

**DECEMBER 2014**

**"ERIC'S STORY"**

Eric Parker was born on the 12<sup>th</sup> of January 1924, in the district of West Derby, Liverpool. The youngest of three brothers he went St Mary's village school. He had an adventurous childhood, since his father Thomas a farm labourer readily gave him access to the open country life on the farm where he worked. The farm was situated in Knowlsey and was called Bathers Farm which is now a built up area.

As a boy Eric enjoyed many happy hours on the farm, especially during hay making and harvesting time. This closeness with nature meant as he grew up he really enjoyed the outdoors. He became a boy scout when he was twelve years of age and his love of the outdoors meant many years of happy camping and scouting in general.

He left school at fourteen years of age and went into immediate employment as a lift attendant working in the seven stories National Bank in Fenwick Street, Liverpool for the magnificent sum of fourteen shillings per week (70 pence in today's money). This was a very good wage at the time for a fourteen year old boy, the average then being about ten to eleven shillings per week. However being a boy with higher ambitions he voluntarily left his job as lift attendant and became an apprentice electrician for a wage of seven shillings and sixpence per week (an appreciable drop in earnings).

This job however didn't last too long, as his love of nature and the outdoors still lingered and he soon left this employment to become a student gardener with Liverpool Parks and Gardens. This meant each year he would be employed at a different park, nursery or farm belonging to the corporation all this whilst studying to become a professional gardener. His first year was at Newsham Park, Liverpool in the greenhouse and nursery site.

A year later he was at Harbreck Farm, Aintree. This farm produced vegetables for the hospitals and homes in the corporation's bounds. By this time by attending various technical college courses he obtained his junior Royal Horticultural Societies Certificate in Botany and Practical Gardening.

The year was now June 1941 and we were at war with Germany, at the age of seventeen and a half years he joined the RAF as air crew and awaited call up which came in January 1942 on his eighteenth birthday.

After the usual enlistment procedures in London and Brighton, he found himself at the Initial Training Wing in Paignton, Devon. Here with, many others he learned the mysteries of things like navigation, meteorology, electronics etc. as well as physical exercise and drill. Such a course was very exacting and all grew up from callous youths to seriously competent young men, so that by 1943 he was part of a large body of airmen ready to be shipped to Canada as possible pilots having successfully been graded by flying in Tiger Moths at RAF Sywell in the midlands.

The troop ship Empress of Scotland safely took him and many others to Halifax, Nova Scotia despite the great U Boat threat of the time. Soon he was on a troop train which took him to Moose Jaw, Satchewan and from there to a nearby RCAF airfield named Caron. Here he settled in to a twenty four week pilot's course, flying Fairchild Cornell Trainers. As a pilot he had a very short career and was soon grounded as unsuitable (The Chief Flying Instructor remarked *"Parker as a pilot you would be more use to the enemy"*) and posted to a holding unit at Brandon in Manitoba, awaiting a thirty two week course as a navigator/bomb aimer (The longest aircrew course at that time).

Finally he was posted to number six Bombing and Gunnery School at Mountain View, Ontario, learning all about bombs, bomb sights and machine guns and bomb aiming. Twelve weeks later after flying on Ansons and Blenheim Aircraft he passed this part of the course and was posted to the number nine air observer school at St Johns, Quebec, which was quite close to the provincial capital Quebec City and also near to Montreal, where his uncle John lived having emigrated to Canada after World War 1.

With his friend Bill Readhead, they were able to spend weekends at his apartment as he was now a nationalised Canadian and held a Managerial post in the celebrated Mount Royal Hotel. Consequently the pair was in regular attendance as his guests at the exclusive Normandy Roof Club on a Saturday night (All on the house).

By February 1944 Eric qualified as a Sergeant Navigator and received his flying brevet. He sailed for home just before Easter 1944, again on the Empress of Scotland (With very little U Boat threat this time).

Back in UK (He holidayed in a commandeered hotel in Harrogate for a couple of weeks) After a few short postings for familiarisation with UK wartime flying conditions and restrictions he was posted to RAF Husbands Bosworth, Northampton on operational training unit, flying on Wellington Bombers for a twelve week course. Here he along with a mass of various aircrew trades, signallers, gunners, pilots etc. were all assembled en'masse in a big Hangar and told by the Wing Commander Flying to crew themselves up. He left the hangar saying he would be back later.

As they all mingled together Eric was approached by a tall gangly New Zealand pilot who introduced himself as Alec Wickes who asked him if he would consider joining his crew as navigator, Eric agreed and soon together they assembled a crew, namely Alec Wickes Flight Sergeant Pilot, Eric Parker as Sergeant Navigator, Trevor Connolly (NZ) Sergeant Wireless Operator, Bob Whyte (NZ) Sergeant Bomb Aimer, Arthur Saunders Sergeant Mid Upper Gunner, Doug Horton Sergeant Rear Gunner and finally Bill McCabe Sergeant Engineer.

