

Bob Sharrock June 1943 – Feb 1946 (A brief career in the RAF)

I joined the Air Force in June 1943, aged 18, and reported to the Lords Cricket Ground in London. We were billeted in blocks of flats nearby. Here we were issued with uniform, given numerous inoculation jabs, initiated into drill exercises and introduced to canteen food. Not a bit like home cooking.

About 2 weeks later we were posted to Torquay for Initial Training. Here we endured physical training, some theoretical training into navigation, drill, Morse code, even skeet shooting on Daddy Hole Plain. When we moved from one site to another it was either running or at a marching pace faster than the army used. This lasted for about six weeks and we were fortunate to have good hot weather. Most of the time it was very enjoyable.

The next posting was to St Athan in South Wales. Here we started our technical training. Most of us were allocated the Halifax bomber, others the Stirling, the Lancaster and a few to Sunderland flying boats. I was disappointed not to be one of the latter. All these were four engined aircraft and it was only these that had a Flight Engineer.

Most of the time was spent in lecture groups and my notebooks give an idea of the type of information we were given. We also had drill, P.T., swimming and other recreational activities.

It was about this time that, when on leave, I went to a dance at the Parish Rooms at Prescot and met Dorothy Marsden.

The following March (1944) I was posted to 1664 Heavy Conversion Unit at Dishforth. This was where we met up with aircrews that had trained on two-engined aircraft and were moving on to heavy bombers. In this case they were Halifax bombers. We had further practical training and were attached to a crew. They were all Canadian with a pilot by the name of Willard MacKeracher. The unit was in 6 Group, operated by the Royal Canadian Air Force, which occupied the area of North Yorkshire.

We did six exercises of Circuits and Landings. These were a series of take off, fly round the airfield and land. They were mainly to familiarise the pilot and engineer with handling the aircraft. This took about 10 hours. A further hour was spent doing three engined landings. Three further trips were made to give the Gunners and the Bomb Aimer some practice but it was on this third trip that we crashed on landing. It was apparent and subsequently reported that we had suffered an engine failure which slewed us over to miss the runway.

It was a miracle that not one of the crew was killed. All I remember is being knocked about and then opening my eyes to see that I was a few yards in front of the nose of the aircraft. The first person to reach me was an Italian prisoner of war who helped me to get out my parachute harness. Help soon arrived and four of us were taken by ambulance to Northallerton hospital.

Examination showed that I had a compressed fracture of the vertebrae in the lumbar region. A plaster of paris jacket was applied which extended from the groin to the neck. I had a few days in bed while the jacket hardened and dried and then I was able to walk about fairly normally. The only difficulty was that I could not bend down. I was then given a couple of week's leave, which I spent at home.

I was then posted to a convalescent home in Hoylake on the Wirral. This was called The Leas and was previously a girl's school. It was provided to recuperate injured aircrew and there were a number of chaps wearing plaster jackets similar to mine.