



SOMEWHERE IN ENGLAND: US veterans back at their wartime operations base

Pictures: Pat Timmons



BACK IN BRITAIN: Airport operations director Ron McConkie and Betty Hockey welcome veteran airman George Parker

Return to Hurn for US airmen

By Robin Thompkins

THEY spent barely a month there more than 50 years ago. But memories flooded back for veterans of the 397th US Air Force Bomb Group when they returned to their wartime haunts at Hurn.

The 20-strong group were young men when their B26 Martin Marauder bombers were based at RAF Hurn airfield - now Bournemouth International Airport - in August 1944.

By the end of that month the group had flown more than 21 bombing raids over occupied Europe. On August 16, the group completed its 100th bombing mission and in celebration the returning crews fired Very pistols from the cockpits - and set fire to surrounding fields!

"It wasn't me - that was

someone else," chuckled former pilot Richard Hurley, 79, as he recalled the incident. Then 23, he flew on a dozen raids from Hurn. "But I got down to Bournemouth beach quite a lot and the pub keepers were all very friendly," he recalled.

Leonard La Cagnin, 79, graduated from second lieutenant co-pilot to first lieutenant at the controls of his own plane while at Hurn. "I flew between 12 and 15 missions and one of them was the 100th mission. We were all firing flares and I was one of them," he admitted.

"The rest of the time here is a bit of blur now but I know we had wonderful help from the locals.

"They were friendly then and they are friendly now," said New Yorker Leonard, who retired to Georgia after a 31-year air force career.

George Parker, 77, founder of the 397th Bomb Group Association, which organised the trip to England, was with the group from its formation in January 1943.

Although one of the youngest pilots, his earlier experience made him flight commander and leader of the group's bombing formations.

"Every mission was different, you never knew what was going to happen," he said. "Of course I remember the 100th - I don't think the farmer was very happy about it!"

Hosted on their visit to Bournemouth by wartime concert party member Betty Hockey, the veterans were greeted at the airport by a parade of World War II military vehicles, before touring the Bournemouth Aviation Museum.

Cllr Jim Courtney, deputy Mayor of Bournemouth, unveiled a plaque commemorating the group's stay at Hurn.

The veterans also took to the skies in a vintage DC3 Dakota and their four-day stay in Bournemouth ended, as it did 56 years earlier, when they headed for Normandy.



IT WASN'T ME: Former pilot Richard Hurley, 79



THAT OLD GANG OF MINE: Nevin Price with a wartime picture of himself and his crew while based at Hurn (right)



THEY spent barely a month there more than 50 years ago. But memories flooded back for veterans of the 397th US Air Force Bomb Group when they returned to their wartime haunts at Hurn.

The 20-strong group were young men when their B26 Martin Marauder bombers were based at RAF Hurn airfield – now Bournemouth International Airport – in August 1944.

By the end of that month the group had flown more than 21 bombing raids over occupied Europe. On August 16, the group completed its 100th bombing mission and in celebration the returning crews fired Very pistols from the cockpits – and set fire to surrounding fields!

“It wasn’t me – that was

By Robin Thompkins

someone else,” chuckled former pilot Richard Hurley, 79, as he recalled the incident. Then 23, he flew on a dozen raids from Hurn. “But I got down to Bournemouth beach quite a lot and the pub keepers were all very friendly,” he recalled.

Leonard La Cagnin, 79, graduated from second lieutenant co-pilot to first lieutenant at the controls of his own plane while at Hurn. “I flew between 12 and 15 missions and one of them was the 100th mission. We were all firing flares and I was one of them,” he admitted.

“The rest of the time here is a bit of blur now but I know we had wonderful help from the locals.

“They were friendly then and they are friendly now,” said New Yorker Leonard, who retired to Georgia after a 31-year air force career.

George Parker, 77, founder of the 397th Bomb Group Association, which organised the trip to England, was with the group from its formation in January 1943.

Although one of the youngest pilots, his earlier experience made him flight commander and leader of the group’s bombing formations.

“Every mission was different, you never knew what was going to happen,” he said. “Of course I remember the 100th – I don’t think the farmer was very happy about it!”

Hosted on their visit to Bournemouth by wartime concert party member Betty Hockey, the veterans were greeted at the airport by a parade of World War II military vehicles, before touring the Bournemouth Aviation Museum.

Cllr Jim Courtney, deputy Mayor of Bournemouth, unveiled a plaque commemorating the group’s stay at Hurn.

The veterans also took to the skies in a vintage DC3 Dakota and their four-day stay in Bournemouth ended, as it did 56 years earlier, when they headed for Normandy.

American airmen return to wartime operations base

The Yanks are coming...back



● Nevin Price

THEY spent barely a month there and that was more than 50 years ago.

But memories came flooding back for veterans of the United States Air Force's 397th Bomb Group when they landed in Boumemouth for a nostalgic return to their wartime haunts.

Now in their late 70s and early 80s, the 20-strong group were young men when their B-26 Martin Marauder bombers were based at the then RAF Hum airfield – now Boumemouth International Airport – in August, 1944.

By the end of that month the group had flown more than 21 bombing raids over occupied Europe before crossing the Channel to set up camp in newly-liberated Normandy.

But the Yanks had ensured their brief sojourn at Hum was a memorable one.

On August 16, the 397th Group carried out its 100th bombing mission and in celebration the returning crews fired Very pistols from the cockpits of the Marauders – and set fire to surrounding fields!

"It wasn't me, that was someone else," chuckled former pilot Richard Hurley, 79, as he recalled the incident.

Then aged 23, he flew on a dozen raids from Hum, but also found time to enjoy the area and its hospitality.

