IF ANYONE HAD GOT A KNIFE, WHEN EITHER A SAILOR OR MARINE PULLED A KNIFE FROM HIS SOCK AND SEVERED THE CONNECTIONS, THE REMAINDER OF THE CORD WAS THEN USED TO TETHER THE DINGHIES TOGETHER, NONE OF US ARE SURE HOW MANY DINGHIES WERE IN USE BUT THE CONSENSUS OF OPINION IS THAT THERE WERE THREE, ONE OF WHICH WAS DEFLATING (PROBABLY PUNCTURED BY THE ALUMINIUM), ONE WHICH CONTAINED THE CREW NO ONE RECALLS HOW THIS BECAME DETACHED FROM THE OTHER TWO.

FORTUNATELY, THERE WAS LIGHT FROM THE EMERGENCY BATTERIES LIGHTING UP THE INSIDE OF THE FUSELAGE AND FLASHES OF LIGHTNING STILL RAGING FROM THIS HORRENDOUS STORM, SO WE WERE AT TIMES ABLE TO SEE WHAT WAS GOING



ON APART FROM FEELING AROUND THE DINGHIES FOR EMERGENCY EQUIPMENT. WE HAD CERTAINLY FOUND THE PADDLES AND AT LAST WE WERE MAKING PROGRESS IN GRADUALLY DRIFTING AWAY FROM THE POINT OF DANGER, HOWEVER THE DINGHY THAT WAS DEFLATING WAS CAUSING SOME ANXIETY TO ITS OCCUPANTS AS CORPORAL MURRAY, A RATHER ROTUND CHAP, WAS BEING PHYSICALLY ILL AND SITTING ON THE BELLOWS AS RECALLED BY TONY, DAVID AND STEW, THEY EACH TOOK IT IN TURNS BY KEEPING THE DINGHY INFLATED BY THIS PUMPING ACTION. BOTH DAVID, STEW AND I RECALL FINDING 'HATS', TO ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES THESE LOOKED LIKE A HUGE TEAT END PIECE OF A CONDOM, THIS CONSISTED OF A PLASTIC TIGHT FITTING HOOD WITH A TINY TORCH BULB IN THE TEAT END, TO ACTIVATE THE LIGHT YOU HAD TO IMMERSE A SMALL CIGARETTE SIZE PACKET BATTERY IN WATER (OBVIOUSLY WE HAD AN OCEAN FULL OF THIS!) WHICH ACTIVATED THE LIGHT BULB ON THE TOP OF THE HEAD, THERE WERE MANY OF THESE IN THE DINGHIES BUT HOW THESE COULD BE SEEN FROM ANY DISTANCE IS BEYOND ME. WE NEVER CAME ACROSS ANY OTHER EQUIPMENT WITHIN THESE DINGHIES, TO MY KNOWLEDGE THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN EMERGENCY RATIONS INCLUDING 'DOG' BISCUITS, DRIED HORLICKS TABLETS AND OTHER TABLETS TO CONVERT SALT WATER IN TO FRESH WATER, IN ADDITION THERE SHOULD HAVE BEEN A YELLOW BOX KITE (FOR DAY TIME USE) AND FLARES BUT NONE OF THESE WERE FOUND. DAVID RETAINED HIS HELIOGRAPH FROM HIS MAE WEST, THIS IS A SIGNALING DEVICE EMPLOYING A QUADRANT MIRROR TO REFLECT THE SUN'S RAYS FOR PASSING SHIPS AND AIRCRAFT TO SPOT IN SUCH EMERGENCIES.



AGAIN, ONLY MINUTES HAD PASSED FOR ALL OF THIS TO HAPPEN, WE COULD HEAR THE ENGINES OF THE SHACKLETON FIRE INTO LIFE AND TO A TRAINED MECHANIC THIS SOUND OF 4 ROLLS ROYCE GRIFFON ENGINES WAS ALMOST HEAVEN SENT, WE

AS SURVIVORS DIDN'T KNOW THERE WAS A SHACKLETON BASED AT GAN BUT MIGHTY PLEASED THAT THERE WAS.

WE WERE NOW BEGINNING TO SETTLE DOWN INTO SOME SORT OF ROUTINE WITHIN THE DINGHIES, WE WERE NOW WELL ADRIFT OF THE CRASHED HASTINGS WHICH WAS STILL AFLOAT, PERHAPS TWO HUNDRED YARDS AWAY FROM ITS TAIL END, THE NOSE POINTING AWAY FROM GAN (AS ALSO REMEMBERED BY STEW, DAVID AND MYSELF), THE AIRFIELD LIGHTS WERE TO OUR RIGHT AND WE COULD ONLY SEE THESE AS WE ROSE ON THE CREST OF EACH GIANT WAVE, HANGING ON TO THE GUIDE ROPES FOR DEAR LIFE, STILL IN A RAGING THUNDERSTORM. HOW TG579 MANAGED TO RIDE THESE WAVES FOR SO LONG IS A REMARKABLE TESTAMENT TO ITS DURABILITY AGAIN IT IS A CONSENSUS OF OPINION THAT SHE STAYED AFLOAT FOR SOME TWENTY MINUTES UNTIL SLIPPING DOWN STARBOARD WING FIRST (STEW THINKS PORT WING DOWN) INTO DEEP WATER. THE PORT WING ROSE INTO THE AIR DEVOID OF BOTH OF ITS HERCULES ENGINES, OTHERS NOTICED THAT NUMBER THREE ENGINE WAS ALSO MISSING, IT WAS SAD TO SEE HER DISAPPEAR AS SAILORS WOULD A SINKING OR TORPEDOED SHIP. IT COULD HAVE EASILY BEEN US GOING DOWN WITH IT, I ALSO FIND IT AMAZING THAT IF TWO OR THREE ENGINES WERE RIPPED FROM THE BULKHEADS WEIGHING OVER A TON EACH WHY THE WINGS WERE NOT TORN OFF ON THE FIRST IMPACT I CANNOT IMAGINE WHY THEY DIDN'T 'T, PERHAPS THE SLOW LANDING SPEED PREVENTED THIS AND WITH THE THREE CRASHES IT WOULD APPEAR AS IF THE AIRCRAFT SKIPPED THE SEA LIKE A PEBBLE SKIPPING ACROSS THE TOP OF A POND.



