



Nightjar

Summer 2014

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Chairman's Letter

It never ceases to surprise me how time flies and to find that we are now less than two months from the next Reunion, this year at the Maid's Head Hotel in Norwich on Saturday 4 October.

As you will see elsewhere in this edition of *Nightjar*, we have managed to arrange a visit to the Radar Museum at Neatishead for Sunday 5 October. The Museum is not usually open on Sundays, so we are grateful for the efforts of Shaun Broaders, who has managed to persuade the Museum to make an exception for us. It promises to be an extremely interesting visit, especially for those of us who spent many hours working with the air defence radars, either on routine tanker towline training or, occasionally, supporting the fighters intercepting Soviet bombers probing our defences. Happy days!

Earlier this year, a few of us gathered for lunch at the Hare Arms in Stow Bardolph. As on previous occasions, the intention had been to have lunch with Sir Michael Beetham, who is now sadly unable to come to our reunions either in Norwich or Derby. Unfortunately, Sir Michael was not well enough to join us on this occasion but a convivial meal was enjoyed by those attending.

Which bring me back to this year's Reunion. The numbers who have booked are slowly increasing and I believe that we have now reached the point where we can go ahead with it. But if you are even mildly inclined to come, please grasp the nettle and complete the booking paperwork and join us for the AGM and evening meal. If we are to keep the Association going, we need as many members as possible to attend – and their partners too, of course.

Alan Mawby

Annual Reunion 2014

See the back page for details of AGM and Dinner

Visit to Neatishead Air Defence Radar Museum on the Sunday at 11am
A special visit for our Association – not generally available to the public

Book now to avoid disappointment!

From the Editor:

My thanks to all the contributors to this *Nightjar*, especially Tony Cunnane who has given me access to all his stories. He has more to tell, which I hope to put in the next edition.

My thanks to all those who have paid their subscriptions this year - if you have a guilty conscience then I will be pleased to receive your cheque. It is still £10 per year.

There is still time to book for the 2014 Reunion

Booking forms are available on the 214 Sqn website 214squadron.org.uk or from the Treasurer.

The 214 Squadron website is up and running again thanks to the hard work of Carol and John Edwards and is well worth the visit, especially if you have not been there before. They are always looking for more content, and additions to information on Squadron personnel.

Dave Parker

Does anybody know the whereabouts of Dave Parker? His last *Nightjar* was returned as 'Moved Away' from Tibberton in Gloucestershire. Dave was a QFI and pilot on 214 back in the 70s and, if I remember correctly, he went on to fly the Victor K2 and instruct on 232 OCU. Please let me know if you have any information. Thanks.

John

Photographs of aircraft models made by Peter Walker

What aircraft is this?



No prizes for this one!

Handley Page Victor K2

Look on page 4 for the answer.

In Memoriam

FLIGHT LIEUTENANT EDWIN FREDERICK SMEETH 1923 – 2014

On 3rd March John Brown and Stewart Waring represented the Association at the funeral of Eddy Smeeth at the Church of St Michael and All Angels at Alberbury, Shropshire. The service was very well attended and an excellent account of Eddy's life was given by the Reverend Valerie Joan Tait.

Eddy's service went back to the Second World War when he flew Thunderbolts in the Far East, including suffering a forced landing in one on his birthday! He was a most professional aviator, with a dry and subtle sense of humour. He set an excellent example to the young co-pilots who flew with him on No 214 Squadron, including both John and Stewart, who served in this capacity at different times.

From Marham, Eddy was posted as Flight Commander to No 8 Air Experience Flight, where he remained until his retirement from the Royal Air Force in 1983. He then joined the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve (Training Branch) and continued to fly with the Air Experience Flight until 1988. Eddy was also very active in Church affairs and made a lot of friends in the local area. RIP Eddy!

Stoo Waring

The Chairman and I first encountered Eddy during the flying phase of our conversion to the Victor B1A of 232 OCU in 1971. Eddy was a QFI and gave the first brief, which was infamous for its detail and length – people were reputed to have taken sandwiches. Somebody once asked – as a joke – 'What was it like on Wapitis?'. It turned out that Eddy had, in fact, flown the Wapiti! - Ed

Mrs Rona Bayliss - Summer 2013 - Widow of Stan who passed away a few years ago.

W J (Wilf) Clough - A Corporal Armourer on 214 during 1944/45. I regret that I have no other details.

Sqn Ldr Mike Dane – AEO – 9 Mar 14 - I do not have full details of Mike's career but I have found that he was a Sgt Signaller on Whirlwinds at Manston in the early 60's when he joined the 'Goldfish Club' after his aircraft ditched. He had various tours in the SAR role at Manston, Valley and Cyprus and then in the Rescue Co-ordination Centre in Cyprus, and had his final tour in Operations at Episcopi. He was commissioned as an AEO and completed a tour on the Victor K1 on 214 Sqn as well as other Tanker Squadrons.

C J (Charles) Holmes. Bomb Aimer (2nd Nav on Fortresses) 1944 /45. Died 29th. June 2014 aged 90.

Sqn Ldr Cyril Penna DFM - Bomb Aimer - Stirlings. Died 7th July 2014 age 92. Author of the book, published in 1987 titled 'Escape and Evasion' based on his adventures after baling out of a Stirling in 1942, and on the run for many weeks until finally returning home via the Pyrenees, Spain, Gibraltar and then home by sea. Cyril was not a 214 Sqn Assn member but we knew of him and his story. The book is still available from Amazon.

The Over 90s Club

Some additions to the list in the previous *Nightjar*:

Cynthia & John Lyall: (Perth WA) - Both aged 90. John was an Air Gunner on Jeff Bray's Fortress Crew in 1944/45.

John Bates: Aged 93. Wireless Operator on the Fortress in 1944.

Angus Cameron RAAF: Aged 90. Wireless Operator on the Fortress in 1944/5 on Marc Stainer's crew.

Mrs Elsie Williams: Aged 98. Widow of WO Ron Williams.

Alan Deadman: Aged 93. Navigator on Stirlings on Bob Mackett's crew (with Bill Wilkinson).

Mrs Joyce Carr: Aged 91. Widow of WO Arthur Carr - a Flight Engineer on James Morrison's crew on the Fortress in 1944/45.

Mrs Winifred Seeley: Aged 93. MT Driver (Nee Tomlinson) 1944/45. Widow of F Sgt Seeley, Signals Section, RAF Oulton 1944/45.