Later that morning the Wing Commander returned and those who were still uncrewed (Very Few) were told by him without any argument, this was his final decision and he crewed them up. His last act of that morning was to line them all up in two ranks and say *"Look at that man next to you"* (This they all did) *"Gentlemen you have thirty operations ahead of you and I tell you now, one of you will not be coming back from your tour, good luck to you all and if anyone here wishes to opt out take a step forward now."* No one stepped forward.

So they finished their crew flying and they all went on to the heavy conversation unit at Blyton near Gainsborough to start flying on the famous Lancaster on a course that was to last for six weeks.

Eric enjoyed his time at Blyton and he with his new crew soon bonded together becoming almost like brothers, doing everything together on and off duty. They were billeted in a Nissan hut along with another crew and they learned to become a reliable crew who depended totally on each other for their survival.

Finally they finished their course on Lancaster's and in December 1944 just before Christmas they were posted to One Group B Flight Twelve Squadron Bomber Command at RAF Wickenby as a brand new crew.

Wickenby is situated twelve miles south east of Lincoln and Lincoln Cathedral was a wonderful land mark for any returning aircraft. Twelve Squadron itself was a very old World War One squadron whose motto is "*Foxes lead the field.*" This and a Foxes head are emblazoned on its crest; It is still in service today.

Life on the squadron was fairly easy going apart from when you were on "Ops" and Eric and crew soon fell into the swing of things. A normal day would normally entail going across to the "flights" (A group of Nissan huts on the other side of the airfield). This was quite a long walk, like everyone else Eric signed out a bicycle for himself and most of the crew followed suit later. At "flights" they had a crew room, where crew sat, drank tea and gossiped.

By this time "Wickes's" crew had been allocated a brand new Lancaster with Squadron Markings PH-Y painted on its fuselage and soon they took it on its first air test. The air test proved perfect and they were all delighted at having a brand new machine for their tour. At this time during lunch in the Sergeants Mess everyone gathered around the notice board to read the battle order for that particular night. Wickes's crew were on it and they read out the petrol load required for the operation, it was full tanks (21.54 gallons). They knew it was to be a very long trip, but where to? That would come later at briefing.

Eric's first operation was in fact Chemnitz in Far Eastern Germany a few miles from Dresden which had been fire bombed the day before. A thousand bombers took part, it was very long and exhausting, but the crew came back elated at their success in getting back home safely.

This posting to Wickenby now presented Eric with a big problem; he was due to get married on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1945 to his dearly beloved fiancé Aimee having become engaged to her prior to leaving for Canada a year earlier.



Eric had first met his wife to be at a dance in St Andrews Church Hall, Clubmoor, Liverpool, one Saturday night. He always remembers this time fondly. He had arrived there with his friend Lenny Hughes and was waiting along with many other young men for a ladies choice dance to begin. He didn't hold much hope of being chosen, but a lovely young sixteen year old girl came confidently across the floor and asked him if he would like to dance. For Eric it was love at first sight and they became engaged six months later.

Luckily the CO realised Eric's Marriage problem and granted Eric and all the crew a five day emergency leave and so all the crew attended his wedding.



Eric and Aimee's wedding. Crew in attendance

The wedding took place at St Andrews Church, Clubmoor, Liverpool on the 6<sup>th</sup> of January 1945. After the wedding ceremony Aimee and Eric went to Blackpool for a three day honeymoon.

The crew remained on leave in Liverpool until Eric and Aimee returned from Blackpool, they as a crew left Liverpool from Lime Street station on the fifth day of their leave back to their Squadron at Wickenby.

Life went on as usual and soon the crew had a dozen operations under their belts and went on to seven days leave in the month of February. Eric went home to Liverpool and the other members of the crew went elsewhere.

On return it was with utter dismay, they found that their aircraft PH-Y had been shot down and the crew listed as missing in action. This was a new crew who had borrowed PH-Y for their first and only operation. The crew were really dismayed at losing PH-Y, but were then given PH-N, this was the oldest kite on the twelve Squadron, but it was a "lucky machine" that had ninety seven operations to its credit, so they didn't mind too much.



Wickes's Crew in front of PH-N

So life continued much as before , a series of events, such as air test, practical bombing, take-off and landing sessions, air gunnery with Spitfires as enemy and of course night bombing operations over Germany.

During nights off the station emptied out into Lincoln or more usually to the local pub. These were very lively evenings where everyone got a little drunk and sang their heads off. The station also put on dances with WAFF'S and invited ladies from local villages in attendance. While the camp cinema showed numerous films of the time.

Eric noticed as their tour progressed that like many other crews they started to get a little "twitchy" as they completed more and more operations. To date Wickes's crew had been lucky for they had survived three night fighter attacks by using a favourite tactic called "cork screwing". The fighter attacks always came from above the port or starboard wing of the bomber. For example if it was the starboard side under attack the air gunner concerned would shout "*Fighter Fighter starboard beam, prepare to corkscrew, starboard now*". On this command the pilot would partially throttle back the four engines and put the aircraft into a steep diving turn to starboard, this meant that by turning into the attacking aircraft it would have to steepen its turn also to keep on the target. By the time the Lancaster had lost about one thousand feet the pilot would pull it up and go in a steep turn to port and climb up a thousand feet, thus completing the first cycle of a corkscrew. Which would be repeated until the fighter broke off his attack. By the time he got his aircraft back on track the Lancaster had managed to escape out of sight, unlike today the attack planes had no way of re locating their foe. The aircraft suffered little damage from these attacks except during an attack by an ME 109 the tail fin being partially shot away.

