

Letter from the Desert

News from Alan & Grace

April and May 2005



Late in the evening of the 10th May, Grace had an emergency Caesarean operation from which was delivered our son, John Paul Alan, who weighed 1.8kg / 4lbs at 2247hrs. after 32 weeks gestation.

We are all fine now - at least things are improving. Grace and John came very close to dying as a result of the sudden break-up of the placenta. It was VERY serious. John is now back to his birthweight (1.8kg) and is out of danger and off the life-support machine. Grace is still unwell after a delayed problem with a blood clot having to be discharged - which left her very unwell. But she is getting better now - although taking a lot of medication. She has been stopped from supplying milk to John while she is on the medication, but the hospital have plenty of her milk in the freezer, so no problem.

The speed of events has overtaken the speed at which we can produce our newsletter during the last few weeks. We'd actually written 6 pages of the newsletter several weeks ago - before we had a hard drive failure and lost some of our data. As it was a 300GB drive, you can imagine what sort of problem it was! - particularly as it was only used to store data (not software). Thankfully, we'd backed-up a lot of our more important data, but we still lost some. The drive was a Maxtor external and was only 4 months old - so beware! It could happen to you too.

Because of the speed of events and that we're trying to cover a lot of material, this newsletter may be a little 'bitty', for which we apologise. We're trying to piece together parts of what we'd written earlier with current events.

Continuing our opening theme from the March newsletter, we are delighted to be able to report that our dear friend, Eunice, has got through the triple heart by-pass operation successfully and is now making a slow recovery at home in Reading. We thank God and pray that she will soon be back to her normal self. Grace and I were waiting to see the Ob/Gyn consultant on 10 April, when our mobile 'phone rang and we were able to have a chat with Eunice directly. It was great to hear her. Situations like that make one appreciate modern communications technology

Grace's sister, Nadia, is also here now and is a great help to us all. Nadia has taken over Grace's job as legal secretary in the office of a British lawyer and he is very pleased with her work. She's also a great help in running the home, now Grace isn't very well.

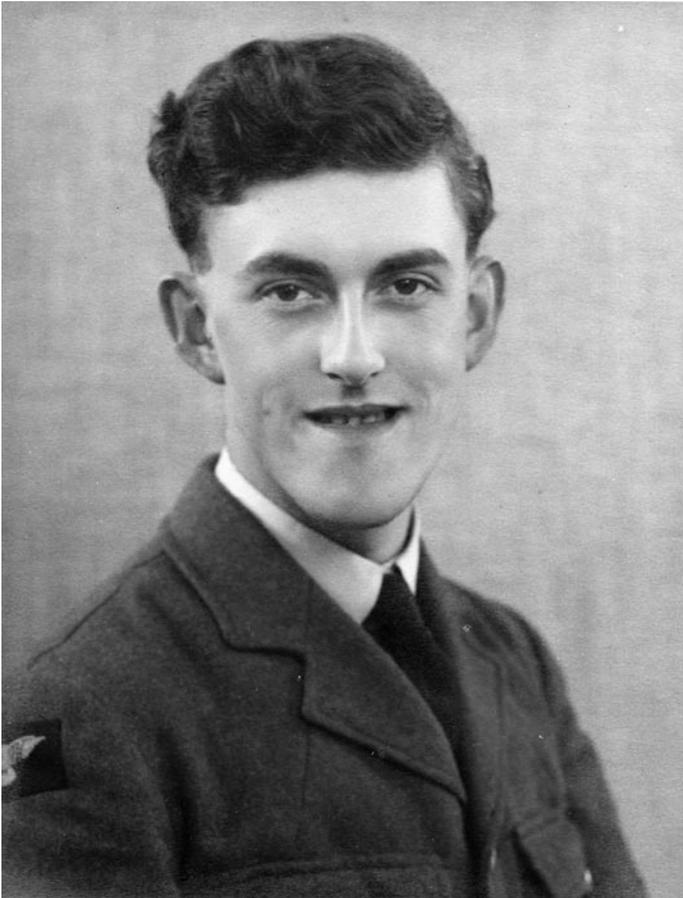
We hope to have John Paul Alan home fairly soon. He spent quite a long time in the Intensive Care Unit but has been moved to intermediate care during the last week or so. In both units he has had the best of care and we have been very impressed by the standard of treatment, care and technology at the hospital where he is staying.



John Paul Alan Navelgas Cook

Douglas John Cook

238(T) Squadron, RAF



As this is the April Newsletter, I particularly wanted to remember my late father, Douglas John Cook (above), as April 22 was his birthday. I thought it appropriate to write a little about his RAF service in this, the 60th anniversary year of the end of World War II. Some of you may be aware that I am seeking information about his war time service, when he served with 238(T) Squadron in India and Burma. He was awarded the Burma Star for his service in this theatre of war, which exposed him to some of the worst atrocities mankind has ever seen. Like many who saw active service, my father was never one to talk very much about his wartime experiences, probably because he would rather forget many of them. For those of you who knew my father, you may be interested to know a little more about his squadron during this period of WWII.

