



*MEMORIES
OF AN
AIRMAN*

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*To My Daughter,
My Grandchildren
and
My Great Grandchildren*



“I am 17³/₄ and have been in the Air Training Corps for 18 months. I have obtained proficiency in Morse code up to 6 words a minute in plain language and 4 blocks per minute in code (letters and numbers), passed a navigation (basic) exam and taken a course in the theory of flight ~ all of which allows me to volunteer for R.A.F. aircrew instead of waiting for call-up after my 18th birthday on 19.11.42.....”

Having obtained and filled in the necessary forms I was sent a railway pass and directions to report to R.A.F. Cardington ~ home of the airship R101 and balloon HQ of the R.A.F. ~ for medical and mental ability and agility.



Administrative Building, R.A.F. Cardington

This lasted three days, 1½ days for each test. The medical was very tough and held in a hanger containing cubicles for each specialist (doctor, dentist, optician, E.N.T., heart, lung etc). The idea was to start with just shorts on and go from one cubicle to another in order until, with any luck, you eventually came out of the last cubicle with flying colours. To give some idea of how tough this medical was, if anyone could not go cross-eyed without assistance they were referred to a medical orderly who gave them exercises to help correct the deficiency i.e. hold a pencil at arms length and bring it slowly to the nose keeping both eyes on the pencil until eventually they were able to cross their eyes unaided! This had to be achieved by the end of the 3 days.

Having passed the medical I was interviewed by the mental ability and agility examiners and informed I could volunteer as a bombardier, navigator, wireless operator/air gunner, or air gunner.

I opted for WOP/AG, completed the necessary enlistment papers and was informed that I would receive my call up papers following my 18th birthday.

These duly arrived in January, 1943 informing me that I had to report to St. John's Wood Aircrew Receiving Centre (A.C.R.C) on the Monday morning. I decided to have a short haircut on the Saturday prior to the Monday to avoid the *short back and sides* favoured by the service barbers! I reported to St. John's Wood at the appointed time with about 40 other aircrew trainees and we were marched to Abbey House, Regent's Park to be kitted out, paraded in front of a tailor who decided if a different size uniform was required or alterations made. We were then allocated billets (blocks of luxury flats) and told to fall in outside for haircut parade. Informing the Drill Corporal I had already had a short haircut the previous Saturday didn't go down very well and he suggested a tip to the civilian hairdresser might avoid any further loss of hair!!

The morning of our second day (Tuesday) we paraded for injections and vaccinations to be carried out at Abbey House. Abbey House had long corridors with rooms either side, the doors of which were set back in large recesses. We were told to walk down the corridors in single file but what we didn't realise was that in the recesses were medical orderlies with small tables on which were syringes and phials ready to give us our jabs and vaccinations as we walked pass with shirt sleeves rolled up. So, whilst one orderly pumped a syringe full of gunge into

one arm the orderly on the other side of the corridor was rubbing smallpox on the other arm and scratching it with a needle!!

We were at A.C.R.C for about three weeks by which time all our buttons and badges were shining, boots had been worked on with methylated spirits and boot polish to obtain a high shine and we knew how to lay out our kit for inspection.

Our last piece of advice before leaving A.C.R.C was a lecture on the methods of avoiding sexual diseases and a film showing the results if you were stupid enough not to. One of the films was American and in vivid technicolour! It had some of the lads passing out (whether they had been indulging or not, I don't know, but the effect was striking!). To us young virginal cadets only just eighteen the lecture had a big impact and the films put me right off obtaining carnal knowledge!

BRIDGNORTH

Our next posting was to Bridgnorth, initial training wing, where we would be learning square bashing (drill), small arms firing and learn the rigours of physical training and battle course.

This was to last twelve weeks at the end of which we would be assessed and if not up to scratch put back a course. We were assigned to huts which housed 26-30 cadets with our Drill Squad Corporal at one end in a private room and opposite was a room containing the hut cleaning materials. These huts were raised about 12 inches off the ground.



Each squad consisted of about 28-30 men known as flights, and assigned a letter ~ “A”, “B” or “C” etc. These flights joined together formed a squadron and were given a colour. The number of flights required to form a squadron depended upon the number of cadets on the camp. Usually a new intake formed about four flights and joined together as one squadron – so each intake consisted of about 120 men and probably four squadrons on the camp giving a total of approximately 500 men.