Navigational tactics during an operation could also endanger the aircraft and many aircraft collided and blew up when navigators took an action which was called "Dog Legging". This happens when the navigator realised he would be too early over the target and would have to take time losing action which couldn't be actioned simply by reducing airspeed (Usually navigators had plus or minus three minutes tolerance over the target). Dog legging meant altering course off the briefed track by sixty degrees for three minutes to starboard or port, this meant that the bomber would be cutting directly across the main bomber stream all virtually unseen at night. Usually the dog leg aimed to lose three minutes of time, so after three minutes the navigator turned the opposite way through one hundred and twenty degrees for a further three minutes, and then the navigator turned the bomber back on track to the target. This would effectively put him back on time by three minutes. He would repeat this action again if he still found it necessary to lose more time. It was an extremely dangerous tactic to undertake as there was a huge risk of collision.

They also successfully survived flying through anti- aircraft flack box barrages, apart from loud explosions from nearby exploding shells and the clatter of shrapnel on the fuselage; they suffered little damage from the running of the gauntlet.

Soon Wickes's crew became the senior crew on the Squadron with twenty three operations to their credit and so with a final operation to Heligoland the war came to a close, although an armistice had yet to be agreed upon.

By this time PH-N had completed one hundred operations and was awarded by the Squadron members with a DFC and they all celebrated that night in the mess.

Things were in a bad state in Europe. The Dutch particularly were all starving, so the Germans agreed on "a safe passage" for a massive air drop on Holland. This was carried out by our bomber command and the USA Eighth Air Force which flew B17 Fortress bombers. This huge Operation was given the code name "MANNA" by the British and "CHOWHOUND" by the Americans and so Eric continued on Ops, but this time instead of bombs Wickes's crew dropped food, and didn't they come down low, zooming across the flat, flooded landscape of Holland at zero feet, with hundreds of Dutch civilians waving to them as they passed over their villages.<sup>1</sup>

Eric's crew did four food drop operations, so he completed the Air War with twenty seven operations, three short of his tour of thirty. It had been a successful war for Wickes's crew but the icing on the cake was yet to come, when a few weeks later whilst on end of war leave Eric discovered he had been awarded the DFM (Distinguished Flying Medal) while Alec Wickes (Now and officer) had been awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross) and so they all disbanded and took de mob leave. **INSERT PHOTO OF DFM**

Eric for his part was very unsettled for in January 1945 he had become a married man and now had a wife to consider. He now realised that he enjoyed service life and loved flying and after a long talk with Aimee they decided to continue RAF life together/ come what may. He signed on for a further eight years. Later he extended this to twelve years. Finally as time passed by for the full twenty two years which entitled him to a full retirement pension at the age of forty? This also meant that he could live out with Aimee and she would receive a

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<sup>1</sup> See later Eric is honoured by the Dutch people and travelled to Holland in 1985

living out allowance along with her marriage allowance. As a married couple they were financially comfortable compared to many young couples settled in Civity Street at the time.

Eric had left Wickenby and the crew had dispersed while he in turn was at a holding unit on an old airfield called Snaith in Yorkshire. Aimee then was living with her sister Lillian while continuing with her post wartime job as a machinist at Lybro Clothiers; they only met at weekends and on leave. This was rather an unsatisfactory arrangement for them both but they accepted it and the short term separation until he got his life on a more permanent station.

Unfortunately this was not to be as he was posted in May 1946 to RAF Dishforth in Yorkshire on a heavy conversion unit on York Transport Aircraft. This would ultimately mean that shortly he would be posted on to a Transport Command Squadron and would be spending lots of his time out of the country on route flying to the middle and far-east, at least once a month. Aimee was not happy about this, but accepted the enforced separation philosophically.

There was one good piece of news that came out of this new posting. Seemingly his old war time skipper Alec Wickes had not left the service and returned to New Zealand, but had signed on with the RAF. He too had been posted to Dishforth and had asked for his old navigator to join him there on the next available course. This request was granted so they met up once again and flew together for nearly three more years.

It is worth mentioning at this point that aircrew on obtaining their wings were promoted to the rank of Sergeant. Some were commissioned as officers. After one year Sergeants were promoted to Flight Sergeant and a year after that they became Warrant Officers. By Easter 1946 Eric had become a Warrant Officer. These ranks were not permanent however and only acting by definition as he explains later in this account.

Soon, Eric with his old pilot Alec Wickes (Now a Flight Lieutenant) completed their course on the York Transport, this plane is a development of a Lancaster Bomber, but with a large under slung roomy fuselage designed to carry both cargo and passengers or both.



