

JIMMY Remembered

by Claire Warren and Mark Smith

Heads bowed in remembrance were suddenly upturned as one, as the unmistakable growl of a Merlin engine filled the air, the sun glinted from the almost perfect shape of Reginald Mitchell's Spitfire and a field in Kent was transported back to the fateful morning sixty-six years ago when twenty-year old New Zealander Flt/Lt Jimmy Paterson made the supreme sacrifice.



66 years ago near this spot...



The clear-up team! James triumphantly finds the farmers long lost tractor!

Family, friends, and those who have become involved with Jimmy over the years met with solemn dignity to mark the unveiling of a memorial stone erected by the Shoreham Aircraft Museum to mark the spot where Jimmy's Spitfire X4422 fell during the Battle of Britain on the 27th September 1940. As the first memorial in what will be a series of permanent tributes to Battle of Britain pilots who lost their lives close to the Museum, the stone's unveiling marks the culmination of months of hard work by Geoff and Lesley and the whole team at Shoreham, not to mention the vital work of Paul Milan and Audrey of Watling Street Cemetery, Dartford, who made every effort to make the stone itself such a thing of beauty.

JIMMY Remembered *continued*

Everybody involved was delighted by the wonderful turnout on the unseasonably bright and balmy morning. The police, in particular lady Police Officer Ann Davis, did a splendid and sympathetic job of organising the many people and vehicles that Sparepenny Lane is entirely unused to hosting. We also owe the Alexander family a huge debt of gratitude for granting the invasion of their land, along with Mr and Mrs Gould, who kindly afforded us the use of their field for nearby parking. All sorts of interested parties arrived for the ceremony, including cousins of Jimmy settled here in the UK, local residents, those with an interest in the

Battle of Britain who had heard about Jimmy, and of course the local television news crews, all of which went on to do the event proud on news reports that evening.

For me personally, it was a tremendous honour to welcome direct representatives of Jimmy's family, six of whom had travelled all the way from New Zealand to be there on the day. In the seven or so years that I've had the honour of looking after Jimmy's grave in the nearby Orpington Cemetery, (Star Lane, St Mary's Cray), I've also been privileged to be friends with kind, patient John Paterson, the son of Jimmy's little brother Hugh. John made



"Hey Geoff! Do you know there's a memorial stone on my foot?" The memorial is gently guided into position



Gathered to remember Jimmy



Justin giving the opening welcome



Trevor reading the scripture



Gathered to honour Jimmy



The Reverend Neil Taylor



Rob & Sam – 2 of New Zealand's present day finest



Rob & Sam



Poppy wreaths for Jimmy



Air Cadet and Standard



The Last Post



the trip to England with his lovely wife Anne, sister Christine North, his two sons Sam and Rob, and Sam's girlfriend (now fiancée: congratulations, guys!) Sarah.

Jimmy's nephew John grew up with circulating stories of brave Uncle Jim the family hero, and has passed this affectionate reverence on to his boys. Amazingly, the eldest Sam was born on the same day as Jimmy, was given James as a middle name in his great uncle's honour, and has followed Jimmy into the Royal New Zealand Air Force. John's younger son Rob has also joined the military, and looked extremely dashing in his Royal New Zealand Infantry Force uniform.

The midday service was conducted in open-air military fashion by the Reverend Neil Taylor, Club members Justin Colegate and Trevor Bardell both delivered some fine words, while John, Sam and Rob Paterson each made a splendid contribution in speaking during the ceremony. John shared the precious sort of Paterson family anecdotes that it would be impossible to glean in any other way, while no finer or more apposite tributes could have been given than those of Jimmy's two great-nephews, both proudly bearing the



Air Cadet Guard of Honour

JIMMY Remembered *continued*



Rob, Mr Alexander, Sam & fiancée Sarah



uniform of the Armed Services of New Zealand, Jimmy's birthplace and home.

Proceedings were lent an added emotional charge by the presence of Jimmy's flag. The now-fragile ensign flew at Jimmy's passing out parade almost seventy years ago and eleven thousand miles away, but then technically went missing, purloined by Jimmy during a harmless prank, and then kept by the family with great affection after his death. The RNZAF kindly overlooked its exact whereabouts for the last decades and allowed it to fly at Sam Paterson's own parade in 2003. John carefully brought the flag all the way from home, and it was draped over the memorial stone to be pulled gingerly aside at the point of unveiling, in what proved, for myself at least, to be one of life's genuinely moving moments.