ONCE TG579 HAD SLID BELOW THE WAVES, IT WAS TIME TO TAKE STOCK, STEW TUCKER SUGGESTED THAT EVERYONE REMOVED THEIR SHOES AND BOOTS TO PREVENT ANY MORE DINGHIES BEING DEFLATED FROM SHARP OBJECTS LIKE EXPOSED NAILS OR STUDS OR BLAKEY'S, SOME SHOES WERE THROWN OVERBOARD TO STOP CLUTTERING UP THE DINGHIES, THOSE THAT WERE RETAINED WERE KEPT ON THE OWNERS LAP IN

CASE WE HAD TO USE THESE FOR BALING OUT WATER FROM THE DINGHIES. THERE WAS WATER IN ALL THE DINGHIES BUT IN MINE NOTHING TO WORRY ABOUT, IT WAS PROBABLY RESIDUAL WATER FROM THE RAIN OR SEA WATER SPLASHING OVER THE HIGH WALLS OF THE LIFE RAFTS.

THE SHACKLETON WAS BY NOW AIRBORNE AND A SYSTEMATIC SEARCH WAS STARTED AS RECALLED BY HARRY HEYWOOD "THE FLARES WERE CLEAR POINTS OF LIGHT, NOT FUZZY AS THEY WOULD HAVE BEEN IF FALLING THROUGH CLOUD. THE SHACKLETON WAS RUNNING IN ON THE RUNWAY LINE FIRING OFF SINGLE FLARES ONE AFTER ANOTHER, THEN AS HE PASSED OVER THE DITCHED HASTINGS HE WOULD FIRE OFF A CLUSTER, PULL AWAY THEN REPEAT THE PROCEDURE." FROM A PASSENGER POINT OF VIEW THIS APPEARED TO BE WHAT I RECALLED, BUT THE HASTINGS WOULD HAVE BEEN ON ITS WAY OR ON THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA BED BY THIS TIME. SHACKLETON AIRCRAFT HAD SOPHISTICATED RADAR ON BOARD AND CARRIED A CREW OF TEN, DESPITE THE FACT THAT NO METAL OBJECT WAS ON THE SURFACE (TG579) THIS WOULD HAVE BEEN QUITE EASY TO DETECT AS IF THE HASTINGS WERE A SUBMARINE, I AM NOT AWARE THAT ANY ASDIC OR SONAR BUOYS OR OTHER SIMILAR EQUIPMENT WAS BEING USED BY THE SHACKLETON. AT THIS POINT DON ELLIS, THE FIRST NAVIGATOR ON THE OFF-DUTY SHACKLETON AT GAN FROM 205 SQUADRON CHANGI RECALLS THE THE ATROCIOUS TROPICAL STORM AND ASKED THE OPERATIONS OFFICER WHAT THE CREW OF THE HASTINGS SHOULD DO, THE OPS OFFICER REPLIED 'IF THEY HAD ANY SENSE THEY WOULD RETURN TO KATUNAYAKE'. THE C.O. OF GAN, WING COMMANDER EWAN THOMAS WAS IN AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL WITH THE DUTY AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL OFFICER. THE CREW OF THE HASTINGS DID A BLIND APPROACH



BEACON SYSTEM (BABS) APPROACH ALMOST RELIANT UPON INSTRUMENTS. DON LATER RECALLS THE HASTINGS NAVIGATOR CALL "2 MILES" AND THE CO-PILOT SAYING "YOU'RE DOWN TO 50". AIR TRAFFIC CONTROL THEN HEARD NOTHING AND WONDERED IF THE AIRCRAFT HAD LOST RADIO CONTACT AND SO THE RESCUE TENDER (FIRE ENGINE) WAS SENT TO TRAVEL THE LENGTH OF THE RUNWAY TO SEE IF THE HASTINGS WAS ON THE GROUND. THE SEARCH AND RESCUE SHACKLETON CAPTAINED