AVRO YORK

They were posted in July 1946 to Holmsley South near Bournemouth an airfield situated right in the centre of the New Forest. Here they picked up a flight engineer, radio operator and an air quartermaster and so joined 246 Squadron, Transport Command.

They had only been on the Squadron two days when Alec approached Eric and said "*get your maps and charts together we are going on a ten day round trip to India tomorrow*". This entailed a five days each way flight which was achieved by slipping crews in Egypt (This means one crew rested in Egypt and the other went on and Eric's crew followed with another plane the next day). The route was UK to Castel Benito, Tripoli, from there to Heliopolis in Cairo, then to Shaibah, Iraq, to Karachi, India and then on to Palam near Delhi. It was all daytime flying, they night stopped at Tripoli and slipped crews at Heliopolis for one day. They night stopped at Karachi and after Palam they returned to UK on a reverse flight order. These were gruelling flights and they all came back greatly fatigued (Today known as jet lag).

Such flights had their compensations and such was the case here in the form of smuggling. This was quite easy in those early days of peace. The British public had been deprived of luxury goods for many years and now had money to spend. There were no customs officers on any of the airfields and strangely, at many places along the routes luxury items like watches, jewellery, nylons, perfumes and ladies shoes were readily available and cheap. One of the most popular items smuggled in by the crews was large Chinese embossed Indian carpets from Karachi. They cost about thirty pounds in Karachi and sold for around one

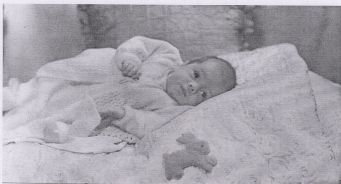
hundred and fifty pounds in the UK. Smuggling became so well known in Cambridge (a later transport station) that at nights in the Criterion Hotel Bar transport crews would be approached by young ladies with a torn out copy of an advert from some American Magazines, this would be pocketed by the would be smuggler along with an outline of the ladies foot and this pattern would be faithfully copied by a back street shoemaker in Karachi for five pounds and later sold in UK to the lady for fifteen pounds. This also applied to all the other short supply goods mentioned. This smuggling continued all the time Eric was on Transport Command to late 1948. Finally ended when a Customs Airfield was established at RAF Lyneham and all future route Yorks had to call there for customs clearance. From then on all the crew's duty free allowance was restricted to a bottle of whisky and two hundred cigarettes, all other imports were taxed and so ended smuggling – more or less.

Eric and Alec were only at Holmsley South for about four months then they were posted to 242 Squadron at Oakington, ten miles from Cambridge. At Oakington they had a new role flying Yorks with both passengers and freight and their route had now been extended to include Singapore and RAF Changi. Flying basically the same route as before, but now including either Dum Dum near Calcutta or Negombo in Ceylon. The choice of which route depended on the position and activity of the monsoon rains at the time.

Most of the time on the UCS route so called, was uneventful, except for one incident halfway across the Indian Ocean on enroute from Changi to Negombo. Eric – as navigators do, was taking a merpass of the sun with his sextant, when his astrodome blew off and away went the dome and the sextant. He was rather shaken as were the rest of the cabin crew, but soon they all settled down to a rather noisy and windy flight. Luckily there was no rain and at Negombo the ground crew sealed the opening temporarily and so they were able to continue for home next day.

Eric and Alec carried on flying Yorks on 242 Squadron until the end of 1947. The Alec was posted to the Empire Air Training School at Shawbury and Eric to 148 Squadron at Upwood near Peterborough and back on Lancaster's at Bomber Command again.

It was whilst on this Squadron that he received the news on 14<sup>th</sup> January 1948 that his wife Almee had given birth to a baby girl, later to be christened as Sandra. (So named after the homing search light beacons present on Bomber Command during the war).



Newly Born Sandra

This period in their married lives meant that for once they could be together even though accommodation was hard to come by. However they struck lucky and Eric was able to hire an eighteen foot caravan situated about half a mile from the RAF Station gates.



Eric and Sandra outside the Caravan.



They were very happy there, but by February 1948 Eric was on the move once more, being posted to RAF Wyton, (15 Squadron Bomber Command) twelve miles away from Upwood towards Huntingdon. Eric would commute by bicycle.

Luckily they had just started building new married quarters at Wyton and after a few months they moved from the caravan into brand new married quarters on the camp at Wyton itself.

These were very settled times for them both and baby Sandra. Eric was now flying Lincolns. This was really a stretched version of the Lancaster, but updated in several ways, yet still obsolete, now that Canberra's and V bombers would soon be coming into service.

Never the less life was now settled and enjoyable for Eric and Aimee, but for how long? Unfortunately it was not for long at all, by April 1950 he was posted to RAF Marham, near Kings Lynn, Norfolk and so they had to vacate their quarters and move on once again. Luckily this station was also embarked on a big building scheme, but quarters would not become available for about eighteen months. Luck was again on their side and they managed to rent a self-contained flat over a general store in Downham Market. So they all settled down yet again. Aimee and Sandra were very happy there and became lifelong friends with the owners of the flat. However this meant that Eric had to cycle back and forward to work each day which was rather a bind (Twelve miles each way). Once the building started he was able to hitch a lift with the Lorries delivering materials for the building of the new runways.



