

SERVICE RECORD

JOHN HENRY (JACK) THOMAS

A424515

DATE OF BIRTH: 14TH September 1923

Enlisting in the R.A.A.F in December 1941 my call-up was delayed until September 1942, as the Army had conscripted me in early 1942. My concern was that the Army was reluctant to release me and I was prevented from accepting the June, July and August call-ups by the Air Force. In early September an R.A.A.F recruiting van arrived at Hume Camp, Albury and the following morning I was on my way to Sydney for discharge from the Army.

I became an Aircraftsman II on the 12th September 1942 at Bradfield Park, Sydney, completed the twelve week initial training course and was classified for pilot training.

On the 9th December 1942 I was posted to No 8 Elementary Flying Training School, Narrandera N.S.W for training on Tiger Moth aircraft. After completion of a course lasting eight weeks, my logbook recorded 70 flying hours.

The next posting was to No 1 Service Flying Training School at Point Cook, Victoria, arriving there on the 7th February 1943. Flying training was on twin engine Airspeed Oxford aircraft operating from satellite airfields at Werribee, Lara and Little River. I received my Pilot's brevet on 16th June 1943 and became a Sergeant Pilot with 200 flying hours in my logbook. The ground subjects were rather onerous, but navigation being a form of Trigonometry and having been in an army artillery survey unit I found it an interesting subject. A Tasmanian trainee and self finished equal first in the course.

After Embarkation leave and a short stay at Bradfield Park I went by train to Brisbane, stayed two days in an army camp in West Brisbane and then boarded a U.S. army transport for the voyage to San Francisco. "NOORDAM" was a Dutch 2nd class passenger/cargo ship of 11,000 tons and the sea trip was an 18 day non stop run. Four days were spent in a U.S. army camp on Angel Island in San Francisco bay. The ferry to Angel Island also called at Alcatraz. Ken Jagger and I stepped onto the wharf and a guard, with Tommy gun and loud hailer, situated in a tower promptly ordered us back on board the ferry; we complied even more promptly.

The next part of the journey was from San Francisco (Oakland) to New York by troop train. In New York boarded the "AQUITANIA" a 46,500 ton sister ship of "TITANIC". The voyage to Greenock in Scotland was a solo trip of 5½ days. On board were 4,000 air force personnel and 7,800 American troops. Meals were twice daily only. In New York harbour the capsized French Ship 'NORMANDIE' was at the adjoining wharf.

The train trip from GREENOCK TO 11 P.R.D.C. Brighton on the English South Coast took place overnight, and in mid September was seconded (with Ken Jagger) to Empire Central Flying School, Hullavington. The purpose of this secondment was for comparison of training standards throughout the Empire Air Training Scheme. There

were 96 types of aircraft at this establishment. Shortly after returning to Brighton I was posted to No 18 Pilot Advanced Flying Unit at CHURCH LAWFORD (near RUGBY) IN WARWICKSHIRE. Completed course on Airspeed Oxford aircraft and now had 284 flying hours in logbook.

I was then posted to 21 Operational Training Unit Moreton in Marsh Gloucestershire and teamed up with crew. Unfortunately Navigator and Bomb Aimer dropped out and had to wait for next intake to complete crew. Completed course on Wellington Bombers on 27.4.1944 and now had 388 flying hours. It was at 21 O.T.U. sustained spinal injury in landing accident caused by instructor and failure of safety harness. Next posting was to 4.G.B.S. (Ground battle School) at Acaster Malbis in Yorkshire. Trained with the Kings Rifle Corps and the Coldstream Guards in self defence and escape routines plus night vision improvement. At the end of May posted to 1658 Heavy Conversion Unit (Ricall) in East Yorkshire where our crew was increased by the addition of Flight Engineer and totalled seven men. Completed course on Halifax MK2 Aircraft and had now 427 hrs, in logbook. Was posted to 102 (Ceylon) squadron Pocklington in East Yorkshire located 12 miles from York on the Hull/York road. After conversion onto Halifax MK3 Aircraft commenced operational duties on 12th July 1944 and completed tour of operations on 22nd January 1945.

The last five sorties the crew numbers had increased to eight now by the addition of a Mid Under Gunner in a nacelle using a point 5 calibre Machine Gun.

CREW LIST

FLYING OFFICER JACK THOMAS	PILOT	RAAF
PILOT OFFICER JACK WHITE	BOMB AIMER	RAAF
SERGEANT DEREK TURNER	NAVIGATOR	RAF
FLIGHT SERGEANT ROSS PEARSON	WIRELESS/OPERATOR	RAAF
SERGEANT JOHN HUGHES	FLIGHT ENGINEER	RAF
SERGEANT NAT GOLDBERG	MID UPPER GUNNER	RAF
FLYING OFFICER NEIL DAVIES	MID ^{UNDER} GUNNER	RAF
FLIGHT SERGEANT JOHN WILLIAMSON	REAR GUNNER	RAAF

Now had 613 flying hours in logbook, thereafter I was posted to 21 O.T.U. Moreton In the Marsh, as a screen (instructor) Pilot where I remained until 22nd June 1945. Logbook total 693 hours. Then posted to Brighton for Repatriation to Australia. Travelled on R.M.S. "STRATHEDEN" arriving in Sydney mid November 1945 and was discharged on 7th December 1945.