BY JOHNNY ELIAS WAS DISPATCHED TO THE END OF THE RUNWAY TO SHINE ITS LIGHTS LOOKING FOR THE AIRCRAFT, JOHNNY THOUGHT THAT IF HE WAS TO DO THIS HE MIGHT AS WELL HAVE GOT AIRBORNE SO WITHIN 10 MINUTES THEY WERE ON THE RUNWAY THRESHOLD. THE AIRCRAFT TOOK OFF AND STARTED FIRING FLARES FROM 3 MILES TO 2 MILES OUT FROM THE CRASH SCENE ON THE FIRST RUN AND THEN RUNNING IN FROM 2 MILES THEY SPOTTED WRECKAGE AND DINGHIES WHERE THE TWO AIR SEA RESCUE LAUNCHES WERE DISPATCHED TO THE SCENE. DON'S AIRCRAFT TOOK TO THE AIR THE NEXT MORNING LOOKING FOR WRECKAGE AND SAW A MAIN WHEEL AFLOAT, THE LAUNCHES LATER COLLECTED THESE. DON ALSO RECALLS THAT HE TOOK GEOFF ATHERTON BACK TO KATUNAYAKE IN HIS SHACKLETON AS GEOFF REFUSED POINT BLANK TO FLY BACK IN A HASTINGS!

THE MORALE IN THE DINGHIES WAS VERY GOOD, THERE WAS PLENTY OF SHOUTING AND SINGING, THE USUAL 'CHESTNUTS' OF 'WHY ARE WE WAITING', 'SHOW ME THE WAY TO GO HOME' ETC. WERE ALL BEING SUNG, THE FLARES WERE GETTING EVER CLOSER AND THAT WE SOMEHOW KNEW THAT THE CHANCES OF RESCUE WERE EXTREMELY HIGH, SOME WAS SUGGESTED WHAT WOULD HAPPEN IF ONE OF THE FLARES ENTERED THE DINGHY, HOW HE DIDN'T GET FED TO THE SHARKS IS ANYONE'S GUESS! IT WAS APPARENT AFTER SOME WHILE THAT THE SHACKLETON HAD FOUND US AS THE FLARES WERE FALLING IN AN ARC SOME DISTANCE FROM THE DINGHIES AND THIS WAS TO GUIDE THE TWO RESCUE LAUNCHES TO THE CRASH SITE.

WE COULD SEE SOME DISTANCE AWAY BRIGHT LIGHTS, THESE WERE A MIXTURE OF THE GAN AIRFIELD LIGHTS AND WE EVENTUALLY SPOTTED SEARCH LIGHTS SEEMINGLY LIKE A VERY LONG WAY AWAY, THESE WERE ONLY VISIBLE AS WERE THE AIRFIELD LIGHTS WHEN WE WERE APPROACHING THE CREST OF A WAVE. AT THIS POINT IN TIME WE DID NOT KNOW WHERE WE HAD DITCHED, WE KNEW WE WERE TO THE EAST OF GAN AIRFIELD AND WOULD ESTIMATE AS BEING BETWEEN ONE AND TWO MILES OUT WHAT I DIDN'T KNOW UNTIL APRIL 2001 WAS THAT THIS AREA IS TREACHEROUS IN THAT IT IS KNOWN AS THE GAN CHANNEL AND SEPARATES TWO ISLANDS WILINGILI TO THE EAST AND GAN ISLAND TO THE WEST THIS STRETCH OF WATER IS WHERE THE CALMER LAGOON OF THE ADDU ATOLL MEETS THE INDIAN OCEAN WITH THE TIDAL WATERS RUNNING VERY FAST AS RECALLED BY BRIAN BARKER , AT ABOUT EIGHT KNOTS.

BRIAN WAS ON PINNACE 1374 THE SMALLER OF THE TWO RESCUE LAUNCHES, I CANNOT RECALL SEEING THIS BOAT BUT BRIAN RECALLS PICKING UP WING COMMANDER GEOFF ATHERTON AND ONE OTHER (THE FLIGHT ENGINEER?) PLUS, ANOTHER DINGHY LOAD WHO WE ASSUME TO BE THE OTHER CREW MEMBERS, WE THINK THIS PINNACE ARRIVED BACK TO THE GAN JETTY AFTER THE LARGE LAUNCH PICKED UP THE PASSENGERS AND I AM INFORMED BY STEW THAT THE AQM WAS WITH THE PASSENGERS. THERE WAS MUCH REJOICING WHEN THE LARGER LAUNCH WAS APPROACHING US, SHOUTING BY ALL, THE WAVING OF ARMS ALL HELPED TO KEEP THE MORALE HIGH. THIS LAUNCH LOOKED HUGE IN COMPARISON TO OUR DINGHIES AND AS IT GOT EVER NEARER THE SWELL LOOKED EVEN WORSE AS THERE WAS A BACKWASH BETWEEN THE GROUP OF DINGHIES AND THE LAUNCH. SCRAMBLING NETS WERE ATTACHED TO THE SIDE OF THE LAUNCH AND IT WAS WITH GREAT DIFFICULTY TO HOLD ON TO THE ROPE AND THEN PUT ONES FEET ON THE ROPE, IF YOU'VE EVER





