

BULLETIN ISSUE NO. 15 – SEPTEMBER 2024



Lieutenant Colonel John Dane Player

Welcome

Ladies & Gents,

Welcome to the September edition of the *HistoryFare Bulletin*.

Personally, September has been a really busy month especially with the 80th Anniversary of Arnhem and Operation MARKET GARDEN and being requested to talks about the British Airborne & the US Troop Carrier Groups at Saltby and Folkingham.

The second part of the exhibition at Melton Carnegie Museum has now gone on display and for me, one of the best things to see on display is the 'Men of Arnhem' guest book.

On the 27th August 1944 the paratroopers of the 4th Brigade who escaped back across the Rhine under Operations PEGASUS I & II and Operation BERLIN were treated to a dinner and evening of entertainment by the Melton Mowbray Town Estate in the Corn Exchange. All those who attended the event signed the Men of Arnhem guest book.

As always, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank you for your continued support, and I look forward to seeing you at a HistoryFare event soon.

Brian

Next Monthly Meeting



Our next monthly meeting will be on **Thursday, 3rd October 2024** at the Melton Mowbray Royal Air Forces Association Tornado Club, Asfordby Road, Melton Mowbray, LE13 0HR at 20:00Hrs.

Malcolm Baxter will be joining us as our guest speaker and will be speaking about Belton and Harrowby Camps, Grantham 1914-1930:

Based on over 30 years of research this talk tells the story of the two camps from the beginning of the WW1

when Belton Camp was first used as the training camp of the newly formed 11th Division through to the two camps becoming the Machine Gun Training Centre.

At the end of the war and the closure of Belton Camp, Harrowby Camp became a Ministry of Pensions Hospital.

Finally, the talk will examine what evidence, if any, remains locally of the two camps.

Admission Cost £3 - Seats are to be reserved via the following link:

<https://historyfare.co.uk/events/belton-and-harrowby-camps-in-the-1st-world-war/>

or via email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com

Raffle



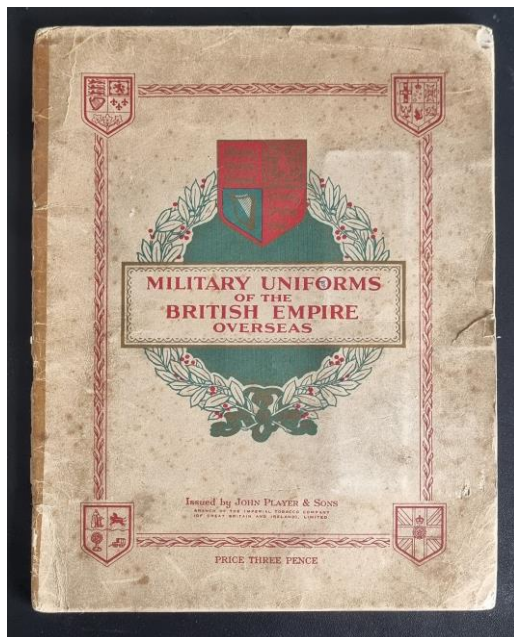
Many thanks to those of you who have supported the monthly raffles by donating prizes for use the draws, they have all been gratefully appreciated.

If you would like to donate prizes to future raffles, biscuits, chocolates, wine, beer etc are all acceptable proving they are in date! Books and artwork etc will also be accepted.

Lieutenant-Colonel John Dane Player

One of the first items that I have that sparked my interest in military history is an old 'smoked stained' album of cigarette cards given to me by my Uncle.

The album which features Military Uniforms of the British Empire Overseas contains 50 full colour cigarette cards featuring military units and their uniforms from the following countries: South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, Australia & New Zealand, Canada, India & Burma, Nigeria, Gold Coast, King's African Rifles, K.A.R. Somaliland Camel Corps, Northern Rhodesia Regiment, Trans-Jordan Frontier Force, British Guiana Militia, British Honduras Defence Force. and Singapore Volunteer Corps.