SORTIES CARRIED OUT

12-7-44	Les Hauts Buisson	Night raid returned with bomb load as unserviceability of equipment prevented bombing
17-7-44	Bois De La Haie	Daylight raid
18-7-44	Vaires	Daylight raid on Paris Rail Depot
20-7-44	Chapelle Notre Dame	Daylight raid
03-8-44	Foret De Nieppe	Daylight raid
05-8-44	Foret De Nieppe	Daylight raid
01-8-44	Novelle En Chausse II	Daylight raid
07-8-44	Battle Area 3	Night raid on the Falaise Gap east of Caen & attack destroyed a Panzer division, 70 000 ton ammunition dump and allowed British and Canadian armies to attack the defending German forces.
08-8-44	Belle Croix	Daylight raid
11-8-44	Somain	Daylight raid on Marshalling yards
15-8-44	Eindhoven Holland	Daylight raid on Philips Electrical works
16-8-44	Kiel	Night raid on Submarine Pens & supporting factories
18-8-44	Sterkrade	Night raid on German Synthetic oil refinery
25-8-44	Wemars Capelle	Daylight raid
31-8-44	Lumbres	Daylight raid
09-9-44	Le Harve	Daylight raid cancelled with 7/10 cloud over target, bombs dropped in English Channel narrowly missing H.M.S. Warspite and H.M.S. Black Prince bombarding Le Harve, but well out of their assigned zone, trespassing in R.A.F. bomb disposal area
10-9-44	Le Harve	Daylight raid
11-9-44	Gelsenkirchen	Daylight raid on German Synthetic Oil refinery intense flak barrage
12-9-44	Munster	Daylight raid, 400 fighter escort Mustang & Spitfires
20-9-44	Calais	Daylight raid
7-10-44	Cleve	Daylight raid with large fighter escort
14-10-44	Duisberg	Daylight raid, RAF dropped 4,500 tons mid morning, USAAC bombed early afternoon and RAF bombed before midnight. Total bomb load 10,000 tons
15-10-44	Wilhemshaven	Night raid on Naval Base
25-10-44	Essen	Daylight raid
30-10-44	Cologne	Night raid, Target covered by cloud P.F.F. used sky markers and target was successfully bombed by main force
02-11-44	Dusseldorf	Night raid with a Night Fighter firing & missing

- 18-11-44 Munster Daylight raid and Master Bomber in a Lancaster lost rear turret from a bomb dropped from above. He passed in front of me and I could see right up the fuselage to the cockpit.

I became hospitalised with severe tonsillitis at this time for a period of two weeks. Subsequently I had a tonsillectomy in March 1945.

From 25-11-44 to 20-12-44, Britain and Europe experienced the coldest winter for 40 years and air operations were at a standstill. Low cloud, snow, and ice were constant. The coldest day was 2 Fahrenheit.

- 24-12-44 Mulheim Airfield Daylight raid when RAF and USAAC bombed 8 major German airbases under the protection of an enormous fighter cover... On take-off our airspeed indicator became unserviceable and navigational aids and bombsight were rendered useless. Target was successfully bombed by closely formatting with another Halifax. Landed at Carnaby as home airfield under cloud cover.

- 28-12-44 Munchen-Gladbach Night raid

- 29-12-44 Koblenz Daylight raid

- 02-01-45 Ludwigshafen Night raid

- 05-01-45 Hanover Night raid, near collision when a FW190 crossed our bow from right to left.

- 13-01-45 Saarbrücken Night raid

- 16-01-45 Madgeburg Night raid

- 22-01-45 Gelsenkirchen Night raid

Typical procedures carried out in preparation for night bombing raid over Germany

Daylight 0745

- 0630 Reveille (broadcast over Tannoy)
0700 to 0830 Breakfast available in Messes
0830 Pilots report to flight office (if not already booked for 1 hour Link trainer session). Other crew members report to their respective sections.
1000 Notification of operations planned for tonight. War list drawn up in each flight office in accordance with number of aircraft by Operational Plan.
1100 Check of aircraft to operate, pilot and flight sergeant in charge of ground crew talk over vital points and airtest aircraft where necessary
1200 to 1300 Lunch available at Messes..

1.30pm to 3.30pm	Crews take rest
3.30pm	Report back to sections, Shortly, call for all operational crews to go to respective messes for operational meal (Bacon, eggs, tomato, toast, tea etc.) thence proceed to briefing Room at 4.15pm
4.15pm	Briefing room. All operational crews taking part are assembled. The squadron commander (wing Commander rank) arrives, says "sit down gentlemen" turns to the covered map on the wall, removes cover and announces the target for tonight (Magdeburg). The map has the route to the target indicated by a coloured tape, with changes of direction to avoid defended areas. The return flight is indicated by a coloured tape, again with changes of course to avoid defended areas. The Wing-Co states time of take off, E.T.A. (estimated time of arrival) having an accuracy of plus or minus 15 seconds.