CLIMBED A LADDER WITH SOFT SOLED SHOES ON YOU CAN APPRECIATE OUR PLIGHT, RAGING SEAS, HUGE SWELL COVERED IN FUEL AND OIL BUT I WAS IN GOOD HANDS AS ONE OF THE MARINE CRAFT GUYS LITERALLY GRABBED THE BACK OF MY MAE WEST AND HAULED ME UP ON DECK, WHERE DAVID RECALLS BEING PULLED ABOARD BY HIS HAIR! I WAS IMMEDIATELY TAKEN BELOW DECK AND GIVEN A BLANKET AND TOWEL AND A MUG OF TEA WHICH I DRANK AND IMMEDIATELY BROUGHT BACK UP AGAIN WITH A CONCOCTION OF OTHER FLUIDS IN MY MOUTH. I STILL REMEMBER THOSE MATTRESSES WITH A TICKING STRIPE COVER AND FEELING VERY MUCH THE WORSE FOR WEAR, PERHAPS IT WAS PART EMOTION THAT BROUGHT THIS ON, I HAD NEVER SUFFERED FROM TRAVEL SICKNESS BEFORE OR SINCE, THAT WAS AN EXCEPTION. STEW RECALLS THE HULL OF THE LAUNCH SCRAPING THE CORAL, THIS MUST HAVE BEEN SOMEWHERE NEAR THE REEF AREA LATER AS OUR IMMEDIATE RESCUE WAS FROM DEEP WATER. IT MUST BE MENTIONED HERE THAT A HEARTFELT THANK YOU MUST GO TO THE OFFICER COMMANDING THE MARINE CRAFT SECTION FLIGHT LIEUTENANT BERNIE SAUNDERS, HIS COXSWAIN DICKIE DENMAN FOR THE BRAVERY SHOWN THAT NIGHT AND THE CREWS OF THOSE TWO MOTOR LAUNCHES WHO SET SAIL IN THE WORST POSSIBLE WEATHER CONDITIONS PREVAILING AT THAT TIME AND IN CURRENTS SO STRONG THAT UNDER NORMAL CONDITIONS THEY WOULD NOT VENTURE OUT THROUGH THE REEF AREA EXCEPTING IN DIRE EMERGENCIES, I UNDERSTAND THAT A COMMENDATION WAS AWARDED TO BERNIE SAUNDERS THAT NIGHT AND AGAIN, JUST LIKE GEOFF AHERTON'S AWARD, RICHLIY DESERVED.

IT IS UNDERSTOOD BY VARIOUS PARTIES THAT WE WERE IN THE DINGHIES FOR 1 1/2 HOURS, I HAVE ALWAYS MAINTAINED THAT TO BE CORRECT, OTHERS THINK LONGER, CERTAINLY THE PINNACE ARRIVED AFTER THE LARGE LAUNCH AND THAT IT IS THOUGHT THE CREW AND THOSE OTHER TWO ADRIPT ARRIVED ABOUT AN HOUR LATER. ROGER STEVENS RECALLS HE GAVE ASSISTANCE AT THE JETTY BY LIGHTING UP THE AREA WITH THE FIRE ENGINE LIGHTS AND RECALLS THE FIRST PERSON HE HAD HELPED ASHORE WAS A CORPORAL BILL GRUNDY WHO HE HAD PREVIOUSLY SERVED WITH AT RAF BALLYKELLY, IT IS ALSO INTERESTING TO NOTE THAT ANOTHER SURVIVOR ROGER HELPED ASHORE WAS A SAILOR WHOSE COMMENTS WERE "THIS IS

THE FIRST TIME I'VE FLOWN WITH THE RAF AND THEY TRIED TO DROWN ME, SOMETHING THAT THE NAVY NEVER DID!"

JOHN BAWDEN WHO WORKED IN GAN AIR TRAFFIC RECALLS THAT WE WERE TAKEN TO THE STATION SICK QUARTERS AND APART FROM ONE OR TWO THAT HAD INGESTED FUEL AND OIL THAT NO OTHER SERIOUS INJURIES WERE SUSTAINED. JOHN TRAVELLED BACK TO LYNEHAM ON 'THE WHITE-KNUCKLE BRITANNIA RIDE' THE NEXT DAY AT KARACHI, I REALLY DO NOT RECALL COMING OFF THE LAUNCH AND HOW I GOT TO SICK QUARTERS (WITHOUT ANY SHOES ON), BUT I DO RECALL BEING MEDICALLY EXAMINED, OTHERS SAY THEY WEREN'T AND BEING PASSED FIT TO FLY TO THE UK THE NEXT DAY. I IMAGINE THAT I WAS GIVEN FRESH KD (KHAKI DRILL) CLOTHING THAT NIGHT AT GAN BUT AGAIN I CAN'T REMEMBER, I DO REMEMBER NOT BEING ABLE TO SLEEP. IT WAS IN STATION SICK QUARTERS THAT THE CREW WERE BROUGHT IN AND THERE WAS MUCH ANIMOSITY FROM THE PASSENGERS TOWARDS THE PILOT, IN THE FORM OF VERBAL ABUSE AND FINGER WAGGING, I REALLY CANNOT REMEMBER THIS HAPPENING BUT I CAN ACCEPT WHY IT DID OCCUR.

I AM ALSO INFORMED THAT WITH WHAT FEW RUPEES WE HAD LEFT BETWEEN US THAT WE CLUBBED TOGETHER AND BOUGHT THE SHACKLETON RESCUE CREW A BOTTLE OF WHISKEY TO SHARE AMONG HIS CREW AND AS A THANK YOU., AGAIN WITHOUT THEIR ASSISTANCE WHO KNOWS WHAT THE OUTCOME WOULD HAVE BEEN.