It was issued in 1938 by John Player and Sons and is not really worth a lot of money, but is a sentimental item for me as my Uncle used to tell me about the uniforms of Southern Rhodesia as this was where he served with he RAF during World War Two.

But who was John Dane Player?

Lt.Col.John Dane Player, was born in Nottinghamshire in 1903, the grandson of the founder of the John Player and Sons cigarette company.

John Player who founded the cigarette company began his career in tobacco by purchasing a shop on Beastmarket Hill Nottingham, selling seeds and fertiliser.

After initially selling these products to farmers and agricultural workers he became interested in tobacco as a commodity, he bought loose tobacco and sold it as a side-line as 'screws' to farmers. However, the sale of tobacco was proving more lucrative than the sale of seeds and fertiliser.

By 1871, Player was registered as a Tobacconist, employing one man and three boys. By 1877, he was so successful with these products that he bought a small tobacco factory, previously owned by the tobacconist William Wright at number 45, Broadmarsh Nottingham.

Now as a tobacco manufacturer, Player registered the first trademark of the company; the image of Nottingham Castle. The Registered Trademark was his guarantee to the consumers that the products were of high quality. He planned to expand the business further and develop a range of products that were easily recognised by the consumer, encouraging brand loyalty. Player's original tobacconist's shop continued to do good trade even after Player moved on to tobacco manufacturing.

This idea for marketing his products proved successful and by 1881 there were 80 people under the employ of John Player and this figure grew as demand increased. Player purchased land in Radford so that another three factory blocks could be built. The first block of the Castle Factory (alternatively known as No. 1 Factory) was opened in 1884 on Radford Boulevard, while the other two blocks were hired by lace manufacturers until Player's company grew enough to require the extra space.

At this time No. 1 was one of the largest factories in the world, with one room 300 feet long by 60 feet wide, the machinery was driven by a 300-horse power engine. The remaining two factory blocks were not used by Player's until the first branded cigarette was manufactured in 1889; Player's Gold Leaf Navy Cut. The demand for these cigarettes was so high that the workforce had to be increased to approximately 500 employees.

On 9th December 1884, John Player died; just after the completion of the Castle Factory on Radford Boulevard. For nine years a group of his close friends ran the business until his two sons, John Dane (1864 – 1949) and William Goodacre (1866 – 1959), were ready to take over in 1893. Two years later, John Player & Sons was made a private limited company and John Dane and William Goodacre became managing directors. William Goodacre Player was the father of Lieutenant Colonel John Dane Player.

John Dane Player Junior, or 'Donny' as he was known, was educated at Harrow and joined the family business with his father William and Uncle John Dane (senior). He retired in 1933 due to health reasons and then went to South Africa.

Donny returned to England a few years later and settled at Friars Rest in Wartnaby where he began farming. He was also a keen sportsman, loved the outdoor life and hunted regularly with the Quorn, Belvoir and Cottesmore hunts becoming one of the best known characters in the Leicestershire hunting circles.

Quite often he would put on dinner parties for the hunting community at his home at Friar's Well in Wartnaby. In December 1936, he was seriously hurt in a fall at Adams Gorse between Knossington and Braunstone and was rushed to the Melton Mowbray War Memorial Hospital. In December 1937, he broke a collar bone whilst riding with the Belvoir Hunt.

At some point in the mid-late 30's he joined the Army in serving with the Territorials and in 1937, he appeared in the Melton Police Court charged with "Ignoring the Halt Sign". The newspaper article published in the Melton Mowbray Times on 21st May 1937 listed him as a Captain.

Later the same year, he was granted a divorce from his wife Mrs Leila Player whom he married in 1928. Three days after their marriage was dissolved, she married Lord Manton in the Caxton Hall registry office in London.