He then says adjust your watches and everyone synchronises their wrist watches. The Wing-Co concludes his briefing and is followed by the intelligence officer, meteorology officer navigation leader, bombing leader, wireless leader, flight engineering leader and finally the gunnery leader. It is now about 5.15pm and the sun has set about 1 1/2 hrs ago.

The crews now travel to the Parachute section where they pick up their chute, don cold weather gear including flying boots and the gunners collect their heated flying suit. It will be cold, -45deg.c. at 24,000 feet.

The crews re-enter the crew buses and are transported to their respective aircraft which are around the airfield in dispersal bays. It is now about 5.35pm and take off has been set for 6pm. The aircraft nearest to the runway in use will start its engines in about 5 minutes and each aircraft thereafter will start engines so that when the first aircraft taxis from its dispersal point, onto the perimeter track, an orderly file of all the other aircraft involved begins.

The noise level created by the twenty, four engined Halifaxes moving round to the take-off position is very loud. As the first aircraft swings onto the runway it travels forward to ensure the tail wheel is straight before being locked in position. With brakes fully on, each engine in succession is run up to full revs and returned to idle. Now all four engines are opened up to 2,000 revs and the brakes released. The aircraft moves and begins to pick up speed as full revs (3,100 per minute) are achieved. Minimum take off speed, 120mph. is reached after a run of 1,200 metres, but usually held aircraft down until 130mph. showing, then lift off, squeeze brakes, lift undercarriage then the 5deg. of flap used for take off. At 160mph. engines throttled back to 2,300 revs. and climb to 2,000ft. level off, circle drome and set course for Germany. Each aircraft followed the above procedures and took off at little more than 20 second intervals.

The first 120 miles is flown at 2,000ft. to stay under enemy radar, then climb begins at 160 mph., 1,200ft. per minute initially but declining as the air gets thinner. The

Dutch coast is crossed about one hour after take off at a height of 12,000ft. Climb continues and 24,000ft. is reached; it is now 1¼ hrs. since take off. At 160mph. indicated air speed, the aircraft is now travelling at true air speed of 227mph. We are now well and truly in the danger zone as German radar is tracking us and directing their A/A guns and night fighters. At 24,000ft. it will take 1½ hrs. to reach Magdeburg. It is very cold and the air is clear. I had my side window open on the climb and when I tried to close it, no luck, it was frozen tight. Later I found the heel of my left thumb had been frost bitten through three glove layers from trying to force the window shut.

For 1½ hrs. the aircraft, weaved, skidded and undulated to avoid being a steady target for any night fighters trying to home in. By this time the inside of the windscreen had iced up so there was no forward vision. The bomb aimer became the forward eyes of the aircraft. The target area comes into view and the P.F.F. flares are visible; now the Master bomber could be heard on the R/T directing traffic. This is the most dangerous time of the operation. Steady course, steady speed, aircraft straight and level, bomb doors open, bomb aimer watching the target marker slide along the bombsight until it reaches the cross, Bombs Gone. The sudden release of 9,000lbs. of bombs in just over 1 second causes the aircraft to suddenly rise 200 feet. Bomb doors shut, but fly straight and level for one minute for aiming point photo. Then turning (rate 1 turn) to starboard to go on reciprocal course for home.

Now its nose down 220mph, which is 297mph. true air speed for eight minutes and levelling off at 16,000ft. on course at 160mph. Indicated (205 T.A.S.) This part of the return flight takes 2¼ hrs., constantly weaving, skidding, undulating. After this, descent commences at 300/400ft. per minute crossing the coast again at 10/12,000ft. and continuing until 2,000ft. then level off, and the aircraft, because of its lightened weight cruises easily in the range 210/230mph. After some 14 minutes of flight the outer circle lights of Pocklington Airfield are sighted and after receipt of permission to land, taxi to dispersal area, leave aircraft and ride on bus back to parachute section then to debriefing. The aircraft had been airborne for 6 hours 15 minutes. After debriefing back to mess for meal, as before, then to bed.

P.S. As Britain was subject to sudden cloud and fog cover, three emergency airfields were established, at Manston, Woodbridge and Carnaby, ringed by petrol filled piping, which ignited dispersed cloud or fog for safe landings. They were known as F.I.D.O. (Fog Intensive Disposal Of).

The most direct sea passage was from San Francisco (Oakland) to New York by motor ship. In New York heading the "MAUTANIA" a 36,500 ton steam ship at 17,000 tons average in Greenland in Scotland was a sea trip of 54 days. The load was 1,000 ex. force personnel and 7,000 American troops. Loads were taken into only 10 New York harbours the captured French Ship "NORMANDE" was at its anchoring point.

The first trip from GREENWICK TO 13 F.I.D.O. Brighton on the English coast from 10 miles offshore, on 4.10.44 September was mounted (with 1000 troops) to Royal Naval Flying School, Northfleet. The purpose of this experiment was to demonstrate the existing procedure throughout the Empire Air Training Scheme. There