Wg Cdr John Wynne: Aged 93. John has been awarded the Guernica Peace and Reconciliation Prize 2014. He was unable to travel to Guernica to receive the award on 26 April. His son Ben and daughter-in-law Jenny travelled to Spain to receive the reward on John's behalf. The prize has been awarded in recognition of John's work in bringing friendship and reconciliation between his village of Llanbedr in North Wales and Huchenfeld, a village near Pforzheim in Germany. A similar link exists between Coventry and Dresden. Most of you will be familiar of what happened to members of John's crew in March 1945 which is told in 'Hoffnung the Rocking Horse'. John has told me that, unlike the Nobel prize, there is no monetary award which would have helped with his Llanbedr/Huchenfeld Children's Friendship Fund, which helps to pay for children from each village to visit each other. John's wireless operator Tom Tate, and the only other crew member to survive the incident is now 97 and has visited Huchenfeld on 13 occasions over the years since 1992. Sadly he is no longer able to make this journey.

The Answer

Peter M Walker



It is a Vickers Warwick ASR Mk 1 of 280 Sqn. Coastal Command, RAF Langham, Norfolk in October 1944. It carried an Uffa Fox designed, fully equipped lifeboat under the belly of the aircraft. It was a little bigger than a Wellington and was in fact a slightly earlier design.

HISTORIAN'S REPORT

1. Amongst this quite varied, and I hope interesting, report there appears a number of family enquiries, a welcome trend which seems to be growing, and I do have to concede that some have originated via our website!
2. WREATHS. Our three Association wreaths should be laid at the National Arboretum, Stradishall, and Chedburgh in November.
3. Peter, our Secretary, has reported the passing of Squadron Leader Cyril Penna DFM, and you may recall that details of his remarkable evasion in November 1942 were mentioned in the last issue of 'Nightjar' relating to an enquiry on the career of his pilot F/Sgt F E Gatland DFM RNZAF.
4. Although not of No.214 Squadron, East Anglia and the old No.3 Group has lost one of its true stalwarts, namely Jack Richards, Chairman of the No.75 (NZ) Squadron Association which remains active with strong UK and NZ family connections. If the name sounds familiar, you may have seen it as a vivid red 'Jack Richards and Son' on the side of many of the bright yellow articulated units of the extensive family fleet. Jack served as ground crew looking after the Stirlings and Lancasters of No 75 (NZ) Sqn at both Newmarket and Mepal, and after the war started out with one lorry delivering animal feed - the rest is history. A friendly, generous and genuine Norfolk man with whom I was privileged to work on three projects; namely to place 75 Sqn memorials at Newmarket (adjacent to the July Course gate), Mepal, (Sutton- adjacent to the old airfield site) and Feltwell (churchyard). One valued piece of personal memorabilia is a 'Corgi' limited-edition of one of Jack's vehicles: but with a difference. Jack autographed it for me! He also possessed a wonderful collection of classic commercial vehicles, one of which was used to carry him from the church through the streets of Fakenham. 'Ake Kia Kiha'.
5. 'Stirling House' continues as a busy training establishment, but still offers a welcome to any visitors who arrive on site. Some are 'ex-Stradishall', some family members, others, are those keen on some aspect of aviation history and their messages left in the visitors' book can often make interesting reading. A recent environmental addition is a long willow hedge planted to run along behind the memorial which should in time, nicely screen the top section of the solar-park. I recently enjoyed meeting a 94 year-old local man who, in his younger days, actually worked as a carpenter helping to build the Officers' Mess (Stirling House) in 1938 and, apart from recalling 'Halfords' rather than 'Heyfords', his memory was spot on, recalling in detail several incidents of the time. He was most interested to see that two photographs (aerial and ground) of the period featured his own house on the western boundary. This later became 'The Royal (Bradley) Oak' and was well frequented by the RAF.
6. For a long time in our research I knew the name of Ted Youseman only as one of the first pilots to have flown Stirlings of 214 Sqn from Chedburgh. It was not until I saw his name on the magnificent No.617 'Dambuster' Squadron memorial at Woodhall Spa that I realised that Chedburgh was only part of his story, but I did not progress it. However, since being contacted recently by Keith Norton who is trying to piece together the career of his cousin - Ted Youseman, we have uncovered some very interesting data. Plt Off Ted Youseman arrived at Chedburgh on or about 1 October 1942, just as the station opened, but due to poor ground conditions 214 Sqn did not operate until 5 October. Ted flew his first 'Op' on 16 October - a Gardening trip, and the usual procedure for a new pilot. But Ted did not arrive from a Stirling or even a bomber unit, he came from No 1511 Blind Approach Training (BAT) Flight at Upwood.

7. Although I was initially aware of Ted Youseman as one of the first No 214 pilots to fly from Chedburgh and one who survived his tour, it was only when I saw his name on the Dambusters' memorial at Woodhall Spa that I realised that he had continued operational flying with No 617 Squadron and had lost his life in November 1943, not so long after leaving No 214 Squadron. However, since being contacted by Keith Norton, who is trying to clarify details of his late cousin Ted Youseman's flying career, some unanswered facts have emerged. After arriving on 30 September 1942 as a Pilot Officer, Ted went straight onto operations leaving in May 1943 as a Flight Lieutenant with a DFC and having completed 19 operations, mostly with an experienced crew (some decorated during early Stradishall Stirling operations). Squadron records show Ted posted to 214 from No 1511 BAT Flight at Upwood where this latest training facility was being perfected using Blenheims and Oxfords - certainly no evidence yet of any 'Stirling Flying'. From Chedburgh he joined No.12 OTU at Edgehill, possibly as an instructor, but soon moved to No.617 along with some of his already dispersed crew, whom Ted, had presumably 'rounded up'. No 617 Squadron, then desperately short of good crews, especially after the two disastrous raids on the Dortmund-Ems canal, were actively recruiting and possibly Ted simply could not resist such an opportunity. By late 1943 617 were bringing in the newly developed Stabilising Automatic Bomb Sight (SABS) using it first on the Antheor Viaduct near Cannes in November, but after two attempts and good bombing the viaduct held fast. Ted probably flew on both these raids which necessitated flying to North Africa (Blida) to refuel and also to load up with 'goodies'. Sadly whilst returning from the second raid, Ted's Lancaster was lost without trace and it is presumed that he was shot down off the coast of Portugal. The story is virtually complete apart from knowing where Ted learned his 'heavy' flying, or how he actually arrived on 617 (where he is recorded as always 'talking flying') . He was obviously a very determined pilot, liked by all who would have probably gone on to even greater things with 617. But what is certain is that he cut his 'operational teeth' with No 214 Squadron. Hopefully I may be able to fill in the gaps next time.