IGNORED THE "HALT" SIGN
 Captain John D. Player, of Wartnaby, was fined £1 at Melton Police Court on Tuesday for failing to conform to a traffic sign at Melton Mowbray on May 3rd.
 P.c. Smith said that defendant drove his car past the "Halt" sign at the junction of Dalby Road and Leicester Road without stopping.
 Chairman (Major A. E. Burnaby): You would not have him up for speeding?
 P.c. Smith: We could not do that, because we have not an accurate check of the speed.

Donny is remembered for his activities on summer camp when he took along his two Great Danes, Lion & Simba. He is also remembered for driving his Rolls Royce around camp with two tin baths tied to the rear bumper each with an Officer sitting in

When the Second World War broke out, Donny was in command of C Squadron of the Nottinghamshire Yeomanry, Royal Armoured Corps. In September 1940, whilst serving in Palestine and Tobruk he became second-in-command of the Regiment under Lt.Col. Flash Kellett.

He fought in the North African desert and whilst operating behind enemy lines in Libya while on reconnaissance with the Long Range Desert Group he was captured and taken prisoner on Christmas Day 1942. His captor was Major Hans von Luck, the Commander of the 3rd Panzer Reconnaissance Battalion of the 21st Panzer Division.

He was reported as 'Missing believed Prisoner of War' on Casualty List 1049 (Officers).

Missing believed Prisoner of War
 Royal Armoured Corps
 PLAYER Maj. J.D. Notts. Yeo. 29981 Date not reported



Fritz Bayerlein

After interrogation by Rommel's chief of staff, Fritz Bayerlein, he was handed over to the Italians from whom he escaped by getting his Italian guard drunk!

Another story is that apparently, Donny was going to be exchanged for 600k cigarettes but when he found out he was only worth 600k he refused as he said he was worth over a million cigarettes!

With the help of local Arabs, he was able to make his way back to British lines and rejoined the Regiment on 20th January 1943 having walked over 150 miles.

Casualty List 1053 (Officers) provided an update on all casualties reported to the War Office Casualty Section for the 48 Hours ended 9am 8th February 1943.

Previously reported Missing believed Prisoner of War
Date not reported, now Not Missing
 Royal Armoured Corps
 PLAYER Maj. J.D. Notts. Yeo. 29981 1049

When Col. Kellett left to be second-in-command of the 8th Armoured Brigade at the beginning of March 1943, Donny took command of the Regiment.

On the evening of 24th April 1943 while reconnoitring a route through the Tunisian town of Enfidaville his jeep came under mortar fire. The occupants of the jeep, Intelligence Officer Capt. Myles Hildyard, driver Trooper John Matkins and Col. Donny Player immediately ran to a ditch.

When the shelling stopped Donny complained about loss of feeling in his legs, although no sign of a wound could be found.

He was put back in the jeep and driven to the Regimental Aid Post where it was found that a shell splinter had entered his shoulder and travelled down through his body.

He subsequently became delirious and died during the early morning of Easter Sunday, 25th April 1943. He was forty years of age.

He now lies at rest in Enfidaville War Cemetery, Tunisia.



Donnys grave, taken on Easter Sunday, just after his burial at Enfidaville, Tunisia.

Following his death, he left an estate of £206,808 2s 6d he bequeathed £3,000 to the Belvoir Hunt, for the benefit of the agricultural population of the district and to encourage them to keep their hedges and gates in good repair, believing that “the hedges of this part of the country are a great asset to its beauty.”

Leaving his residence Friar’s Well for use as a residence by the incumbent of Wartnaby, the testator urges that the churchyard be kept in good condition so that it will always be recognised as one of the best kept in the countryside.

After several personal bequests and gifts to employees, he left the residue to the diocese of Leicester for the benefit of the living in the village of Wartnaby. “No individual is to be appointed who does not approve of hunting, shooting, football and other many sports which develop the best qualities of mankind”.