Sandra in plane at Marham with son of their flat owner

Marham turned out to be a very special posting; he became part of a team chosen to form a new conversion unit because the RAF had decided to re-equip their Bomber Squadrons with B 29 Bombers from the USAF (United States Air Force). The B29 had proved itself in the Japanese theatre of war and was seen as a perfect stop gap plane until the Squadrons of the RAF were re-equipped with jets.



B 29

Initially these new crews were all converted on to the B29 by American crews and Eric because he was already familiar with the "Norden" bomb site became a Bombing Instructor when the first of the new RAF B29 Squadrons came into conversion. The B29 was known in the RAF as the Washington and he remembers up to eight Squadrons of RAF air crew that he was involved in training. The conversion unit then finally became a full Squadron in its own right and was given the title 35 Squadron. He now served on the new Squadron as a Navigator/Bomber Aimer.

A year later Eric was able to move into a new married quarter on the base, this was a three bedroom semi-detached house with all mod cons of the day.

During his time at Marham Her Majesty the Queen visited the base and the next door married quarter was inspected by her. All the children were lined up to meet her.



Queens Visit to Marham

He remained at Marham until June 1956. Sandra grew up and then at five years old attended a small "huttet" infant school set up by the camp authorities for Eric's part, life settled down to the usual humdrum Squadron life, except now he was a full Flight Sergeant but life was similar to before. Cross country exercises, bombing and gunnery etc. Life had become quite boring.

Things changed in 1955 when other bomber squadrons in the RAF were now being re equipped with jet bombers and the B 29 crews had the very pleasant task of ferrying a well-used B29 back to the USA.

Eric was lucky and made three transatlantic crossings, firstly via Iceland to near New York and then down to Dover in Delaware. They night stopped at Dover and next day flew via Montgomery in Alabama and then on to their destination at Davies Monthan Air Force Base near Tucson, Arizona, a very successful flight to a huge desert airfield full of thousands of moth balled military aircraft stretching out into the desert as far as the eye could see. It really brought home to him the enormity of the American Air Force and how it now had an Air Force fully equipped with jet planes.

The crews returned to Marham courtesy of American civil and military transport planes as passengers.

Later at Marham 35 Squadron converted on to the jet Canberra Bomber.



Pilot and Radar man with Eric and a Canberra

It took Eric quite a while to adjust to the new speeds and altitudes of the Canberra, then gradually as before he settled down to normal Squadron life.

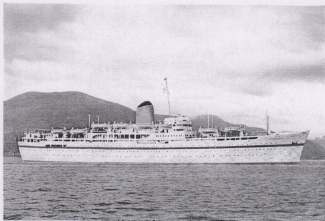
He remained at Marham until June 1956, until the whole Squadron was relocated to RAF Upwood and so he completed a full circle in Bomber Command. Shortly after arriving Aimee and Sandra moved into a new quarter on the base and Sandra went on to the village school in Ramsey village.

Eric was only at Upwood a week when the Suez Canal crises occurred, this was when the canal was nationalised by Colonel Nassar and closed to shipping. British and French Governments strongly objected to this action and several Squadrons of Canberra's were posted out to Akrotiri in Cyprus, 35 Squadron being one of them. As history shows this campaign to open up and free the blockaded Suez Canal which was aided and abetted by France and Israel became an utter farce and even after successful landing of troops in the zone and one bombing raid by RAF Canberra's on Cairo Radio Station the whole force had to withdraw, like whipped dogs since the United Nations with USA in the lead, insisted that this

action was against International Law and that sanctions would be taken against us all if we disobeyed the UN's orders.

Once again Eric was back at RAF Upwood to whatever lay ahead, he didn't have to wait too long, by early July 1957 he was posted to Kuala Lumpur in Malaya to the Department of Psychological Warfare (Whatever that was).

So by late July 1957 Eric found himself on the troop ship SS Oxfordshire along with Aimee and Sandra, as he had organised an accompanied passage for them.



SS. "OXFORDSHIRE"

BIBBY



LINE

DINNER

Crepe Cakes

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Poached Turbot - Sauce

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Roast Quarters of Lamb - Mint Sauce

Garden Peas

Potatoes: Roast & Boiled

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Moka Ice Cream

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Dessert

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Coffee

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Clocks will be Advanced  
30 Minutes at Midnight Tonight

S.S. "OXFORDSHIRE" 4th July, 1957

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The ship had to go via Durban, South Africa, because the Suez Canal was still closed to shipping. When they reached Durban they were on the first troop ship to call there since the end of World War 2. In those days the "troop ships" were always met by the "Lady in White" who sang patriotic songs over a very loud PA system and the citizens welcomed all the troops as they passed through. Now as patriotic as ever, she came out of retirement to welcome them all both in and out of the harbour during their twelve hour stay. As the Oxfordshire left Durban at dusk she was on the quay and sang them away with land of hope and glory. It was a very emotional experience for all on board.