THE FOLLOWING MORNING WEDNESDAY 2ND MARCH 1960 I RECALL QUEUING FOR SOME EMERGENCY PAY AS ALL MY LEAVE MONEY WAS IN MY CAMERA BAG, £35-0-0 PAID IN 10/= NOTES AT RAF KATUNAYAKE, A KING'S RANSOM IN THOSE DAYS (ABOUT £700-800 POUNDS TODAY), THE REASON WE WERE ALL PAID IN BROWN 10/= NOTES WAS THAT PAY ACCOUNTS HAD RUN OUT OF WHITE FIVERS AND BLUE POUND NOTES! ALL OF THAT MONEY AND MY PERSONAL POSSESSIONS WERE LOST IN THAT ACCIDENT, THE ONLY THING THAT I WAS ABLE TO SALVAGE WAS MY OMEGA SEAMASTER WATCH WHICH WAS ON MY WRIST. WHEN I ASKED THE MARINE CRAFT BOYS WHAT EFFECTS WERE FOUND, THEY SAID NOTHING APART FROM THE WHEELS OF THE HASTINGS, I AM SURE IT WAS THEY THAT TOLD ME THAT THE AIRCRAFT HAD SUNK TO A DEPTH OF OVER 1000 FATHOMS WHILST DAVID BLOOMFIELD WAS TOLD THIS DEPTH BY A MEMBER OF THE SHACKLETON CREW, IT DOESN'T REALLY MATTER WHAT DEPTH IT ENDED UP IN WE LOST EVERYTHING. ALL FOUR PASSENGERS SAY THEY LOST EVERYTHING INCLUDING LEAVE PAY AND STEW TUCKERS DEEP SEA BOX WAS ON BOARD THE HASTINGS GIVING A NEW MEANING TO THE TERM DEEP SEA BOX!

I FEEL REMARKABLY LUCKY THAT THE AIRCRAFT STAYED AFLOAT AND DIDN'T BREAK UP ON IMPACT AND THAT THE INJURIES SUSTAINED WERE OF A MINOR NATURE TO ALL. I AM ALSO FORTUNATE THAT WE DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS ABOUT TO UNFOLD AND THAT THE PILOT DIDN'T KNOW WHAT WAS ABOUT TO HAPPEN TO HIS AIRCRAFT, IF EITHER OF THE ABOVE WAS KNOWN THEN I AM SURE THAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES WOULD HAVE BEEN COMPLETELY DIFFERENT. AS AN ENGINE MECHANIC I HAD NO PARTICULAR LOVE AFFAIR FOR A HASTINGS AIRCRAFT, THEY WERE REASONABLY EASY TO SERVICE AND QUITE RELIABLE AS PISTON ENGINED AIRCRAFT BUT TOOK SOME TIME TO 'TURN AROUND'. HAVING SAID THAT THE DESIGN TEAM OF A HANDLEY PAGE HASTINGS DESIGNED PERHAPS THE BEST AND MOST DURABLE NON-FLYING BOAT AIRCRAFT THE ROYAL AIR FORCE TOOK DELIVERY OF AS ANOTHER HASTINGS CRASHED

IN THE MEDITERRANEAN OFF CASTEL BENITO AIRFIELD AND ENDED UP FLOATING FOR SOME TIME FOR ALL ON BOARD TO MAKE THEIR ESCAPE.



CREDIT MUST GO TO ALL THOSE THAT TOOK PART IN THE RESCUE, THEY WERE ALL HEROES, ON THE NIGHT THEY DID THEIR DUTY THAT THEY WERE TRAINED TO DO IN APPALLING WEATHER CONDITIONS AND NOT KNOWING WHETHER THEY WERE LOOKING FOR SURVIVORS OR BODIES OR EVEN NOTHING IF THE AIRCRAFT HAD SUNK WITHOUT TRACE, AND IT IS TO THESE PEOPLE THAT I SAY A MIGHTY BIG THANK YOU!

THE HISTORY OF TG579 READS THUS:

CONTRACTOR HANDLEY PAGE LTD, CRICKLEWOOD, CONTRACT NUMBER 4186, ENGINES INSTALLED 4 BRISTOL HERCULES 101 AIR COOLED RADIAL ENGINES.

TYPE HASTINGS C1 RAF NUMBER TG579

12/04/1949 CONTRACT COMPLETED

13/04/1949 TO 241 OPERATIONAL CONVERSION UNIT (OCU)

08/10/1949 TO LYNEHAM

18/10/1951 HANDLEY PAGE FOR MODIFICATIONS UNTIL 01/11/1951 AND RETURNED TO LYNEHAM ON THAT DAY

05/02/1953 TRANSFERRED TO RAF TRANSPORT COMMAND AIR SUPPORT FLIGHT (ASF)

02/03(?)1955 TO 29 MAINTENANCE UNIT

08/03/1956 TO 242 OCU

18/08/1956 TO ROS/60 MU

23/08/1956 EX ROS

03/06/1957 20 MU

06/12/1957 FREE LOAN FOR ONE MONTH

07/01/1958 20 MU

20/01/1958 TRANSFERRED TO 48 SQUADRON FEAF (CHANGI)

01/03/1960 FLYING ACCIDENT CATEGORY 5

08/03/1960 STRUCK OFF CHARGE

T6579 FINALLY HAD HERCULES 216 ENGINES ADDED SOMETIME IN ITS LIFE A.M. FORM  
78 DOES NOT RECORD THE DATE.