Finding out any information about the squadron's activities during this period has proved extremely difficult, as very little documentation appears to exist. I am grateful to a number of people who have contacted me to inform me about a book entitled



Coastal Support and Special Squadrons of the RAF by the late Rev. J.D.R. Rawlings, published by Jane's in 1982. I would particularly like to thank Mike Hooks of Aeroplane Magazine for sending me a copy of the relevant page from the aforementioned book, and for making mention of the squadron and my search for information in the *Information Exchange* pages of the July edition of *Aeroplane Monthly* magazine. If any readers of our newsletter can supply me with any more information, I'd be most grateful.

238(T) Squadron existed as a transport squadron during WWII for little more than a year. It was formed at RAF Merryfield on 23 November 1944, although it received no aircraft until January 1945 when it received Douglas Dakotas. Many of you will know that this aeroplane was my father's favourite aircraft and he had a painting of one hanging in our home for many years.

During the middle of February 1945, the squadron flew to India where it began operations, flying supplies into forward airfields and bringing out casualties. During the last two weeks of March,

the squadron flew 331 sorties, losing three aircraft, one due to enemy shell fire at Meiktela. In April, 659 sorties were flown, supplying the troops fighting around Mandalay. In May, the squadron concentrated on supplying Toungoo and evacuating casualties from Akyab and Ramree - also releasing prisoners of war and bringing them back to Comilla.

For the first week of June 1945, operations continued, but then the squadron began moving to South Australia, setting up base at Parafield in July 1945. It began transport schedules within Australia and then began a shuttle Momote-Leyte-Guam-Eniwetok in August, supporting the British Pacific Fleet and a high rate of flying was continued until the end of the war. The squadron then stayed in Australia until disbanding on 4 January 1946. My father returned to England aboard the Union Castle Liner "Athlone Castle."

Bases of 238(T) Squadron

Merryfield (UK)	23 November 1944 - February 1945
Raipur (India)	February 1945 - March 1945
Comilla (India)	March 1945 - July 1945
Parafield (Australia)	July 1945 - 4 January 1946

Commanding Officers

W/Cdr R.E. Bailey DSO DFC	December 1944 - January 1945
W/Cdr H. Burton	January 1945 - January 1946



The Burma Star



Dakota over Burma

by Geoff Lea

On the occasion of his 68th birthday (8 April), our friend Joseph McClusky left Doha to start his second retirement. Joe retired some years ago and lived in Spain, but became so bored he decided to return to work. This time, he's got more definite plans for keeping himself busy and happy and intends spending time with his adopted family in India and in his apartment in Thailand. We wish him well and hopes he manages to play on all the golf courses in Thailand. We know that several of our readers know Joseph very well, from his days in Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and Bogota, Columbia. He had a great send-off from Doha, being taken out several times for meals before we managed to pack him into the car going to the airport. We'll miss you Joseph - Good luck and happiness wherever you go. It was intended to publish some photographs of one of the many retirement parties that were thrown for Joseph before he left Doha, but we're rather behind times at present, so we'll try and get them ready for the next newsletter.

We were very appreciative to Nicholas and Patty, who gave us tickets to a wonderful evening out at the Sheraton on April Fools Day, where there was a most spectacular Traditional Arabic Costume fashion show. Stunning would be an understatement! Unfortunately, I never took a camera (I'm still kicking myself!) as we never expected the show to be anywhere near as good as it turned out to be. A few days after this marvellous spectacle, we went back to the Sheraton to see a performance of Tchaikovsky's 'Nutcracker'. This was the first time that we'd been to a ballet and the first time that Grace had been to a concert of classical music. We were both entranced and had a wonderful evening out. Surprisingly, there was no programme printed, and no report in the newspapers on the following day, so we have no idea of the names of the ballet company, orchestra or the stars of the show.

Alan's daughter, Fiona, recently changed jobs in her career in hotel management. She has been assigned manager of a holiday park in North Kent, where she volunteered to sort it out and return it to profitability - in 3 months. Some job! We wish her every success in this challenge.

Alan's son, Paul, has recently returned from South Africa where he represented the Royal Marines on their Rugby Tour, based in Cape Town. We're hoping that Paul will send us some photographs of his travels there.

Thanks to Chris and Mam Belt for the invitation to another wonderful event that we went to recently; the celebration of the Thai New Year at the Thai Embassy in Doha. As you can see from the photographs, we all had a great time watching the festivities and traditional Thai dancing.



Pouring water over the Buddha



Mam receiving her blessing from the Monk



Young Thai dancers



We welcome contributions to our newsletter from any of our readers. Please send them to us at: alan&grace@cooksonline.info

Remember our website is at URL: <http://www.cooksonline.info>



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We thank Paul for sending in these photographs, which we hope you will enjoy.



Top right: Paul during his endurance training.

Above and Right: Paul was Section Commander of this group during his training. I wouldn't want to be on the wrong side of these guys!



Below: Passing-Out Ceremony

Below Right: In his 'blues' with friend Matt..





Paul's wheels