A couple of weeks later they arrived early morning at Singapore and they all spent the day sight-seeing in Singapore City, before boarding a sleeper train bound for Kuala Lumpur (KL). The night trip was uneventful in spite of terrorist activity in certain areas of the route. All servicemen including Eric were issued with rifles and revolvers.

They arrived at KL early morning and took up residence for a few days in the Paramount Hotel in Batu Road.



Paramount Hotel

It took Eric and family a few days to get settled in but soon they were safely billeted in an RAF civilian hiring at an area called Brickfields. Shown below.



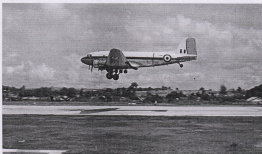
Meanwhile Eric acquired an old Standard 9 saloon car for a small sum and soon was using it to get himself and family to and fro from hiring to airfield and elsewhere. In fact life became very pleasant indeed, Sandra was soon enrolled in the local British Army School and was bussed into lessons every weekday. These lessons finished at 1pm every day, Aimee and Sandra taxied to the airfield nearly every day where they met up with Eric at the Naffe Club and swimming pool, since he had usually finished the days flying duties by then. The family

later moved into a small bungalow at Petaling Jaya and new housing estate on the outskirts of KL.



Standard 9 outside bungalow 6 Jalon Chowan

Eric discovered that he was now a navigator attached to a flight of three old Dakota Transport Planes of World War Two vintage, but still fully operational. They were known as "The Voice Flight" each was named as "Faith" "Hope" and "Charity" and had been especially adapted to carry out loud hailing operations for the Department of Psychological Warfare.



DAKOTA

Each Dakota carried four ground tannoy loud speakers securely attached to the underside of the fuselage on a metal girder pointing out to port (Left) (Can be seen in photo just above wheels). Power to these was in the form of a huge emergency AC Ground Generator and was firmly bolted in the centre of the empty fuselage along with four by fifty vault valve



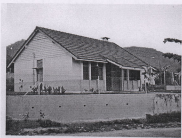
operated amplifiers which stood at each corner of the generator. Messages in various local languages such as Chinese, Malayan and Indian were recorded on an endless tape and so messages were sent out to various terrorist groups in their jungle hideouts asking them to surrender. These terrorist groups were determined to break away from the British Empire and form a free Malaya, but not as a democratic government, but as a Communist one which the British Government was not prepared to sanction.

Eric soon found out that this was quite a dangerous job since all the flights were done at a very low level and followed a square search pattern at a very low airspeed which meant flying near the aircrafts stalling speed. Most flights were performed early morning and lasted three to four hours every day seven days a week, but not in bad weather conditions.

Paint Your Wagon (Not the film later released starring Clint Eastwood and Lee Marvin) was a very popular musical on Broadway and soon the voice flight had adapted one of its songs as a signature tune, namely "I Talk To The Trees" (Clint Eastwood later sang this in the film). It was a very exacting job, but seemed to get results. As the terrorist war progressed so the terrorist groups gave ground more and more towards the Siamese Border. Soon the voice flight was on the move and found themselves at Bayen Nepas a small airfield on Penang Island.

Aimee and Sandra soon followed a few days later when Eric had obtained a small Bungalow hiring at a small hamlet on the Island named Buket Glugar. This was also HQ for an RAF Boat Squadron for the region and several high speed launches were birthed there for sea patrols in that region. The voice flights were made very welcome by them and gave them access to their mess and outside film show which the family enjoyed. Eric was also a member of the Army Sergeants Mess at Minden Barracks which allowed them to use the facilities including swimming pool, this was near to their home in Green Lane.





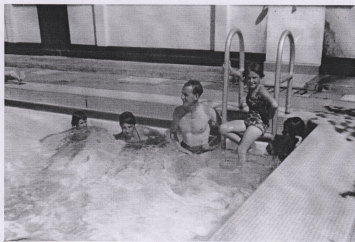
Green Lane 1950's (and previous picture)



Green Lane as it was in 2000 (Visited by Sandra)



The swimming pool at Minden Barracks 2000 (visited by Sandra, it hasn't changed)



As above as it was Sandra on steps



Sandra and Aimee in George Town in 1958



Sandra and Eddie in George Town in 2000

During the move to Penang, there was a tragedy the Dakota's were being used to carry freight to their new base in Penang and since the airfield had no night facilities one of the planes fully laden was in a hurry to take off to get there before nightfall and in his haste the pilot Flight Lieutenant Kevin Kelleher failed to carry out his ground checks and took off with his elevator locks still inserted in the elevators in the fully up position. On take-off he went straight up in the air and stalled and crashed on the end of the runway. Fortunately no one

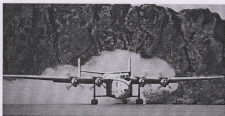
was injured but the plane was a write off. (I recently learned in December 2014 that Kevin had died). Now we only had "Hope" and "Charity" left.