THE OFFICIAL ACCIDENT REPORT AS PROVIDED BY THE AIR HISTORIC BRANCH AT RAF  
BENTLEY PRIORY WAS HAND WRITTEN AND THIS HAS BEEN DECIPHERED BY  
SQUADRON LEADER NEIL JONES AND WARRANT OFFICER (THEN CORPORAL AT GAN)  
HARRY HEYWOOD, THE OFFICIAL BOARD OF INQUIRY WAS HELD AT HQ FEAF FAIRY  
POINT CHANGI, SINGAPORE, DATE UNKNOWN BUT HELD BEFORE MAY 1960.



IT IS WITH MANY THANKS TO ALL WHO HAVE PAINSTAKINGLY SHOWN AN INTEREST  
FOR MY SEARCH FOR THE TRUTH, YOU HAVE PROVIDED, IN MANY CASES, THE MISSING  
PARTS OF THE JIGSAW.

SINCE THE NIGHT OF THIS ACCIDENT I'VE ALWAYS WANTED TO KNOW WHY OUR  
LIVES WERE IN SUCH DANGER, I ALWAYS HAD A SNEAKING SUSPICION THAT  
SOMETHING WAS AMISS AND I COULDN'T GET TO THE BOTTOM OF IT, I (AND DAVID  
BLOOMFIELD TOO) HAD STROVE TO ASK QUESTIONS TO THE VARIOUS AUTHORITIES  
WITHIN THE THEN AIR MINISTRY AND LATER MINISTRY OF DEFENCE AND NOTHING  
WAS FORTHCOMING. I BASICALLY KEPT THIS 'LITTLE EPISODE' TO MYSELF AND ONLY



MY WIFE AND CLOSEST FRIENDS KNEW THE 'BARE BONES' OF THAT NIGHT, I KEPT THESE THOUGHTS TO MYSELF FOR OVER 40 YEARS, HAVING MANY FLASHBACKS AND SLEEPLESS NIGHTS, SWEATS AND NERVOUS TENSION. (I NOW KNOW THAT I AM NOT THE ONLY ONE!) I HAD NO AMBITION OF FURTHERING MY CAREER IN THE WAY OF PROMOTION TO THE NON-COMMISSIONED RANKING SYSTEM I STAYED A JUNIOR TECHNICIAN ENGINE FITTER UNTIL MY DISCHARGE. MY DIARIES FROM 1962 TO 1969 SHOW MY INTENSE HATRED FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AND RECORD ON NUMEROUS OCCASIONS REQUESTS ON GENERAL APPLICATION FORMS TO OBTAIN A DISCHARGE, BUT THE ONLY WAY OUT WAS BY PURCHASING MY CONTRACT OF EMPLOYMENT BACK FROM THE AIR MINISTRY AND ON EACH OCCASION AMOUNTED TO £200 WHICH I COULD NOT AFFORD, SO I 'RODE OUT' MY TWELVE YEARS BEGRUDGINGLY. I ENJOYED MY WORK AT 'THE SHARP END' ENORMOUSLY, THE COMRADESHIP OF THE LOWER RANKS APPEALED TO ME MORE THAN THE HIGHER RANKS, APART FROM SOME EXCEPTIONS THERE WAS ALWAYS AN AIR OF ALOOFNESS PREVALENT, HOWEVER I MET THIS LESS WHEN IN FIGHTER COMMAND.

MY QUEST WAS ANSWERED IN MARCH 2001, ALMOST EXACTLY 41 YEARS ON, TO GET TO THE TRUTH, I FIRSTLY BOUGHT MYSELF A COMPUTER IN JANUARY 2001 AND SURPRISINGLY IT DID NOT TAKE ME LONG TO GET USED TO IT. I 'SURFED THE NET' DAY AND NIGHT FOR ADDRESSES AND EYE WITNESSES AND ALL OF THIS WAS READILY AVAILABLE, I PLACED TWO SEARCHES ON CHANNEL 4'S 'SERVICE PALS' PAGES IN JANUARY AND MARCH FOR EYE WITNESSES AND WAS WELL PLEASED WITH THE RESPONSE AND EVEN PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T INVOLVED KNEW SOMEONE THAT WAS! THE INFORMATION I ASKED FROM OFFICIAL SOURCES WAS SLOW IN COMING AND IN SOME INSTANCES NON-EXISTENT, THE RECORDS OFFICE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE AT RAF INNSWORTH WERE APOLOGETIC REGARDING THE LACK OF INFORMATION BUT DID PROVIDE ME WITH MY SERVICE RECORD AND THIS INFORMATION WAS SCANT TO SAY THE LEAST, I THEREFORE WENT BACK TO THE MoD IN WHITEHALL FOR FURTHER INFORMATION AND ALSO FOR A COPY OF MY MEDICAL RECORDS. I AGAIN HAD A REPLY FROM THE PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AGENCY (ON BEHALF OF THE RAF) AT INNSWORTH AND THEIR CHIEF SECRETARY INFORMS ME THAT ALL AIRMENS DETAILED RECORD OF SERVICE IS DESTROYED AFTER 6 YEARS OF END OF ENGAGEMENT (IN MY CASE 14/07/75) AND THAT BOARD OF INQUIRY REPORTS ARE DESTROYED AFTER 20 YEARS AFTER THE INQUIRY WAS HELD (IN THIS CASE SOMETIME IN 1980). CERTAIN CONFIDENTIAL MILITARY DOCUMENTS ARE RELEASED TO THE PUBLIC RECORDS OFFICE AT KEW AFTER 30 YEARS (THIS IS GENERALLY KNOWN AS THE 30 YEAR RULE), HARRY HEYWOOD'S COUSIN DOREEN DID SOME RESEARCH HERE AND AGAIN THE INFORMATION WAS VERY SCANT. SO, TO SUMMARISE IF ANYONE TRIES TO GET TO THE TRUTH ON ANY GOVERNMENT CONFIDENTIAL MATTER VIA 'OPEN GOVERNMENT' POLICY THERE ARE MANY OBSTACLES PUT IN YOUR WAY AND JUST WHEN YOU THINK YOU ARE ABOUT TO CLEAR THE FINAL HURDLE, YOU FIND THAT MOST OF THAT INFORMATION HAS GONE MISSING OR IS NONE EXISTENT. CURRENTLY THE DEPARTMENT OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE THE RIGHT HONOURABLE GEOFFREY HOON MP HAS HAD A LETTER FROM ME ON THIS VERY SUBJECT AND I AM AWAITING HIS REPLY! I SUPPOSE THAT WAITING 30 YEARS, MEANS THAT EVERYONE'S MEMORY RECEDES WITH TIME, I CAN ASSURE YOU IT DOESN'T, IF YOU ARE DETERMINED THEN THE 'TRUTH IS OUT THERE' GO AND GET IT. I NOW HAVE OVER 200 DOCUMENTS RELATING TO THIS ACCIDENT AS AT 30/06/2001 BEFORE 12/01/2001 I HAD NONE, I WAS MERELY A PASSENGER ON A