8. I recently met with Andrew and Gavin Lindsay, two brothers who have been researching the career of their relative, Sgt Thomas Webley James (air-gunner) lost from Stradishall on 11 May 1941 when Wellington R1462 was brought down near Hamburg. Plt Off Toplis and his crew were all killed. On exhausting all of the available records, the boys, together with Bill Livesey, the nephew of another crew member, decided to try and contact any local people who had either witnessed, or who remembered the crash. Their efforts were not only successful, but when, after visiting the Hamburg War Cemetery - an extremely emotional experience in itself, they finally visited the small rural community they were treated with great kindness sympathy and understanding and learned much of the events of that sad day, not least the great respect shown by the people when removing bodies of the crew. From photographs taken at the time it seems that the aircraft, flying low and probably damaged, ploughed through two lines of tall trees bordering a small road, and with the wings tom off, the fuselage continued on into a field disintegrating as it went. There was no fire (fuel still in wing tanks), and bombs were scattered around, but sadly, there was nothing that could be done for the crew. With their work virtually complete, both the boys and Bill hope to produce their versions of the story, telling not only of the operational side which is well documented, but more importantly the human effect of just one crash on folk from both sides, and such efforts must be seen as a valuable source of historical material for future generations. On a much lighter note, I met Andrew and Gavin in a pub in Fowlmere, a village which is remembered for its wartime fighter base and, as it was the weekend of 'Flying Legends' at nearby Duxford, the hostelry was full of a wide variety of friendly and noisy aviation enthusiasts including a contingent from Germany. Although not quite sure of the significance of about twenty pints of 'Guinness' lined up on the adjoining bar, it was obvious that a good time was being had by all, so what with the flying plus the 'World Cup Final' to come next evening, no doubt our European friends returned home well satisfied. So when reflecting on the tragic events of the past which Andrew, Gavin and myself had been discussing, perhaps that is what it is all about.

9. In the Spring of 2013, I wrote of work in hand to get 'Just Jane' the Lancaster at East Kirkby airworthy once again, and how good it would be to finally see TWO Lancasters airborne. Although I understand that progress is being made to achieve that aim, 'Jane' currently continues with her regular 'ground runs'. The great news is that, all being well, we shall be seeing TWO Lancasters airborne later this year, as the one flying in Canada is due to arrive in UK at the end of August. This remarkable 'one off', long in the planning, has been the hope of the devotees for many years and dates of appearances in her busy schedule are now being carefully checked. For those of you fortunate enough to see this unique historic pairing, perhaps you might tell us (briefly) of your impressions of the day.

10. For my sins, I have offered to give a talk to my local Aviation Society on the history of none other than No 214 (FMS) Squadron! No problem regarding the amount of material available, but certainly one in selecting in trying to tell the whole story in a single evening. In addition I shall need to be careful on my facts for as we meet in the 'RAF' Room of 'Stirling House' once occupied by No.214 Squadron in traumatic times past, who knows who might be listening? As it will be the December meeting, I anticipate and hope that the only 'spirits' around will be of the liquid variety.

Jock M Whitehouse

GUILD OF AVIATION ARTISTS

As usual, for its July Annual Exhibition, over four hundred works by members of the Guild filled the walls of the Mall Galleries, offering the visitor a stunning cross-section of all aspects of aviation art. Although many old favourites were there - very few tire of Spitfires, Hurricanes and Lancasters, there was a noticeable presence of scenes from the First World War, a subject which will no doubt feature prominently during the next four years with art being the ideal historical vehicle to help appreciate, in full colour and with accuracy, the environment, and the many types of aircraft used by both sides and especially their remarkable colour schemes!

There was an interesting selection of pictures of Sunderlands and their earlier relatives, the between-wars flying boats, some depicting the luxury travel of those days in those magnificent aircraft. Apart from the Lancasters, only a smattering of Stirlings or Halifaxes from the 'heavy' brigade, but some excellent vivid action studies of the Mosquito were on show.

The jet-age was well covered, some lovely Hunters, Phantoms, and Tornados but although no Valiants, numerous studies of the Vulcan and Victor. 'Mission Impossible' was a very atmospheric one of 'Vulcan '607' leaving the target area, 'Satisfied Customer' was a distant Tornado leaving a Victor K2, but the titling for the scene of a Victor (foreground) and a Vulcan (rear) was 'What's he mean, we're off?' put the viewer right in the cockpit of the receiver!

To really appreciate the content of these exhibitions one needs to spend far more time than is usually available, as most pictures are an inter-dependence of aircraft and landscape and to succeed in both is a very big ask. After a day well spent in a very hot London, it was a welcome relief to return to a cooler and more peaceful Suffolk there to mull over an impressive exhibition. Back to the drawing board? Just maybe.

Jock M Whitehouse

214 Squadron

Stories from Tony Cunnane

I arrived on 214 Squadron at RAF Marham in April 1971 having completed the conversion training course without incident. We, my constituted crew, then had to learn about operating the aircraft as an airborne tanker. Our first two all-solo operational tanking sorties were uneventful. The third sortie, on 16 April was far from uneventful. It was planned to be a routine refuelling sortie on Towline 6, the southernmost of the six dedicated refuelling areas over the North Sea between northern Scotland and Suffolk. We had been briefed to expect a series of Lightnings coming up in pairs from 29 and 111 Squadrons at Wattisham. I was looking forward to that having very recently been a temporary operations officer there whilst waiting for my Victor course. Normally such sorties were conducted under radar control from Eastern Radar, the joint RAF and civilian air traffic control radar unit located a few miles south of East Dereham in Norfolk. However on our first solo sortie we were tasked to operate with Number 1 Air Control Centre, call sign Romeo, a mobile tactical radar facility operating from vehicles in a farmer's field somewhere in deepest East Anglia.