In St Michael’s Church at Wartnaby there is a slate tablet that reads “The restoration of this Church was made in 1948-1950 by the generosity of Lieut. Colonel J.D.Player of Friars Well, Wartnaby, who was killed in action in the Middle East in 1943”

There is a similar plaque in St Leonard’s Church at Holwell that reads “The restoration of this church was made in 1948 by the generosity of Lieut. Colonel J.D.Player of Friars Well, Wartnaby, who was Killed in Action in the Middle East in 1943.” “

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Twitter: HistoryFare @FareBrian

Website: <https://historyfare.co.uk/>

Email: meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com



HistoryFare Events

September

29th – Guided Tour – Airborne & Commando General Tour

October

3rd – Monthly talk – Machine Gun Corps and Harrowby Camp

5th – Guided Tour - Melton Mowbray History Trail

26th - Guided Tour – Airborne & Commando General Tour

November

7th – Monthly talk - High Society: Flying Foxhunters and Airborne Aristocrats

9th - Guided Tour - Melton Mowbray History Trail

30th - Guided Tour – Painting the Town Red

December

5th – Monthly talk – Melton Mowbray in WW2

To keep up to date with forthcoming HistoryFare events and to book a place, visit my website <https://historyfare.co.uk/events/>

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Acting Sub Lieutenant Arthur Derek Maher

A few days ago, I visited the Lee-On-Solent war memorial to pay my respects to Melton lad Arthur Derek Maher.

Arthur Derek Maher was born in 1922 in the George Hotel in Melton Mowbray and was the son of the hotel manager Mr Alexander Charles Maher and his wife Doris Margeurita Maher.



He joined the Royal Navy as an Accountant in January 1939 and on 20th June 1940 he was promoted to Acting Sub Lieutenant as he had been selected for commission and training as aircrew in the role of Observer.

On the 24th January 1942 he was lost without trace flying over the Mediterranean just off the coast of Benghazi in Libya whilst on a transit flight from Benghazi to Malta.

At the time of his loss, he was an Acting Sub Lieutenant serving as an Observer with No 828 Squadron Fleet Air Arm based at Hal Far in Malta.

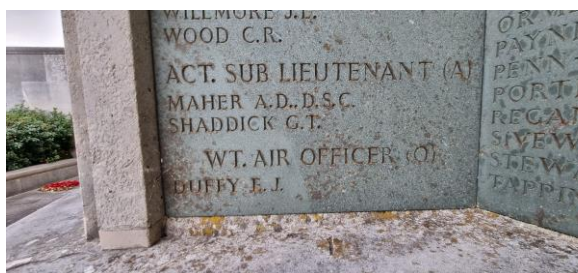
His aircraft was a Fairey Albacore, X8971 and his pilot was Lieutenant Vaughan Ninean Startin Davies.

Both crew members were awarded the Distinguished Service Cross whilst serving with No 815 Sqn for Operations in the Mediterranean and this was Gazetted on 28th April 1942.

His father, Alexander, attended Buckingham Palace to receive his sons DSC from King George VI.



Both airmen are commemorated on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission memorial for the Fleet Air Arm at Lee-On Solent.



The memorial commemorates 1,927 members of the Fleet Air Arm who have no known grave across all theatres of war.

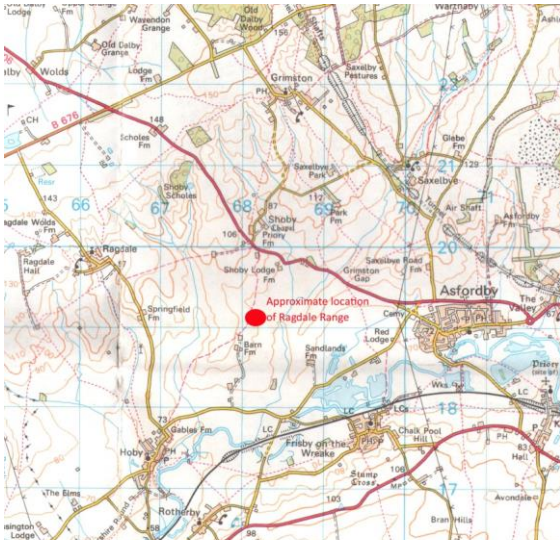
Lee-on-the-Solent in Hampshire was the principal base of the Fleet Air Arm, and as a result was chosen as the site for the memorial to almost 2,000 men of that service who died during the Second

World War and who have no known grave.