In August 1959 Eric was promoted to Warrant Officer yet again, but this time he was of substantive rank and now known as a Master Navigator. He remained in this rank until he retired.

By the end of December 1959 the terrorist war came to a victorious end to the British and Commonwealth Forces. The terrorists surrendered in droves. The Chinese Leader Chin Peng disappeared over the Thai Border and presumably ended up back in Communist China (He lived to a good age and died last year 2013). It was also the end of the British Governing in Malaya as the country became an Independent state. At the beginning of January 1960 the Malayans celebrated MERDEKA (Freedom) and became known as Malaysia. On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1960 Eric and family arrived by air into London's Heathrow. After a visit to Air Ministry Eric was posted (After a month's leave) to Dishforth

It should be mentioned at this point that prior to leaving Malaya Eric had ordered a new Hillman Minx Car from a dealer in George Town, Penang. In those distant days it was almost impossible to buy a new car in the UK as they all went for export and any UK models carried a huge purchase tax burden. However since he was then deemed as overseas he was able to purchase a new model free of taxes which was duly deducted from the export line in the UK and was awaiting his collection for when he had finally arrived home. This collection was duly made by him whilst on leave and so he became the owner of a brand new Hillman Minx

At Dishforth instead of York Aircraft he found himself on a twelve week conversion course on the mighty Bristol Beverley a workhorse transport aircraft as navigator.



Bristol Beverley

In early 1960 Eric finished the conversion and was posted to 47 Squadron at Abingdon in Oxfordshire. A lovely area to be posted to. With his seniority he soon moved into married quarter whilst his daughter Sandra who had passed the eleven plus examine in Malaya, moved into the local Grammar School, so the Parkers were settled once more except for the number of detachments he would have to suffer, now that he was back in Transport Command.

Whilst stationed on the new base apart from the usual crew training so named as continuation training, they were also involved in para trooping and heavy drop training, but most of the time the crews were out of the country ferrying passengers and freight to all parts of the Med, Middle East and all over Africa north of the equator. For example the Squadron flew out to Eastleigh/Nairobi, Kenya for a month in November 1962 and made numerous food drops to the famine suffering areas of Kenya in the northern frontier district on the Ethiopian border, either air dropping or landing with heavy supplies, on very short air strips carved out of the bush. Short field landings and take offs were a speciality for the Beverley with its four reverse thrust engines and very low landing speeds and robust under carriage. The Squadron spent Christmas in Nairobi and returned to UK in January 1963. Satisfied that they had done a good humanitarian job in Africa.

During his time with 47 Squadron he made several interesting trips, one in particular was to a place called Manfe in the British Cameroons; this meant crossing the Sahara Desert with a load of heavy freight for a new airfield being constructed there right in the middle of a dense jungle region. On his first flight, his navigation took him to a couple of miles of the new airstrip, but unfortunately for him all homing devices on the airfield had broken down, making it impossible to find the airfield among the dense canopy of trees. They flew around for about half an hours searching vainly for visual contact, but to no avail. But hope came from an unsuspected source, as one of the passengers, a civilian air engineer, returning to Manfe from UK leave came forward and recognising a nearby river bend was able to direct them to the much concealed airstrip. Relief was expressed all round as fuel was getting critical by this time and they would have had to consider diverting to Kano a big airfield in Nigeria.

The second trip was no problem as all the radio waves were fully serviceable, on returning to UK Eric had to report sick as he found out he had contracted amoebic dysentery and spent three weeks in isolation hospital at RAF Ery, Norfolk. He finally got clearance for the disease and was soon back on flying with the Squadron, with a medical restriction which

supposedly was to restrict his flying to Europe only but the squadron ignored this and soon he was back en route to Khormaksa, Aiden. This airfield served the port of Aiden and the Yemen.

This was at the time when Britain was withdrawing from the smaller outposts in the middle and Far East. With many others on the squadron he helped in this withdrawal. Evacuating troops and valuable freight back to the UK.

Eric remained with 47 Squadron until August 1964, when he applied for a one year home posting which airmen ending long service were entitled to receive under RAF regulations.

The Parker family packed their bags and bought a brand new semi-detached house at Formby. This house had a large back garden. The house had been purchased and equipped during an earlier leave period. His new posting was to an RAF telephone exchange at Haydock – between Liverpool and Manchester alongside the Haydock Racecourse. This exchange also supported a Radar tracking unit in its grounds. In his last year Eric became a RT controller on the unit. (A very cushy posting). Although the hours could be very irregular depending on when the new V bomber force wanted to practice their radar bombing. As he now still had the Hillman Minx, the journey from Formby was not onerous.









Series of photographs of 14 Osborne Road 1980's 90's prior to alterations<sup>2</sup>

At this time the role of the Plotting Unit should be explained. Its purpose was to allow the V Bomber Force to practice its blind bombing techniques. Each unit (There were several dotted over the UK) had two radar dishes in cabins, it was the task of the operators to track the V Bombers as they made their bombing run in for the target, which in this case was the dead centre of the plotting table. So that as they came into range information from the dishes was passed to this part of the unit.