Courtesy of owner Peter Monk and Paterson cousin Chris Dale who largely helped to finance the flight, the Spitfire

flypast piloted by Rod Dean was also truly a magical few minutes for each person present. It would be impossible not to be moved by the tremendous sound of that Merlin engine, and the incomparable sight of the brave little plane, swooping and looping over the field in which Jimmy died so terribly, and over all of us, for whom he made the ultimate sacrifice so that we all could take an hour or two off work to remember Jimmy before carrying on with the daily lives which he and many like him fought so bravely to preserve for us.

Never was this brought home to me so poignantly as during the ceremony's two minutes' silence that followed the haunting Last Post played beautifully by Brian Rance. Somewhere along the valley, it happened just then to be a junior school's lunchtime, the distant whoops and yelps and laughter of little children utterly oblivious to what went on here sixty-six years previously, and what was going on today, served serendipitously as the most appropriate thank you of all to Jimmy Paterson.

Long after memories of the ceremony itself have dimmed, the handsome memorial stone with its simple, moving inscription will ensure that his name will not be forgotten; placed close to the crash site and just a few miles from where Jimmy is buried, it stands as a fine and fitting tribute to one much-loved member of The Few.

(Mark Smith is Curator of the excellent Firepower, The Royal Artillery Museum, in Woolwich. Website: www.firepower.org.uk)



FROM THE TOP: Spitfire flypast at the memorial; Relics of Jimmy's Spitfire. BELOW: Jimmy's Ensign





One for the family album! Jimmy's nephew John Paterson is stood 3rd from the left, with wife Anne at far left.

A Few More Thanks by Dean Sumner

As everyone made their separate way from Jimmy's wonderful memorial after the unveiling, many headed back to Shoreham Village to visit the Museum and partake of some promised refreshments.

Many thanks go to those who put on such splendid fare, not least Geoff's sister Denise who once again provided enough superb dishes for a small army, but this time the army turned up! The "Flower Bowl" at St. John's Hill, Sevenoaks, donated the flowers to brighten the refreshment marquee, and we are grateful to our very own Norman Pearson who once again gallantly paid for the hire of the marquee.

Much pleasant conversation and 'noshing' of the fine fare took place in and around the marquee as everyone reflected on the day's sobering event, but in Geoff's case the 'noshing' was too eager for his liking as there was not a single scrap left for him when he got back to the Museum. Geoff and Dean (who also missed the food having elected to

remain on duty in the Museum) both had to be provided with a lovingly prepared cheese sandwich courtesy of Lesley to save them from wasting away!

Such a memorable day cannot be allowed to pass without mentioning a couple of the more hilarious moments... Who will ever forget poor Geoff having to 'sprint' back down Sparepenny Lane at 11:55am to the car park to fetch Jimmy's RAF Ensign in time for draping over the memorial at 12 Noon, which he had forgotten to walk up with. As no records have ever been kept, Geoff is the current Sparepenny Lane ten yards 'occasional dash' champion! Sympathy goes to Bernard, for after driving his splendid Willy's Jeep all the way up from Ashford to help out on the day, he then got himself locked in the farmer's field!

On a day when we remembered and honoured one of the RAF's finest, we would also like to thank the young Dartford Air Cadets who all had special permission to attend the event, and sincere thanks also to the Dartford RAFA for pulling out all the stops at the last moment to bring their Colour Standards along for the unveiling. They

all helped to really make felt that there was an RAF presence in Jimmy's honour.

To everyone who hasn't been mentioned by name but who 'did their bit' leading up to and on the day itself, we extend much thanks including all the Club members who tried their level best to keep out of the lenses of the BBC and Meridian TV, but worked really hard. And Geoff reckons he knows where all those "Spitfire" beers donated by Shepherd Neame really went! ~ Yes lads! And fancy blaming the Patersons!

The one mention of thanks which can never be said enough is that to the living colleagues of Jimmy Paterson – our wonderful Battle of Britain aircrew, who tirelessly and so generously give of their time to take part in popular signing events to raise the much needed funds for the memorials project. They still serve!

After the success in unveiling the memorial to Flight Lieutenant James Paterson MBE, the Museum can now look forward to erecting the further planned pilot memorials and details about these can be found elsewhere in this edition of 'Friends of the Few'.

"Don't worry Geoff, it'll be fine!"