The weather was perfect with unlimited visibility. From our vantage point at 35,000 feet my co-pilot and I could see all of East Anglia as far north as the Humber estuary and to the south the whole of London and stretches of the south coast. The first part of the sortie was uneventful and we quickly off-loaded 18,000 lbs of fuel to the ever-thirsty F3 Lightnings. In accordance with SOP (Standard Operating Procedures) when fighters were in contact with our refuelling hoses, the auto-pilot was engaged but my hands were resting lightly on the control column ready to disconnect the auto-pilot instantly should something untoward occur. And before long something untoward did happen!

As we were turning left at the southernmost end of the towline, with two Lightnings in contact with our under-wing hoses and taking on fuel, I suddenly heard a very urgent radio call from one of two other Lightnings that were holding a couple of hundred yards astern awaiting their turn to refuel:

"Tanker, emergency break up, emergency break, up and left, NOW!!!"

Knowing that my refuelling operator, Ken Hulse, would have immediately switched on the red lights at the rear of the refuelling pods, thereby ordering the two Lightnings in contact to make an emergency disconnect, I pushed all four throttles fully open, and pulled the aircraft into a climbing left hand turn. The auto-pilot instinctive cut-out switch under my right thumb automatically disconnected the auto-pilot as I took tight hold of the control column. A heavy Victor Mk 1 at 35,000 feet did not respond well to such a manoeuvre! It would roll quickly but the extra thrust from the engines, which had each been running at about 90% anyway, was barely noticeable. A second urgent radio call came.

"Tanker, pull up harder, keeping turning."

By this time the Victor was performing something akin to an aerobatic manoeuvre known as a wing-over. The airspeed started dropping rapidly - the last figure I saw on the instrument was 140 kts. I couldn't afford to pull back any further because the aircraft would certainly have stalled. Indeed, I had to 'unload' the wings by pushing forwards on the control column thereby reducing the 'g' force to less than 1g. The two refuelling hoses were probably flailing about quite dangerously but we couldn't even contemplate jettisoning them without knowing who was right behind us. Suddenly there was a mighty roar in our cockpit as four jet pipes passed close overhead, filling my forward windscreen, before disappearing off to my right. By that time the Victor was in a dive and the speed was increasing rapidly to a much more sensible figure. I levelled the wings and gently pulled out to straight and level flight. I had to be gentle: the maximum permitted loading at our all up weight was 2.3g which didn't give much scope for aerobatics.

"Was that a VC-10!" I called on the radio to no-one in particular. All I had seen were the four tail-mounted jet pipes. "No, it was an Aeroflot IL-62," replied the Lightning pilot who had given me the warning. The IL-62, like the VC-10, had four tail-mounted jet pipes so it was an understandable misidentification for me to make in the heat of the moment. Throughout those frantic few seconds no word was heard from the Controller at Romeo and there was no answer to any radio calls. My AEO, Neil Flowerdew, changed to a dedicated emergency frequency and filed an immediate air miss report over the radio with Eastern Radar. Apart from that my crew were uncharacteristically silent. I decided to jettison excess fuel and return to

base immediately - partly because I thought the aircraft might have been over-stressed but mainly because I and my crew were shocked by the incident. After landing, I telephoned the Lightning pilots at Wattisham from the Marham operations room to thank them for their good look out and to get their version of the story. They had, incidentally, all recognised my voice from the few weeks I had recently spent in Wattisham Ops.

It seems that the Romeo controllers, in their huts in the farmer's field in deepest East Anglia, had seen and heard nothing because they had decided to have a shift change while we were turning northbound at the southern end of the Towline, but they had not bothered to tell us. So much for radar control! The two Lightning pilots taking on fuel from me saw nothing of the incipient disaster because they were, quite properly, concentrating all their attention on keeping station on the refuelling hoses. One of the two Lightning pilots waiting their turn to refuel had saved the situation by keeping a good all-round look out to protect his own Leader and his tanker. He had seen the IL-62 in a climb coming towards the formation, had realised that there was imminent danger of collision, and had ordered the emergency break.

Two other Lightnings, about 20 miles away climbing out of Wattisham under the control of Eastern Radar using a different radio frequency, had seen the whole incident but were unable to do anything other than warn the Eastern Radar controller whose only contact with 1ACC was by landline telephone. One of those two Lightning pilots told me that the IL-62 had appeared to fly right through the middle of the formation from behind and he could not believe that there hadn't been a mid-air collision. He said my wing-over had looked most impressive and he had watched in amazement as the four Lightnings closest to me had scattered in all directions.

It turned out that although the accelerometer in the Victor's cockpit read 2.5g, according to the readings on the more sensitive fatigue meters in the bowels of the Victor the aircraft had not been overstressed - but it had come close.

It took nearly three months for the Air Miss final report to reach me. The Aeroflot captain, having just departed from Heathrow Airport on a scheduled service to Moscow with a full load of passengers, was many miles off his flight planned route. This had gone unnoticed by the civil air traffic controller - but that individual was struggling a bit because his assistant sitting alongside him had, according to the official report, passed him incorrect flight plan details for the Aeroflot flight anyway.

The Aeroflot captain gave written evidence in which he stated that he had not submitted an air miss report because he had not seen any Lightnings or the Victor. Remarkable really because the entire action had taken place directly in front of him and had he bothered look out of the front of his cockpit it would have been impossible not to see us! Perhaps he was having a late breakfast - or perhaps he was deliberately off course so that he, or someone else on board, could monitor our refuelling operations. The Soviets were sneaky like that.

214 Sqn - Sleeping over Nice

This anecdote tells of an incident in the early-1970s. I have not mentioned the exact date or the names of the crew members concerned and the story was left unwritten for many years for reasons that will become obvious. As Captain of the aircraft I was entirely responsible for what happened. I was prompted to write this story, and put it on my website, by media reports in 2012 of airline pilots' crew duty times and the dangers of both pilots falling asleep at the same in flight.

We, a non-constituted crew this time, were returning to base at RAF Marham after our third 5-hour trip in a 24-hour period. On each sortie we, and several other Victor tankers, flew under military radar control to a point over the Mediterranean south-east of Nice where we gave a final in-flight refuel to a variety of Lightning and Phantom fighters before casting them off to fly on, unescorted, to either Malta or Cyprus where they would protect British interests in one of those largely forgotten international emergencies that tended to crop up during the 70s. After bidding farewell to the fighters, we turned about and headed towards Nice where we had flight-planned to join the normal civilian airways system for the return to UK. I handed control to my co-pilot in the right hand seat and I took charge of the fuel system from him. This would allow me a short break from flying the aircraft before I took over to make the landing at base. I

calculated that fuel would be a bit tight, but we had done similar sorties twice before in the previous 18 hours, so no sweat. The flight had become very mundane and we were all exhausted. The only light in the cabin came from the dim lights on the flight instrument panels and a couple of small anglepoise lights in the rear cabin needed so the navigator and AEO could see what they were doing. I fell asleep, in the left hand pilot's seat, still clutching the fuel log.

