

Memories of Dennis

1. His cousin Dot (Dorothy Braidner)

Dennis was one of the last surviving cousins with THORNE connections. In the school holidays we tended to stay with uncles and aunts (and therefore cousins) until WW2 broke out in September 1939. Life changed, people were evacuated (with their work) to safer areas. The use of telephones was discouraged, and should we go to a railway station we were met with huge posters which said "IS YOUR JOURNEY REALLY NECESSARY?" Some of the cousins were in the forces overseas, others did various activities as directed by the war machine such as the Land Army and Civil Nursing Reserve. Dennis trained to be a pilot with the RAF, an interest he retained until his death.

After the war ended in 1945 we developed a habit of meeting at what we called "The Cousin's parties" held at our homes or occasionally in Richmond Park where we might just see a deer. The numbers attending came to include their marriage partners and offspring. To this day those of us who survive cherish the copies of photos he took at the parties.

We say "Farewell" to a Christian gentleman, for him the scriptures tell us "far better". We send love and condolences to his loved ones who remain.

2. His cousin Doreen (Ward)

When I was young, I well remember enjoyable visits to the home of my cousins, and particularly playing on rough ground called The Thicket. We built wigwams from branches and tall grass and spent enjoyable times playing with my cousins there.

Early memories of Dennis were that he was always involved in anything electrical! On one of my visits, he had been working on something electrical which had gone wrong. To repair it, he needed a part from Woolworths, and we had to make the long walk from St Margaret's Road to Woolworths to get the item, so that power and lighting could be restored throughout the house.

We will miss him so much.

3. John Chilcott, friend and former Pirelli colleague.

Dennis was my mentor at work in the early sixties after I joined his Estimating Department at Pirelli Contruction, for our overseas business. Thanks in large measure to him, it was a most enjoyable and productive period.

He was highly respected and liked by his staff, colleagues, contractors and customers.

In 1981, he was my close confidante when I decided to take up a position in Australia, and his support and guidance were invaluable to me at that time of personal redirection.

Since then we kept in continual contact despite living half a world apart. We corresponded regularly and met when we could on my visits back to England.

It was always a joy for me to meet up with him and Neta in recent years, and reminisce over our shared history.

I shall miss his dry humour, that familiar chuckle and the twinkle in his eyes.

4. Norman Pipler (Pip), RAF friend from 22 Squadron

I first met Dennis in late 1944 when I arrived in Florence to join 225 Squadron, fresh from the Operational Training Unit in Palestine. Our job was as a Photographic Reconnaissance Unit and thanks to Dennis we were equipped with clipped wing Spitfire Mark IXBs. Dennis was a very good pilot, but originally it had been decided that we would use the Spitfire Mark XI, although the airplane's flying capabilities were not ideal for this. Dennis told me he had already written two off and survived both of these incidents. His description of the technical problems involved in flying the Mark XI directly resulted in the allocation to 225 Squadron of the clipped wing Mark IXB which was much better suited to flights of this nature. Thanks to Dennis therefore, my job was already safer.

The first memory I have of Dennis is organizing a dance at the Palazzo Cora, an elegant building we had requisitioned for our billets in Florence. There was no mood lighting or amplification but Dennis solved that problem by rigging Heath Robinson electrical connections through the chandeliers. I'm surprised we didn't go up in flames before I even got flying.

Dennis was always very friendly, a very genuine fellow, one of the best. He never left you in the lurch. A good example of Dennis's bravery and thoughtfulness was on ops one day when he was flying with a New Zealander who had been posted to the squadron. They came under very heavy ground fire near Bologna and the other pilot was shot down. Despite their low level, the New Zealander managed to bail out, and at great personal risk to himself Dennis continued to circle and protect his friend until he was sure he had landed safely and then managed to get back to base. Dennis himself described his action modestly as 'I just stooged around for a bit.'

On a later occasion, Dennis undertook his 100th operational sortie. We had already had VE day, but there was still unrest and armed conflict in the region of what would later become Yugoslavia. Dennis knew that our war flying was coming to an end but he persuaded the C.O. that a final operational flight was necessary, so he reached his 100, Not Out!

In later years he retained a formidable memory for so many details of the Squadron and the technical aspects of flying Hurricanes and Spitfires that I am not surprised he was instrumental in founding the Spitfire Society. **I will miss him.**