

119732 Pilot Officer Humphrey L Gilbert

A pre-war make-up artist in Hollywood, Gilbert became a British Army Officer, transferring to Royal Air Force. He joined 609 (West Riding) Squadron on 30th June 1942 under Sqdn Ldr Paul Richey, on the same day as Roy Payne and Peter Raw, having attended the same OTU. On 30th July 1942 he crash-landed Typhoon R7816 at Catwater Farm in Cambridgeshire following engine failure. In August he was concussed in another forced landing and went on sick leave. In December he rejoined 609 under Squadron Leader Roland 'Bee' Beamont. Gilbert never flew a single operational mission before being 'bumped off' the Squadron on 1st January 1943. The Form 540 Operational Records Book records the following: Dec 16th...In the evening there is a bit of a party at the Bridge Hotel, Westgate, to celebrate. This includes P/O Gilbert, now returned to the Sqdn...

Dec 26th. Apart from 6 eventless patrols, chief activity of Boxing Day is a 'comic' rucker match featuring 609 V. The Station. The MO appears in blood stained shorts, F/O Evans in long combinations, P/O Gilbert in pyjamas. Though the Station team look somewhat askance and take the game quite seriously, 609 wins, despite being attacked with soot bombs by a hostile Albacore of 841 Sqdn.

Dec 25th...In the evening there is a dance at Doone House, at which the 2 chief sensations are 1. A horse which enters ridden by a soldier and a Waaf, 2. F/O Creteur dancing without, apparently any trousers - the illusion being achieved by the removal of his shirt and rolling his trousers below it. Roland Beamont records it thus:

"Presently the IO, Ziegy', came in and said "I think you should come and see this", and when I rounded the door it was just in time to see the rear end of a horse turning from the staircase onto the landing above! It then came to a halt on being confronted by bedroom doors through which it could not enter. Despite this its rider, who could now be seen to be Typhoon pilot Humphrey Gilbert, was urging it on, jumping up and down in the saddle and shouting "Tally Ho!" The horse was clearly impressed by all this and, deciding that Christmas gifts would be appropriate, deposited a number all over the staircase and landing. Humphrey saw me, then dismounted; slid down the banisters and saying "Just parking my horse, Sir" disappeared into the bar. As the senior officer present it seemed incumbent on me to do something; but what? Then light dawned - this was surely what administrative officers were for, so summoning the unfortunate Squadron Adj.O, I issued formal orders. He looked rather forlorn and said "What on earth can I do about this" as he viewed the carnage all round. I said "Try ringing the Station Admin Officer", and rejoined the party. On the following day a terse message came from the Station Commander demanding my presence, but I found rather conveniently that I had to deal with urgent operational priorities, and the excitement soon died down. This was to be the last of the arisings involving Humphrey Gilbert who, commendably, had almost completed his 'tour' on the Squadron and who throughout his time with 609 had gained the dual reputations of irrepressible humorist and practical joker, and formidable pranger of Typhoons. He was becoming a problem in fact and when, without any prompting from me, a requirement came in for the name of a pilot 'finishing his tour' for posting to Palestine on target-towing duties, Humphrey was just the man for the job!

About ten years later my wife, Pat, and I were attending an air function at London's Dorchester Hotel when we noticed that 'Flying Officer Kyte' was on the programme. Postwar Humphrey had made a famous career on radio and cabaret with his caricature of an RAF fighter pilot, complete with handlebar moustache and stage name of Humphrey Lestoq. Then he came on stage, still the original Humphrey Gilbert, and

began his act. His eyes suddenly focused on our table and he stopped, saying “My God, my old CO! Hello Sir, how are you? – Oh, I say, I rather care for that!” Wondering how to escape this with any dignity, I exchanged a few passes with him, and then he went on with his act. As soon as he could afterwards, he advanced firmly towards us and said ‘Dear CO, I’ve always wanted to ask you...how was it that I was suddenly posted to Palestine to fly target towing?’ – I still hadn’t the heart to tell him!”

In later years, due to his magnificent moustache, he became a member of the ‘Handlebars’ club. He was also awarded a children’s television award for ‘TV personality of the year’, being awarded his silver microphone Coliseum, London. It was decided by a panel of eight children that Humphrey Lestocq (HL as he was known, the stooge) and his friend, (often joined by Sarah Swede and Colonel Beetroot) the string puppet Mr. Turnip (invented by Joy Laurey, and whose voice was created by Peter Hawkins) had the edge over Annette Mills and her Muffin the Mule. Incidentally, HL's catchphrase was "Goody, Goody Gumdrops" while Mr Turnip's was "Lawky, Lawky, Lum". He was also renowned as Flying Officer Kyte in the radio show "Much Binding In The Marsh"

Filmography.

- 1966 Avengers: What The Butler Saw - Character played: Vice Admiral Willows
- 1964 Life in Danger - Character played: Inspector Bennet
- 1962 Design for Loving - Character played: Manager
- 1962 Waltz of the Toreadors - Character played: Huntsman
- 1962 The Golden Rabbit
- 1961 Bomb in the High Street - Character played: Reporter
- 1961 The Court Martial of Major Keller - Character played: Lt. Cameron
- 1961 Pit of Darkness - Character played: Bill
- 1961 The Long Shadow - Character played: Bannister
- 1961 Two Wives at One Wedding - Character played: Mark
- 1961 The Third Alibi - Character played: Producer
- 1960 Not a Hope in Hell - Character played: Cricklegate
- 1959 The Son of Robin Hood - Character played: Blunt
- 1959 The Unstoppable Man - Character played: Sgt. Plummer
- 1953 Meet Mr. Lucifer - Character played: Arthur Simmonds
- 1953 Conflict of Wings
- 1953 The Good Beginning - Character played: Thorogood
- 1952 School for Brides - Character played: Jimmy Bradley
- 1952 Angels One Five - Character played: F/Lt. 'Batchy' Salter
- 1952 Once a Sinner - Character played: Lewis Canfield
- 1952 Come Back Peter - Character played: Arthur Hapgood
- 1950 Fake's Progress - Character played: Commentator
- 1949 Stop Press Girl - Character played: Commentator