I woke, with a guilty start, to find that the auto-pilot was still happily flying the aircraft while the rest of my crew, including the Crew Chief in the occasional 6th Seat facing to the rear, were fast asleep. I estimated that we could all have been asleep for about 10 minutes because the south coast of France was now very close, looking spectacular from 41,000 feet on a gin clear night. Suddenly, I remembered that a mandatory flight level change was needed as we approached the major airways complex at Nice! The insistent voice of the French Air Traffic Controller was asking for a radio check - and that was probably what had woken me. The AEO should have answered the call but didn't, so I called the ATC Controller, apologised for the delay in replying, and requested our flight-planned climb to 43,000 feet to join the airway. By this time the other five members of the crew were all wide awake - but silent.

That was not the end. One thing led to another, as so often happens. Radiation fog suddenly closed both Marham and our planned alternate airfield, Manston in Kent. Had the possibility of fog been mentioned at the pre-flight briefing? I couldn't remember. Perhaps the Met Man had got it wrong! Then I remembered that I had not had an updated weather forecast before leaving Marham for this third 5-hour sortie of the day. There had been a quick turn round, with barely an hour on the ground, between the second and third sorties but, after all, they were genuine operational sorties!

Now, with insufficient fuel remaining to make a stab at trying to land at Marham, we were given a Grade 1 mandatory diversion to RAF Waddington in Lincolnshire. We returned to Marham a couple of hours later when the fog there had lifted - the 4th sortie in well under 24 hours. Naturally, I didn't report to anyone that the entire makeshift crew had been asleep at a crucial phase of the flight - what good would that do, I asked myself. As far as I am aware, they never realised that we had all been asleep at the same time and we certainly never discussed the matter! There must, however, have been some guilty consciences - apart from mine. In those days there was no such thing as confidential occurrence reports and confessing to my crew's lapse of concentration would undoubtedly have resulted in comments on another sort of confidential report.

214 Sqn - St Elmo's Fire

We departed late one evening from Goose Bay, Labrador for a night flight across the North Atlantic back to our home base at RAF Marham in Norfolk. The Met Officer had warned us that we could expect extensive cumulonimbus cloud all the way up to 35,000 feet from take-off and for the first hour of our flight. Because of that we flight planned to climb to and maintain 43,000 feet and use the most northerly of the several approved routes across the Atlantic Ocean. At that height we would have stronger tail winds from the high level jet stream, and, therefore, a shorter transit time home.



At our cruising level I and my co-pilot occasionally saw the clouds beneath us lit up brightly by lightning flashes within them. Where we were, above all the cloud, we were in smooth, clear air. Our part of the aircraft cabin was in complete darkness, except for the instrument lights - no digital displays in those days. A full-length curtain shielded the rear crew members from us so that their lights, which they needed for doing their work, didn't affect our night vision. It was actually rather boring!

Suddenly I thought I could see through the windscreen faint signs of the Aurora Borealis (Northern Lights) away in the distance, due north of our position. I pointed with my left hand to draw my co-pilot's attention. As the tip of my left index finger, which was covered as it always was in flight by the standard issue white cape leather flying glove, touched the windscreen it, my finger, immediately lit up and glowed white. I withdrew it, startled, but the white substance remained attached to my finger tip. My co-pilot said

something like, "What're you doing, Tony?" That, naturally attracted the attention of the three rear crew members who all immediately wanted to know what was going on 'up front'. The co-pilot and I both noticed then that a white fluorescent glow was slowly but inexorably spreading across the windscreen and along the main instrument panel.

I had vaguely heard of St Elmo's Fire but I had never experienced it before. I found that I could 'wipe' more of the white luminous plasma onto my glove but then I discovered that I couldn't get rid of it. The more I tried to wipe it off, the more of it gathered on my glove. After a few minutes it started to fade - from my glove and from the windscreen, and soon everything was back to normal. Only then did it occur to me that it might have been wiser not to gather the stuff on my flying glove in the first place. However, I never felt any electrical tingle so I assumed that the electrical bonding that all aircraft have to protect them from lightning strikes had done what it was supposed to do.

Sadly, we didn't see any sign of the Northern Lights and by the time our navigator assured us that we were passing close to the southern tip of Greenland there was still complete cloud cover beneath us. We saw nothing of Scotland either when we crossed the coast near Prestwick - indeed we didn't see any ground at all until we were five miles from touchdown on a straight-in radar approach to Marham.

Recently I trawled the Internet for information about St Elmo's Fire. There's masses of material available but here is one description I found:

"Physically, St. Elmo's fire is a bright blue or violet glow, appearing like fire in some circumstances, from tall, sharply pointed structures such as rods, and on wings. Conditions that can generate St Elmo's fire are present during thunderstorms, when high voltage is present between clouds and the ground underneath, electrically charged. Air molecules glow due to the effects of such voltage, producing St Elmo's fire. St Elmo is a mispronunciation of St. Ermo or St. Erasmus, the patron saint of Mediterranean sailors. They believed the fire was a sign of salvation from the saint, since the phenomenon occurs most often toward the end of a storm."

214 Sqn - Supersonic over Paris

There was a worrying incident involving my non-standard crew on a Marham-Marham flight on 4 October 1971. First we had to RV with, and take on a maximum fuel load (41,000lbs) from, a Victor bringing four F3 Lightnings from Malta to their home base at Binbrook, refuelling them several times en route. I was still an inexperienced captain serving on 214 Squadron and this was my first operational maximum on load.

The flight lasted 5hrs 50mins and was my fifth long flight in five consecutive days. The first four of those five flights, involving my own constituted crew, were uneventful. For the fifth flight, for reasons I cannot now remember, I had two crew members, the co-pilot and the refuelling operator, who were not part of my regular crew. We had known, even before we took off from Marham, that we would be very short of fuel when we arrived at the top of descent on the return but that was nothing unusual. More often than not, tankers were short of fuel when they landed at the end of a busy refuelling sortie - particularly one involving the thirsty F3 Lightning. We also knew that the base weather on return would be 'iffy'.