This triggered off the ink filled tracker arm fixed on the plotting table and this track continued towards the table centre until the bomber pilot called bomb had gone then the plotting arm stopped drawing. The by a series of mathematical tables a controller was able to calculate where the bomb would have struck in relation to the target on the plotting table centre and the results were then passed to the bomber by VHF radio. The V Bomber Force honed its blind bombing skills in this way and became more proficient.

The bombers would fly from their various bases situated in other parts of the UK and ostensibly bomb Haydock and other such units situated elsewhere in the course of the exercise.

<sup>2</sup> See later 1997 photographs of [redacted] Alterations completed by Wagnall's Builders

*Eric quite enjoyed his short time at Haydock and recalls one very special evening which has stayed with him until this day. About 1030pm all RT discipline on the unit was broken when a V Bomber pilot called him up and said "Have you heard the news? President Kennedy has been assassinated." Soon the airwaves were awash with uncontrolled chatter. It seemed so strange as strict radio discipline had always been the rule.*

Soon Eric's time at Haydock and indeed the RAF ended. He departed in late August 1964, on his last but one day to the de mob centre just outside Blackpool and took a bed there for the night. Next morning he went through all the de mob procedures and finally was kitted out at the clothing store with a full set of civilian gear. This gear was exactly the same as that given to conscripts at the end of the World War 2 – 1945-1948 and comprised: Hat, shirt, tie, three piece suit, socks and shoes, and belted raincoat. Eric found them handy for working in, in the garden and other odd jobs. He also received his final wages which surprisingly contained a £12 bonus for winning his DFM. Seemingly officers received £25 for their DFC's, but were expected to forgo this amount and donate it to the RAF Benevolent Fund (Or so he was told).

Eric became a civilian once more and he felt quite disconsolate as he made his way home to his new house in Formby and new life with his wife and daughter. He had made plans for his future, during his last few years at RAF Abingdon and he now intended that his new work life would be that of a schoolmaster and so during that period he attended many educational courses provided by the RAF to obtain the necessary GCE's to gain entry to a training college.

During this time he obtained good passes of GCE's in Maths, English Language, English Literature, Navigation, Chemistry, Geography and General Paper. These were quite sufficient at that time for entry into college. He was finally accepted by Edge Hill Teachers Training College, near Ormskirk, Lancashire, which is situated about twelve miles inland from the coast of Formby, which is now a part of Merseyside (Since 1974) and so he travelled to and fro each day in the comfort of his Hillman Minx (Quite a change from his cycling days in the RAF).

Edge Hill was a very stately college in lovely grounds and as a former lowly lad from West Derby, he felt very privileged to be a mature student there. This mature status meant that he only had to complete a two year course and so he joined up with a junior course of students that had just completed their first year's study. He joined this course at the beginning of the Easter Term 1965 along with about six other mature students, both men and women were on the course.

For his main subjects he elected to specialise in Geography and Rural Science as he still maintained his love of the outdoors and the wider world. Rural Science comprised many topics such as general gardening, soil science, botany, chemistry and he found it very interesting especially as his new house in Formby embraced an extra-large garden. (As earlier photographs have shown).

The Geography course was equally comprehensive and he found it quite fulfilling as it embraced so many subjects that he had used every day as his role as RAF Navigator. Such topics as map projections, meteorology, geology, astronomy, time and tides, all were relevant to him and so he found the course quite absorbing and easy.

During the two years at Edge Hill Eric had to complete a full school term teaching practice for each of the years, for the first year he was lucky and completed his practice at Holy Trinity Junior School in Formby which was very convenient for him.

For the second year term of practice he taught at Ormskirk Secondary School. He enjoyed both these postings and learned a lot about handling children and general classroom procedures.

Finally he qualified and left college and took up a position at St Luke's C of E School in Formby.



This was a typical small village school still maintaining its links with the church even though this was now the responsibility of the local council.

The headmistress at this time was an old fashioned spinster named Miss Cubbons and she ruled the school with a fair but firm hand. Eric remembers his opening week with her when one day she said to him *"Remember this Mr Parker, you don't want children to like you, you want them to respect you and liking you will follow."* Eric took this on board and it served him in good stead during his twenty two years of teaching.

During his first two years at St Luke's Eric was in charge of second year Juniors and settled in well until Miss Cubbons retired and a new headmaster was appointed, a Mr Brian Walter Mills who was formerly Deputy Head at St Peters, Formby.

Eric and Brian became firm friends almost overnight and when the school reconvened at the end of the summer holidays he moved Eric up to fourth year junior class teacher. Eric was delighted with his new post and soon spread his wings, since the new head although quite traditional, was not afraid to accept new challenges. This suited Eric and he spread his wings into all sorts of educational topics of curricular and non-curricular. By and large the boys and girls of the fourth year responded well to his efforts and he gained the respect not only of the children but their parents as well.