W/O. ERIC BALDWIN R.A.A.F. 467 SQUADRON
AIR GUNNER. WADDINGTON. LINCOLN
1943 – 1945.

I was born in Sydney, Australia, February 1923.
Joined R.A.A.F. in 1942.
Trained in Canada, then posted to England.
Completed 33. Bomber Operational Missions from Waddington.
Posted back to Australia as Gunnery Instructor.
Discharged 1945.

Our crew were 6 Australians and 1 English Engineer

The following are just some of the events that occured during my service career. Our aircraft was PO-K for the majority of our raids, except when it was being serviced or repaired from damage due to German fighter attacks and enemy A.A. guns.

On our first raid as a new crew it was to Walcheren Island in daylight, to bomb the German gun emplacements that protected the island.
However, some bright planning officer of the Air Ministry, had decided that it would be a good idea to attack in a formation known as "Line Astern" (we think he must have been transferred from the Navy).
Being a new crew we were at the rear of the formation. As each aircraft being only 200 yards behind and below the aircraft in front, the slipstreams made position difficult, then evasive action taken when fighters found us and attacked plus anti-aircraft guns, caused confusion when dropping our bombs and we were then down to 3,000 feet

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instead of 6,000 feet and bombs were coming down all around us, too near for comfort, but being our first raid, we all thought this was the normal danger on Bomber Command.

Fortunately this type of daylight attack was suspended, but we found many more dangerous situations before we completed our tour.

Some of these included one particularly memorable for me personally.

As Mid Upper Gunner on a night raid to Essen and we were approaching the target with ack-ack shells like fireworks, when two German fighter planes were sighted by myself and the Rear Gunner on the port side about 800 yards away and below. We both fired as they mounted an attack and we gave instructions to our skipper to corkscrew, which prevented them surprising us. We were nearing the bombing target with ack-ack bursting around, a piece of schrapnel came up through the underside of our aircraft, between my legs, sitting in the mid-upper turret and shattering the perspex above my head on its way out, causing me facial damage and shock. My injuries were not too serious and we completed our raid and returned to base where I was attended to by our medical staff.

Next day the ground crew showed us there were 64 holes of various sizes on the aircraft.

So that was one of my lucky days.

Returning from a raid to Politz, we had completed our bombing run, but met lots of German fighters waiting for us plus ack-ack shelling as we came away from the target. From our corkscrew evasive action, it must have toppled

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our Gyro Compass, as instead of being on our Homeward course we were flying in the wrong direction to the course given by the navigator to the skipper, until the compass settled down.
Then suddenly the Bomb Aimer discovered we had two bomb hang-ups and the bomb doors would not close fully.
Breaking radio silence we were given orders to divert to Lossiemouth in Scotland. Decision to land with the bombs on board was discussed by all the crew and agreed instead of all bailing out over the sea.
We landed safely amid lots of panic among the crew and also the Service personnel on the aerodrome. Stayed overnight and the ground crew working on the aircraft, safely removed the bombs and we returned to Waddington.

On another occasion we were just taxi-ing for take off and with my mid-upper guns pointing to the rear, as routine, I noticed the port rudder had fallen off.
I yelled over the intercom to the skipper and we managed to abort "take off" and then headed for dispersal.
The ground crew spent time re-assuring us, they could not have seen that the bolts holding the rudder were worn and weak.
All the same, in about 5 minutes we would have been airborne losing a rudder, there was a good chance we would have crashed with a full load of fuel and bombs on board.
But as "luck" would have it they found a replacement spare aircraft and took off about 40 minutes late, and we somehow got permission to fly to France over

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London and meet up with our squadron with the help of a Mosquito aircraft which flew alongside us and waggling his wings indicated he wanted us to follow him to join the formation and there was a sight to behold with "gaggles" of 60 to 100 planes as far as the eye could see.
The reason was for a special operation to bomb hell out of the Germans in the "Battle of the Bulge".
When I saw the film "Battle of the Bulge" with Humphrey Bogart and the Americans winning the battle, I am sure they could not have done it without our Air Force and in some way a little help from PO-K.

On another raid to the Mittelland Canal we had a "second dickie" pilot with us on his first operation as we had progressed to a senior crew status. All went well, the weather over the target was clear and the canal was breeched. Until on the return leg, planes started going down left, right and centre, so we were extremly vigilant and then our skipper decided to air his knowledge and explain to our "second dickie" pilot about the use of "scarecrow" weapons by the Germans, to give the impression that lots of planes were being shot down, to scare us, but knew all about them and not to worry.
This was completly wrong as 5 Group lost 13 planes that night out of a force of 165. So our skipper did not offer his experienced knowledge freely again. As we could not confirm any sighting of "scarecrows".

During an early evening raid on Duren, we were

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just short of the target when the Pathfinder who was acting as "master of ceremonies", called us down from 16,000 feet to 10,000 feet to get below the cloud level When we broke through at 10,000 feet, we thought there was something wrong as there were only about a dozen planes at this level, so we thought we must be one of the first to arrive and the rest were on their way down, but we were close to the target when I saw a load of bombs come through the base of the cloud heading for a Lancaster that was about 800 yards ahead of us.

I started yelling corkscrew, but we were on our bombing run and the "Bomb Aimer" was staying on the intercom saying Steady, Steady, Right a bit - Steady - "Bombs Gone", as the Lancaster in front was hit by the bombs falling from above and there was a fierce explosion as the planes own fuel tanks and bomb load blew up and I remember seeing the starboard wing being blown off the plane, which was replaced by a cloud of black smoke as we flew through it with the bombs from above still falling all around us, a 4,000 pound bomb passing so close I could almost have touched it.
Only a few moments ago there had been a Lancaster with seven men on board as the shock waves hit us.
We did not get any explanation why the other bombers ded not come down to 10,000 feet as instructed by the Master Bomber.

A story not directly about our bombing raids, but the German re-actions to our attacks and how

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they would respond, on occasions against us.

It was customary on the nights we were not flying, to adjourn to the Waddington village pub, the "Horse and Jockey", together with our ground crew, with whom we were very friendly.
On this occasion, after a long session, we staggered from the pub, Tommy our skipper and Paddy our Engineer, managed to seperate themselves from the rest of the crew as we headed back to the aerodrome.
Our Lancs were just returning from a raid and we had been warned for some time, that enemy planes could follow the bomber stream back to England and attack our planes as they landed.
On this night as we were in two seperate groups, one of our planes passed overhead and we could see an enemy fighter positioning himself for an attack from behind. We could see the tracer bullets going towards the bomber and we were shouting from the ground below, to no avail.
Then another fighter started shooting up the aerodrome and Paddy and our Skipper raced towards the control tower where there were guns mounted and somehow fired a few shots, going everywhere but not hitting the enemy fighter.
The rest of the crew, myself included reached the aerodrome and were suddenly confronted with the Fire Tender, being driven by the Commanding Officer and he ordered us to climb onto the running boards to be driven to the bomb dump, as the fighters had started a fire among the incendary store

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and with the help of the C.O. we started throwing them away from the main explosive bomb racks, as fast as we could.
Next day, at the main parade of all personnel of the Station, the Commanding Officer praised the efforts of the Gummersall (our skipper) Crew, as we stood in line, dishevelled and unshaved, with hangovers from the night before and trying very hard to look like heroes, to all those present.

It must be remembered, that this was our night off flying and really not at war dodging anti-aircraft fire and cannon shells during our many raids and did not have to stick our necks out trying to save the station's bomb dump, but we did this as the crew of PO-K.

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