I handed control of the aircraft to the experienced co-pilot (I will withhold his name to save him the embarrassment he deserves) shortly after the final transfer of fuel to the Lightnings. I wanted to get experience of carrying out the fuel scavenge drill for myself and I had briefed the crew accordingly before take-off.

I started the scavenge drill, reading each item on the check list carefully and then fingering the appropriate fuel pump and transfer cock switches before actually moving them. After some time, while consulting the check list and waiting for a couple of wing tanks to empty completely, I saw, from the corner of my right eye, the co-pilot reaching over to the central fuel panel and making a couple of selections without my permission. I told him curtly to keep his hands off and concentrate on what he was supposed to be doing - monitoring the auto-pilot. Thinking about it afterwards, I assume he, an impetuous youth out to impress the new captain, was getting frustrated with my slow, methodical progress through the check list, but there was no need for any rush.

Almost immediately after admonishing my co-pilot, my eyes were attracted to the Rate of Climb and Descent Indicator (RCDI - some pilots call it the VSI, the Vertical Speed Indicator). I was astonished to see that it was indicating full-scale deflection down, representing something in excess of 4,000 feet per minute rate of descent. Immediately next to that instrument was the Mach meter and I was horrified to see the needle creeping inexorably towards Mach 1.0.

I need to make two short digressions here for those readers who are not *au fait* with Victor tankers. The Victor was a very slippery aircraft, and by slippery I mean aerodynamically very clean. The tanker versions could cruise quite happily, safely and relatively economically, at Mach 0.93. I knew that on a test flight of Victor XA917 with test pilot Johnny Allam at the controls, he had accidentally exceeded Mach 1 in a shallow dive on 1 June 1956, making it the largest aircraft up to that time to exceed the speed of sound. I also knew there were stories of Victor Mk 1 bomber pilots allegedly having exceeded Mach 1 in a slight dive just for the hell of it and because the aircraft could do it - but no one seemed to know for certain any captain who had actually done it. There was a major reason for not doing it deliberately - and we were told about it in the ground school during our conversion training. Above Mach 0.96 the aircraft ran out of pitch control because the large supersonic shock wave forming over the wings completely blanked the elevators, so making them ineffective. This meant that even pulling the control column fully backwards would not get the aircraft out of the ever-steepening dive and the aircraft would continue to accelerate up to Mach 1.0 and on to who knows what Mach number. Speeds above Mach 0.96 were, therefore, forbidden. The only way of recovering from flight above Mach 0.96 was to slow down by closing the throttles and extending the air brakes. As the speed reduced through Mach 0.96 elevator control would be regained.

The second digression concerns the Victor's auto-pilot. As all pilots know, it is important to keep any aircraft in trim when flying with the auto-pilot engaged but it was especially important with the Victors. The auto-pilot height lock, which was supposed to keep the Victor flying at a constant height, was less than totally reliable and would frequently trip out for no obvious reason. If the aircraft had a nose up or nose down trim when the height lock tripped, the aircraft would naturally go into a climb or a dive. Height lock trips were insidious; they sometimes occurred when the aircraft was only very slightly out of trim and the event could easily pass unnoticed for a short while if the duty pilot was not completely attending to his duties.

Moving the fuel around during the scavenge drill had changed the aircraft Centre of Gravity. My co-pilot instead of doing his proper job of monitoring the auto pilot and maintaining a good external lookout, started fiddling with the fuel cocks against my instructions and had failed to notice two things: that the aircraft had gone slightly out of trim and the height lock had disengaged itself. The aircraft had entered a descent, gentle and barely perceptible at first, which caused the speed to increase rapidly, which in turn caused the nose to drop further.

Calling out on the intercom, "I have control", I grabbed hold of the control column, thereby operating the auto pilot instinctive cut out switch under my thumb which disengaged the autopilot completely, closed the four throttles and extended the airbrakes. I noticed that the Mach meter was passing Mach 1.0. Pulling the control column back as far as it would go into my chest without it having any effect whatsoever on the aircraft's attitude was, I can tell you, a completely weird sensation. As the engines wound down to flight idle and the powerful air brakes took effect, we started rapidly decelerating. The deceleration caused the nose to start pitching up and I quickly had to retract the air brakes, open the throttles to 90%, and push the control column forward again. Having bottomed out at about 37,000 feet, I regained straight and level flight at 41,000 feet again, give or take a few hundred feet.

Worried about the four Lightnings that had been flying in close formation with me, I called on the formation's radio frequency, "Sorry about that". "Sorry about what?" came the nonchalant reply from the lead Lightning pilot. I looked out of my cockpit side window and saw two of the Lightnings in immaculate echelon formation. Looking downwards, I could see that we were directly over the centre of Paris; the Champs Elysées and the Arc de Triomphe were clearly visible. What I said to my co-pilot is best left unreported but he was very apologetic and told me that he accepted full responsibility for what had happened. That, of course, was irrelevant: as Captain of the aircraft I was solely responsible.

After landing I reported the incident but, to my surprise and relief, I heard nothing more about it. The French authorities apparently never made any complaint about supersonic booms over their capital, nor

did the airways controller report that five aircraft had made an unauthorised deviation of several thousand feet from their assigned flight level. Fortunately, in 1971 radar height finders were not very accurate and the airways were far less crowded than they are these days.

Trapping!

In January 1975 I was appointed Officer Commanding the Victor Standardisation Unit (VSU). My new unit lodged in a tiny office on the top floor of one of the hangars at RAF Marham. It made sense for the VSU, colloquially known as the Trappers, to be based at Marham, because all the RAF's Victor tanker aircraft were there. I reported directly to the Air Officer Commanding No 1 Group (the AOC) who was based at RAF Bawtry, 100 miles away near Doncaster.

There was a touch of *déjà vu* about this appointment for me because only nine years earlier, while I was still an Air Electronics Officer but about to start my own pilot training, I had sat in, as an observer, on a very heated staff meeting at 3 Group HQ at Mildenhall where a new commanding officer for the 3 Group Standardisation Unit (3GSU), the predecessor of the VSU, was being discussed. The choice was between a time-served squadron leader who was very experienced in the role, and a younger, less experienced, newly-promoted squadron leader who was deemed to need a 'command appointment' to further his career. I never found out which candidate was selected. I could not help wondering if there had been a similar staff meeting about my appointment to the VSU.