TRANSPORT AIRCRAFT OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE THAT CRASHED INTO THE SEA FOR REASONS NOT KNOWN.

I HAVE SINCE FOUND THREE OTHER PASSENGERS FROM THAT AIRCRAFT ACCIDENT VIA A PLEA BY THE DAILY MAIL 'MISSING AND FOUND' COLUMN AND THEIR STORIES ARE ALSO VERY INTERESTING AND THAT THERE IS SOME BITTERNESS RELATING TO THIS ACCIDENT FROM THESE GUYS. THE AUTHORITIES FOUND THAT THIS COULD BE A RATHER EMBARRASSING INCIDENT TO THE SQUEAKY-CLEAN IMAGE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE, GET RID OF THESE GUYS, TELL THEM NOTHING AND THEY WILL FORGET ALL ABOUT IT! THEY DIDN'T BARGAIN FOR MYSELF DID THEY? TO NOT COMPENSATE US THAT NIGHT FOR THE LOSS OF OUR PAY (AN ENTITLEMENT), TO ANY RECOMPENSE FOR THE LOSS OF THEIR PERSONAL POSSESSIONS (NO ONE TOLD ME THAT I NEEDED TO BE INSURED FOR SUCH AN ACCIDENT AND WAS WILLING TO CARRY MY PERSONAL POSSESSIONS AT NO CHARGE). KD DRESS WAS WORN THAT NIGHT BY ALL ON BOARD AND 'WHITES' BY THE SAILORS NOW IF WE WERE GOING TO HAVE TO SWIM THE LAST TWO MILES SHOULD NOT SWIMMING TRUNKS BE THE DRESS OF THE DAY? WHY WERE ILL FITTING UNIFORMS ISSUED AT NICOSIA, AND WHY WERE THE SURVIVORS PUT UP IN TENTS IN FREEZING CONDITIONS, WHY WERE WE ALL WEARING TOWELS AROUND OUR NECKS (BECAUSE THE RAF DID NOT SUPPLY FRONT AND BACK COLLAR STUDS) AND WHEN A SAILOR AS ONE OF THE SURVIVORS SPORTING A BEARD IN RAF UNIFORM WITH NO HAT WAS ASKED BY A 'REDCAP' ARMY POLICEMAN AT SWINDON STATION 'AND WHOSE F\*\*\*\*\*G ARMY ARE YOU IN?' (AS RECALLED BY S.A.C. BRIAN WILMER A PASSENGER WITH US ON THE BRITANNIA), THE WHOLE EPISODE BEGGARS BELIEF, OUR QUICK EXIT THROUGH CUSTOMS AND IN DAVID BLOOMFIELD'S CASE WHEN HE ARRIVED AT RAF WADDINGTON GUARDROOM TO REPORT TO HIS NEW UNIT WAS CONFRONTED BY A SENIOR N.C.O. AS TO WHY HE WAS WEARING CIVILIAN CLOTHING AND NOT UNIFORM, AND LATER HAD TO BUY HIS FULL UNIFORM FOR £35 FOR SOMETHING THAT HAPPENED WHICH WAS NOT HIS FAULT! THIS IS THE SQUEAKY-CLEAN IMAGE OF THE ROYAL AIR FORCE.

THERE ARE MANY QUESTIONS STILL TO BE ANSWERED, THE 'NITTY GRITTY' QUESTION WHY DID IT HAPPEN HAS BEEN ANSWERED AND WE KNOW THAT NEGLIGENCE BY PILOT ERROR WAS THE CAUSE AND AS YET STILL TO BE ADDRESSED.