Whilst we were at breakfast the hut corporal would inspect the bed layouts – blankets and sheets had to be folded in a proper laid down manner, spare boots and cleaning material laid out at the foot of the bed. All beds and bedding had to be in perfect line when viewed from the end of the hut and any bed not in line or correctly set up was tipped on its side and had to be made up again on return from breakfast and reported to the hut corporal as ready for re-inspection.



INSIDE A BILLET AT BRIDGNORTH

We were initiated into the rigours of 'square bashing' by the drill corporals. First of all we were inspected to see that boots were shined, trousers were the correct length, tunic buttons polished and belt buckle polished, pocket flaps buttoned, forage cap buttons polished and that the white flash in forage cap, denoting we were aircrew trainees, was clean.

The Drill Sergeant was a Glaswegian from the tough area of Glasgow and in the opinion of many of us was a frustrated aircrew volunteer, so had trained as a drill instructor and rose to the rank of sergeant. He was a hard task master and to his credit made us into a very efficient unit. We did have one drawback ~ unfortunately one of our squad was a Welshman who could not swing his left arm forward when his right leg went forward! His natural way of walking was to swing the same arm and leg together. This caused chaos to the cadets immediately behind him and gave our sergeant a lot of grief ~ so much so that the sergeant stood behind him one day and shouted at him "I'll stick my penis in your ear and blow your f***** brains out". This under *King's Regulations* is

unacceptable behaviour and unfortunately for the sergeant we had an Australian cadet in the squad who ate, drank and slept the Royal Air Force. He was more than familiar with *King's Regulations* and reported the incident to the adjutant. An enquiry ensued and the sergeant was posted off the camp with a flea in his ear. Another of our squad was a volunteer re-mustered from the Grenadier Guards and was staggered at the standard expected of us as a drill squad.

For the eight weeks of our initial training we did square bashing every day and physical training every day – including battle courses and cross country running.

At the end of four weeks we had the COs (Commanding Officer's) inspection. Each hut was inspected for cleanliness, polishing, dusting (including the rafters!). The furnace had to be blackleaded. This furnace stood in the centre of the room and was the means of heating the hut in winter. Those with beds close to the stove sweltered and those at either end of the hut froze. The floor was polished with a 'bumper'. This was a solid block of wood covered with felt and attached to a handle. Invariably the felt was worn and an old piece of blanket was used instead – the best way of getting a shine was to have the lightest cadet stand on the bumper and he was then pulled up and down the hut until we were satisfied with the result after which nobody was allowed in the hut until after the inspection!

After hut inspection the flight paraded for cadets' inspection. This took place on the drill square. The C.O. (Group Captain) followed by the Adjutant, Warrant Officer, Drill Sergeant and Hut Corporal's inspected us as we stood in open order (each line two paces apart instead of the usual space of an arms length) to allow the party to move along. Unfortunately for me I decided, as it was my first one, to use my spare forage cap. I had noticed that one of the two buttons on front of the cap was upside-down so gave it half a twist to bring it the right way up.

Sadly by the time they arrived at me the button had twisted back upside-down. This was noticed by the Adjutant who asked me if I was aware of this fact, to which I replied that I was, that I had righted the button before the parade but that it had obviously been sewn on upside-down. The outcome was that I was confined to barracks for three days for being improperly dressed. This was noted on my records and am glad to say it remained the only time I was ever charged.

Once a week we were on fatigue duty. This meant doing all the menial jobs which had to be carried out on a regular basis. Clearing rubbish from around the camp, washing out empty tins discarded by the kitchen staff, distributing coal from the main store and taking to the huts etc. The idea was that the corporal would ask for volunteers. The number would depend on the task. If you didn't volunteer for any task you would find yourself doing the worst job left to the last. We used to find time to make the most of it and get some fun from it. I remember a particular time when a corporal asked if there were any musicians in the squad. Several keenly stepped forward thinking they were onto a good thing and were promptly told to move the piano in the Officer's Mess to the gymnasium!!