Before I could start working at the job, I had to visit my new Boss at Bawtry. The AOC made it abundantly clear to me that I would be responsible to him alone, and not the Station Commander at RAF Marham, for all aspects of Victor tanker flying operations. To do that I and my three specialists, a navigator plotter, a navigator radar/refuelling operator, and an air electronics officer, were to carry out regular flight and ground checks on the crews of the three Victor tanker squadrons (55, 57 and 214) and the pilots on the Victor Simulator Squadron, and additionally I was to make recommendations to the AOC on any matters affecting tanker operations that I saw fit - he emphasised the "any matters" bit. How I carried out those orders was entirely up to me!

The first thing I noticed at Marham after taking up the appointment was that the four of us on the VSU could no longer pop into any of the squadron crew rooms just for a coffee and a chat.

"You and any member of your team may call in for a social visit at any time you wish, Tony," Wing Commander Al Sutherland, OC 57 Squadron, told me one day in my first week, "but you must ask me in advance so I, or one of my flight commanders, can be present. Look at it from my point of view: you work for the AOC - I work for the Station Commander. I need to know what you're up to!" I could see his point. I was supposed to fly with each Victor captain once per year and supervise a flight simulator sortie once per year with each of the three or four simulator instructors. In addition to those duties, there were sundry other tasks concerning checks of flight supervisory officers and experienced co-pilots who were being considered for captaincies. My three staff on the VSU had similar tasks pertaining to their own aircrew category.

I was also appointed as the CFS Agent: in that capacity I worked for the Commandant of the RAF's Central Flying School, then based at RAF Little Rissington. As CFS Agent I was responsible for issuing, renewing, and upgrading the QFI category held by any of the Victor captains who were former flying instructors. Clearly, I was going to get considerably more flying than I had done on either 214 or 55 squadrons.

Before me, VSU checks had taken place during a dedicated sortie and tended to follow a standard routine that everyone, including the air traffic controllers, had become accustomed to. Those sorties were entirely predictable but I wanted to see how the crews operated on routine AAR sorties. I let it be known from the outset that, whenever possible, I and my staff would conduct VSU checks on routine tanker operations, rather than asking the station to provide an aircraft especially for us. I aimed to give squadron pilots at least a week's notice of their impending flight check and it was then up to the squadron to programme that crew.

On a legal point, I personally authorised all VSU flights which meant, of course, that I was solely responsible for the way the flights were conducted. The VSU did not 'own' any aircraft so, in effect, I 'loaned' the aircraft and associated ground crew for each and every VSU flight. That was very important - for the squadron commanders as well as for me. If I screwed up there would be no come-back on the squadron commanders!

I always told crews at pre-flight briefings, that I was not trying to catch them out; I was simply looking to see how they handled the sort of emergencies that could occur in normal operations. My typical VSU flight checks would usually involve RV-ing with and refuelling either a group of fighter aircraft or another tanker - and sometimes taking on fuel from another tanker. At some point I would generate a simulated emergency that would require an unplanned diversion to the nearest suitable airfield. This would usually require a practice emergency message to the UK flight emergency organisation and the controllers at West Drayton always welcomed such practices. On return to Marham I would ask the pilot to carry out a variety of circuits and landings and, fuel and time permitting, fly a few myself to keep my hand in. The object was to see how the 1st pilot, and his crew, reacted to both normal and emergency situations. If I was checking a co-pilot's potential for captaincy, I would sometimes deliberately do something wrong and hope he would point it out.

The first question crews always asked each other when they returned from a VSU check was "What did he give you?" or "Where did you go for your practice diversion?" One day, well into my tour of duty, I jokingly threatened that I would start introducing practice diversions to either Heathrow or Gatwick but, of course, I couldn't do that - not least because the RAF would not pay the airport handling fees! However I discovered later that some crews had started looking up Heathrow and Gatwick approach and departure procedures, just in case.

Immediately after each VSU flight I debriefed the crew as a whole and then the pilot separately. In slower time I wrote a narrative report, at the end of which I was required to assess each pilot as Unsatisfactory, Satisfactory, Commendable, or Exceptional. An 'unsatisfactory' flight (and they were very rare) was inevitably reported straight up through the command chain to the AOC - by me on the telephone immediately after landing if there was something serious to report. As a result the aircrew under test were usually in a state of anxiety before and during the flight checks.

Like all captains, I had to renew my own QFI and Instrument Ratings and other qualifications once per year. It could all have been a bit nepotistic because, on the face of it, I could choose which checking officer to fly with - but I didn't and so it wasn't. When my time was due I asked the squadron commanders to select someone to carry out my own annual check rides. I knew that if I didn't meet the required standard in any test, then I would be in big trouble.

Once per year my entire unit, all four of us, had to descend on a squadron HQ for a week and examine everything in minute detail, from the cleanliness of the buildings to the correct maintenance of the many order books. We carried out oral tests of individuals' general knowledge about tanker operations and procedures but we did not do any flying tests that week. The VSU's annual visit was a worrying time for all, but for squadron commanders especially. To make sure everyone realised it was the Formal Annual Inspection, we had to turn up on the Monday morning dressed in our best blue uniform and formally tell the squadron commander that we had arrived! That always seemed well OTT to me (especially as one of the squadrons lived in the same hangar as the VSU, so all we had to do was walk downstairs!) but it had, so I was told, been the practice in the V Force for many years when the examiners were based at the Group HQs and not at the airfields. I tried to change that so that on Day 1 of a formal visit we could go downstairs, or walk to one of the other hangars, in our normal flying clothing, but I was over-ruled by HUP (Him-up-North).

At the end of the VSU Week we debriefed the squadron commander on our findings and invited him to make any observations or comments that he wished to be included in my formal written report to the AOC. I always assumed that squadron commanders wrote a report on the VSU after we had left.

Lethargic and Bored

There was one major Strike Command exercise lasting about 10 days while I was OC VSU - I forget precisely which year it was. All aircrew at RAF Marham, and presumably at all the other Strike Command bases, were required to fill in a questionnaire every 60 minutes during waking hours, including those hours when we were airborne or preparing to fly. The survey had been prepared and was controlled by some psychiatrists at Command HQ. We were never told how the accumulated data would be used.