MY INTENTIONS TO FLY AGAIN AFTER I LEFT THE SERVICE OF THE R..A.F. HAS NEVER BEEN FULFILLED, I DO NOT HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO TAKE TO THE AIR AGAIN, TWICE BITTEN IS ENOUGH BECAUSE WITHIN 24 HOURS OF HASTINGS TG579 CRASHING INTO THE SEA AT GAN WE TOOK THE 'WHITE KNUCKLE RIDE' ON THE 2ND MARCH 1960 AT KARACHI VIA A BRITANNIA XL638 'SIRIUS', WE LANDED AT KARACHI, REFUELED, TOOK OFF WHEN WE HAD ANOTHER EMERGENCY IN AS MUCH THAT A NOSE WHEEL ACTUATOR FAILED TO OPERATE RESULTING IN 'A NOSE WHEEL RED', AT THE TIME OF THIS INCIDENT NO PASSENGERS WERE INFORMED OF THE PROBLEM. I WAS SAT BY A WINDOW AND COULD SEE WHAT I THOUGHT WAS SMOKE COMING FROM NUMBER THREE ENGINE, I STOOD UP IN PANIC AND CALLED THE CABIN STAFF OVER (A SERGEANT) WHEN ALMOST IMMEDIATELY A MEMBER OF THE CREW (CAPTAIN?) CAME OVER THE TANNON SYSTEM TO SAY THAT WHAT WE WERE SEEING WAS FUEL BEING JETTISONED AND WHAT LOOKED LIKE SMOKE WAS IN FACT ATOMISED FUEL. TERROR WENT THROUGH MY BODY FOR ONE HOUR AND TEN MINUTES WHILST WE CIRCLED DUMPING FUEL AND AIR TRAFFIC CHECKING THE UNDERCARRIAGE NOSE WHEEL WAS DOWN, I CANNOT BEGIN TO EXPLAIN THE FEAR THAT I AND OTHER SURVIVORS

ENCOUNTERED, THIS SPREAD TO OTHER PASSENGERS NOT ASSOCIATED WITH THE HASTINGS INCIDENT. TWO OTHERS ON THE BRITANNIA WERE JOHN BAWDEN AND BRIAN WILMER WHO HAVE MADE CONTACT AND RECALL THE WHITE FACES AND KNUCKLES OF THOSE SURVIVORS AND HOW THE EMERGENCY FIRE CREWS AND AMBULANCES LINED THE RUNWAY AND CHASED AFTER US WHEN WE TOUCHED DOWN SAFELY! I SWEAR THAT IF I HAD BEEN GIVEN A PARACHUTE AT THAT TIME I WOULD HAVE TAKEN THIS EASIER ROUTE OF ESCAPE.....



## ..... 57 Years On.....

BY DAVID BLOOMFIELD

WHILE PREPARING THE IMAGES FOR THIS PRESENTATION, I HAVE RELIVED THAT NIGHT OF HORROR, AS I HAVE DONE A THOUSAND TIMES DURING THE LONG DARK NIGHTS OF FITFUL SLEEP - NIGHTMARES THAT WILL NOT GO AWAY.

DURING THE EARLY YEARS, MY WIFE COULD DEAL WITH THE NIGHT TRAUMAS, BUT DUE TO MY VIOLENT ACTIONS, THE TIME CAME WHEN IT WAS NO LONGER SAFE FOR HER TO SHARE THE SAME BED. I NOW SLEEP ON MY OWN IN A BED WITH COT SIDES - A SAD SITUATION.

I HAVE RECEIVED HELP FROM A LONG LIST OF 'EXPERTS' IN P.T.S.D. WITH LITTLE OR NO SOLUTIONS OFFERED OR FOUND. MY ONE SAVIOUR HAS BEEN THE LOVE AND UNDERSTANDING OF MY DARLING WIFE WHO HAS ALSO SUFFERED SO MUCH IN HER SUPPORT ROLE.

THERE ARE BUT A FEW OF MY FELLOW SURVIVORS FROM THAT CRASH STILL WITH US. THE YEARS HAVE PASSED AND, YES, WE HAVE SURVIVED, LIVED A LONG LIFE, BUT AT WHAT COST?



## CERTIFICATE OF QUALIFICATION

*Corporal David Bloomfield R.A.F.*

### CITATION

ON 1ST MARCH 1960 THE ABOVE NAMED WAS ABOARD A ROYAL AIR FORCE HANDLEY PAGE 'HASTINGS' OF 48 SQUADRON WHEN THE AIRCRAFT CRASHED INTO THE SEA NEAR TO GAN IN THE MALDIVE ISLANDS.

ON ESCAPING THE SINKING AIRCRAFT WEARING A MAE WEST LIFE PRESERVER, HE EVENTUALLY CLIMBED ABOARD A SURVIVAL DINGHY AND WAS LATER RESCUED BY A ROYAL AIR FORCE AIR SEA RESCUE LAUNCH.

THE CIRCUMSTANCES OUTLINED ABOVE QUALIFIES THE SAID DAVID BLOOMFIELD AS A MEMBER OF THE GOLDFISH CLUB IN THAT HIS LIFE WAS SAVED DUE TO THE PRESENCE AND USE OF THE ON BOARD SAFETY EQUIPMENT.

*Jim Julian* CHAIRMAN

*Richard Shepherd* SECRETARY