Ragdale Bombing Range and Bullseye Exercises

The target at Ragdale bombing range was roughly located at SK 681 192 (not confirmed as yet) and was a white triangle, described as solid, with a danger radius of 600 yds.

Originally a daylight range only, lighting was requested in December 1942 and it ended the war with night facilities. Originally it seems to have been controlled by RAF Langar but control passed to Bottesford on 23rd March 1945. It was derequisitioned in 1953.



Mr R Fulford states in a web forum (<http://100548.activeboard.com/t49794533/1662-heavy-conversion-unit-blyton/>) "My Dad's crew flew a Bullseye when they converted onto the Lanc III at No. 1668 HCU.

They flew out over the Wash and did an overflight of Rotterdam and a short leg along the Dutch coast before they returned to drop red T.I. markers and bombs at the Bombing range at Ragdale prior to returning to the Base at Bottesford, I believe they were the No. 1 aircraft for a number of others who flew the same route on the same exercise that night.

Their T/O was at 2145 and comprised some 13 legs of various durations between turning points in a Lancaster coded J9-G. The Pilot recorded 3:30 minutes instrument/cloud flying time during a Bullseye of 5:10 duration."

"Bullseye" was the term used to denote a night training exercise which encompassed navigating a long cross country route often of about 800-900 miles and of around 5 hours duration, encounters

with the searchlight defences and usually with night fighter defence forces who would press home simulated attacks. The Bullseye routes sometimes ventured out over the North Sea or the Channel and often right up to the Coast of France or Holland particularly after D-Day. Other times they were routed solely around England. They usually ended up with the dropping of bombs over a selected Bombing range before returning to Base.

Sadly, not all trips to the range were successful! In Roy Bonser's book Aviation in Leicestershire & Rutland, there is a reference under RAF Wymeswold to Wellington X LP406 of 28OTU diving into ground at Ragdale Bombing Range.

Chorley's Bomber Command Losses V7 (OTU's) lists the following entry dated 17/7/44 28 OTU Wellington Mk X LP406 - Training ATD Wymeswold 0052 to practise bombing over the nearby Ragdale ranges. At 0107 whilst over the range, the aircraft went into a dive from which it failed to recover. On hitting the ground there was a huge explosion. The two RCAF officers were taken to Brookwood Military Cemetery, Surrey whilst the others were claimed by next of kin. The three SNCO's were all Air Gunners

Fg Off J.E. Thompson
Sgt F.V. Davis

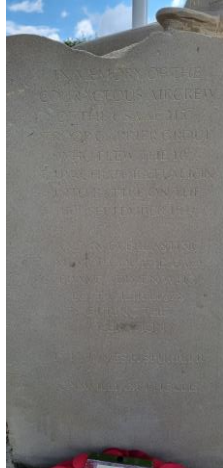
Fg Off J. Michalec RCAF
Sgt W.A. Lewin

Fg Off F.P.O. Weary RCAF
Sgt W.L. O'Connor

New Memorial Unveiled

At the annual sunset ceremony of the 10th Battalion Parachute Regiment at Burrough on Saturday 7th September 2024 a new memorial was unveiled to the 315th Troop Carrier Group.

The memorial takes the form of a stone block with an inscription on one face and a carving of a 315th TCG C47 Skytrain.



The inscription reads “In memory of the courageous aircrew of the USAAF 315th Troop Carrier Group who flew the 10th Parachute Battalion into Battle on the 18th September 1944 and in everlasting memory of the two brave airmen who lost their lives during the operation.

1st Lt James H Spurrier

Cpl William T Hollis”



Thank you for your support!

Till next time!

Please feel free to share this bulletin with whoever you think may be interested.

For any enquiries or to submit articles, please email Brian at meltonhistoryfare@gmail.com