The method was quite simple: once every waking hour, on the hour, we had to log what we were doing and put a number in a box to indicate how we felt at the time we were doing it; a table offered us the numbers 1 to 9 and defined what each represented. For example, on first waking from sleep there was a number which indicated how we felt: refreshed; not refreshed; enthusiastic; hungry; ready for the off; in need of the toilet; and several others that I can't remember. Quite a few forms got covered in coffee or soup or worse, some got lost, and some got accidentally shredded. Without, as far as I am aware, any connivance between us, it seems that most of us gave no thought to the questions and simply entered the number 9 for all activities - number 9 was defined as "Feeling lethargic and bored". It became a sort of greeting when we met each other: "Still lethargic and bored?" "Yup! You?"

The survey was suspended after three or four days and the psychiatrists left Marham disillusioned. We never heard any more about it officially although word filtered down to us that by our non-cooperation we had wasted weeks of preparation and effort put in by the designers of the survey. The truth is that, at the time of filling in the questionnaire, we really and truly did feel lethargic and bored but the scientists were not convinced.

Another example of how aircrew time and tax-payers money was wasted concerned the so-called "Teaching by Objectives", which was all the rage at that time (mid-70s). An intense, young, civilian fellow was 'attached' to me when I was running the VSU. His task was to specify a series of 'objectives' for those responsible for teaching pilots how to fly Victor Tankers. He started off badly by asking me to define a satisfactory take-off. He apparently thought that everything to do with operating an aircraft started with the take-off. I replied that a satisfactory take-off started hours earlier at the planning and briefing stage. However, when pressed, I offered: "A satisfactory take-off is one that results in the aircraft getting safely airborne."

That was not good enough for the IYC fellow. "The take-off presumably starts when you release the brakes? What speed, exactly, should you take-off at?" he asked. "I need to define assessable criteria that the pilots must achieve."

I explained that the Victor's take-off speed depended on, amongst other things, aircraft weight, aircraft thrust, air pressure, outside air temperature, runway slope (up, down, or level), and surface wind velocity.

"And the skill of the pilot, presumably?" he interrupted, helpfully. "I need to define a take-off on a scale from 1 to 5, ranging from satisfactory in all respects to not at all satisfactory".

I know he had a job to do - but so had I, and I couldn't afford to spend hours teaching him how to fly a Victor. However we persevered, on and off, over the course of about a week without actually getting any closer to many of his needs. Finally I told him that there were at least three 'objectives' that he should have been aware of before embarking on his task:

1. If you don't ask the right questions, you won't get any meaningful results.
2. You can't ask the right questions unless you have researched your subject thoroughly in advance.
3. If you want to get aircrew involved in answering what appear to them to be silly questions you need to motivate them in advance.

He left! He put in a complaint about my attitude. My AOC, through his ADC, let it be known he agreed with me. Result!

"I have control!"

One of the first lessons I had learned on my own CFS Course in 1967 was that it is always better to intervene early when a student had put the aircraft into a potentially dangerous situation rather than wait until the situation had got out of control. I had not expected that lesson to be put to the test when flying a Victor but one very dark night at 31,000 feet between layers of clouds over the North Sea, I had cause to remember that lesson. (Not for nothing is the CFS official motto, when translated from Latin, "Our teaching is everlasting.")

I was flying as OC the Victor Standardisation Unit and captain in the right hand seat of a Victor K1 conducting an Instrument Rating Test (IRT) on a very experienced squadron captain. IRTs were sometimes practised in the very basic, by today's standards, Victor Flight Simulator but the rules at the time stipulated that the formal test had to be conducted in the air and the pilot under test had to fly most of the flight manually, that is without using the auto-pilot.

About two hours into the flight, ATC instructed us to alter heading 40 degrees to port to avoid conflicting civilian traffic. The candidate entered what should have been a routine turn with 30 degrees of bank. I put my right hand on the four throttles waiting for him to request the 5% increase in thrust that was necessary to maintain speed and height in the turn. Not only did the candidate not ask for the power increase but he allowed the angle of bank to increase beyond 30 degrees and, at the same time, he let the aircraft's nose drop below the horizon. In other words we entered a descending left hand turn with the speed and angle of bank increasing rapidly. He made no response at all when I urgently called him to "check bank; check rate of descent". It was as though he had suddenly become paralysed into inaction.

I took control of the aircraft as we entered the cloud layer with the angle of bank then increasing beyond 50 degrees. I had to recover the aircraft to straight and level flight without inducing a high speed stall (often referred to as an 'accelerated' or 'g' stall). A very gentle pull up was necessary to avoid the application of 'rolling g', which, to put it unscientifically, twists the airframe and has over the decades caused the loss of quite a few aircraft - including at least one V Bomber. During all this I had no reaction, or assistance, from the candidate. My navigator, doubtless speaking on behalf of all three rear crew members, shouted on the intercom in an anxious voice, "What the Hell's going on?"

Throughout those dramatic few seconds, the candidate had remained completely silent and motionless. Whether this was because he was embarrassed at what he had just allowed to happen, or because of a medical problem, I knew not. I do not mind recording that I was both shocked and astonished. I instructed my AEO to tell the ATC controller, who had obviously noticed our unexpected manoeuvres and rapid height loss on his radar, that I was curtailing the sortie and returning to base. In answer to the Controller's questions I had the AEO report that we did not have an emergency but we might have a medical problem. The candidate maintained his complete silence and I had to complete the return to base, approach and landing without any input at all from him. As we disembarked, I had a quiet private word with the SMO who had been called out and was waiting at the aircraft steps; we both knew that the captain in question had recently returned to flying after a very traumatic flying accident for which he had been entirely blameless. I was, of course, not privy to any report the SMO made as a result of his examination. At my delayed post-flight debriefing the candidate could not explain what had happened - in fact I was quite sure that he had not realised he had allowed the aircraft to get into a dangerous situation. The candidate failed his IRT and was immediately grounded by his squadron commander. I submitted my factual post flight report but heard nothing more officially about the incident.

As the Boss of the VSU I was not permitted to discuss individuals' reports with anyone on the squadrons but I was very aware that one or two Victor pilots thought that I had acted too soon and thereby ruined a very experienced captain's career - but that was based on crew room gossip. I had to hold my tongue. They had not been there and they did not know, or need to know, the full story from me. I heard no complaints from the three rear crew members who had been flying on that sortie with me, nor from any of the other navigators or air electronics officers on the Victor squadrons.

Tony Cunnane

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