He said: "It didn't rain all the time! I got down to Boumemouth beach quite a lot and the pub keepers were all very friendly."

Deane Myer, 78, making his first visit to England since returning to America after the war, also had a cast-iron alibi for the fire-raising incident – he was a member of the ground crew.

"I remember being here when the group made its 100th mission but I spent all the time on the ground," he said.

By Robin Thompkins

"It was a very busy time and it is hard to remember things." And he added: "This place has changed such a lot I don't recognise it."

Leonard La Cagnin, 79, graduated from 2nd Lieutenant co-pilot to 1st Lieutenant at the controls of his own plane while stationed at Hum.

"I flew between 12 and 15 missions and one of them was the 100th mission. We were all firing flares and I was one of them," he admitted.

"The rest of the time here is a bit of a blur now but I know we had wonderful help from the locals.

"They were friendly then and they are friendly now," said the native New Yorker who retired to Georgia after a 31-year air force career.

George Parker, 77, founder of the 397th Bomb Group Association, which organised the trip to England, was with the group from its formation in January 1943, having already trained as a Marauder pilot for a cancelled Pacific bombing mission.

Although one of the youngest pilots, his experience made him flight commander and leader of the group's bombing formations.

He said: "I can't remember a lot of the detail – we had other things to think about at that time – but it was typical of what we were doing. Every mission was different, you never knew what was going to happen."

"Of course I remember the 100th mission party when some of the guys fired flares and set the field on fire. I don't think the farmer was very happy about it!"

Hosted on their visit to Boumemouth by wartime concert party member Betty



● American airman who served in the United States Air Force's 397th Bomb Group return to Hum Pictures by Pat Timmons

Hockey, the veterans were greeted at the airport on Saturday by a parade of World War II military vehicles, before touring the Boumemouth Aviation Museum.

The American airmen were also reunited with Ron Roccias, a war orphan the squadron had adopted while based in Essex before moving to Hum.

After lunch as guest of Boumemouth International Airport in the terminal building, the veterans watched as deputy-mayor of Boumemouth Cllr Jim Courtney unveiled a

plaque commemorating the 397th US Bomb Group's stay at Hum.

Veterans also took to the skies in a vintage DC-3 Dakota for an aerial tour of the wartime airfield sites in the New Forest.

And their four-day stay in Boumemouth ended, as it did 56 years earlier, when they packed their bags and headed for Normandy.

● A cherished photograph of Nevin Price's wartime crew ready for action in 1944



THEY spent barely a month there and that was more than 50 years ago.

But memories came flooding back for veterans of the United States Air Force's 397th Bomb Group when they landed in Bournemouth for a nostalgic return to their wartime haunts.

Now in their late 70s and early 80s, the 20-strong group were young men when their B-26 Martin Marauder bombers were based at the then RAF Hurn airfield – now Bournemouth International Airport – in August, 1944.

By the end of that month the group had flown more than 21 bombing raids over occupied Europe before crossing the Channel to set up camp in newly-liberated Normandy.

But the Yanks had ensured their brief sojourn at Hurn was a memorable one.

On August 16, the 397th Group carried out its 100th bombing mission and in celebration the returning crews fired Very pistols from the cockpits of the Marauders – and set fire to surrounding fields!

"It wasn't me, that was someone else," chuckled former pilot Richard Hurley, 79, as he recalled the incident.

Then aged 23, he flew on a dozen raids from Hurn, but also found time to enjoy the area and its hospitality.

He said: "It didn't rain all the time! I got down to Bournemouth beach quite a lot and the pub keepers were all very friendly."

Deane Myer, 78, making his first visit to England since returning to America after the war, also had a cast-iron alibi for the fire-raising incident – he was a member of the ground crew.

"I remember being here when the group made its 100th mission but I spent all the time on the ground," he said.

By Robin Thompkins

"It was a very busy time and it is hard to remember things." And he added: "This place has changed such a lot I don't recognise it."

Leonard La Cagnin, 79, graduated from 2nd Lieutenant co-pilot to 1st Lieutenant at the controls of his own plane while stationed at Hurn.

"I flew between 12 and 15 missions and one of them was the 100th mission. We were all firing flares and I was one of them," he admitted.

"The rest of the time here is a bit of a blur now but I know we had wonderful help from the locals.

"They were friendly then and they are friendly now," said the native New Yorker who retired to Georgia after a 31-year air force career.

George Parker, 77, founder of the 397th Bomb Group Association, which organised the trip to England, was with the group from its formation in January 1943, having already trained as a Marauder pilot for a cancelled Pacific bombing mission.

Although one of the youngest pilots, his experience made him flight commander and leader of the group's bombing formations.

He said: "I can't remember a lot of the detail – we had other things to think about at that time – but it was typical of what we were doing. Every mission was different, you never knew what was going to happen.

"Of course I remember the 100th mission party when some of the guys fired flares and set the field on fire. I don't think the farmer was very happy about it!"

Hosted on their visit to Bournemouth by wartime concert party member Betty

Hockey, the veterans were greeted at the airport on Saturday by a parade of World War II military vehicles, before touring the Bournemouth Aviation Museum.

The American airmen were also reunited with Ron Roccias, a war orphan the squadron had adopted while based in Essex before moving to Hurn.

After lunch as guest of Bournemouth International Airport in the terminal building, the veterans watched as deputy-mayor of Bournemouth Cllr Jim Courtney unveiled a

plaque commemorating the 397th US Bomb Group's stay at Hurn.

Veterans also took to the skies in a vintage DC-3 Dakota for an aerial tour of the wartime airfield sites in the New Forest.

And their four-day stay in Bournemouth ended, as it did 56 years earlier, when they packed their bags and headed for Normandy.