Another cadet we had in our flight was a "Geordie" from Newcastle. We had met up with each other after two days at A.C.R.C. No matter how hard he tried he could not look smart! From the time he was issued his uniform he had difficulty looking like a smart aircrew cadet. His uniform jacket, instead of dropping straight from below the belt, suck out like a ballerina's tutu, his forage cap kept falling off his head and his trousers hung over his boots like a concertina. I think the drill NCOs gave up on him!

We were all now beginning to feel the effect of the physical training, cross country runs and battle courses. Muscles we didn't know we had

were aching. Blisters were a regular thing on hands and feet and bruises were all over, all of this making it difficult to perform well on the parade ground.

However, towards the end of our twelve weeks we found we no longer felt the effects of the physical training etc and all the exercises were much easier to do. Blisters no longer appeared and all that remained now was to learn rifle drill and pass out on rifle and small arms (revolver) firing.

The big day arrived ~ passing out parade ~ the whole squadron was to do a full drill before the C.O. and end with a march pass ~ “Horse Guards Parade Style” ~ with the station band playing the R.A.F. march.

You never saw a prouder bunch of young cadets – following the parade we were issued leave passes and sent off home to await our postings. All the cadets at initial training wing consisted of volunteers for all seven branches of aircrew ~ pilots, navigators, bombardiers, flight engineers, wireless operators, W/O/P gunners, gunners ~ now we were about to be sent for our specialist training and posted all over the UK and even to Canada and South Africa.

No. 4 RADIO SCHOOL

I was posted to No 4 Radio School, Madley in Herefordshire about 8 miles west of Hereford. We were to be trained up to 24 words per minute, taught how a transmitter and receiver work, semaphore signalling (flags) and Aldis (using a light to signal). Aldis signalling was quite good fun as we went out into the surrounding countryside for the exercises.



Instruction in the use of the Aldis lamp

On arrival at Radio School we discovered that from then on, whenever we arrived on a new station or camp, we had to get an arrivals chitty signed by various departments ~ dentist, doctor, paymaster, padre, adjutant's office, clothing stores and several others. These chitties had to be completed and handed in to the Record's Office. If the camp happened to be one where different units were scattered this process could entail a fair bit of foot slogging!! Madley was one of these!!

We were picked up from Hereford railway station in lorries and driven the eight miles to Madley. Before we arrived at the main camp we passed a number of squads marching down the country lanes with side packs, ground sheets and carrying handfuls of exercise books. We were to discover that Madley Radio School was well and truly scattered! The lorry stopped at the entrance to the main camp – usual flag pole with the R.A.F. flag flying, stones around the base of the pole, all painted white. The corporal informed us that this was where we had our meals, showers and ablutions. The NAAFI and camp shop was here also. We then drove on for a further 1½ miles to our sleeping quarters – GRIM – a nissen hut, door each end, stove in the middle and beds down either side, bloody cold in winter and baking hot in summer. The daily routine was reveille at 06.30, dash out to elsan toilets, pick up toiletries

and equipment required for the day, march to main camp, shower, shave, breakfast and clean up for parade at 09.00. March down to stores to pick up exercise books and instruction manuals, for which we had to sign and for which we were responsible. We were then marched to the teaching blocks where we saw the squads on arrival the previous day, about a mile from main camp. We were now some 2½ miles from our nissen hut.

The instructors for receiving Morse turned out to be seconded naval personnel selected for their expertise and teaching ability and to send Morse with great speed. These bods ate, drank and slept Morse code and the course was so intense that some went “*dit dah dally*”! Dot-dash was not used for verbal Morse ~ dit dah was a much faster method. It was not unusual for a cadet to hand money over in the NAAFI and say “Here’s a dit give me two dahs change” and was promptly whipped off to the sick bay for rest and assessment. The intensity of the training and concentration needed can be summed up by the following which took place toward the end of the course.....



Morse code message keyed by Flying Officer Instructor

Creed machines were gadgets where punched tapes were fed in and Morse code produced from a speaker or played into headphones. Three of these machines were set up on the platform at the front of the class and the class then divided into three sections, each section receiving Morse from one of the creed machines. Each machine produced a different pitch or note; each section of men was played a tape for a short period so they knew whether they had high pitch, low or medium. Then all three were fed into the headphones and you had to sort yours out! Suddenly music also came into the background just to distract you!

We still had square bashing to do, one hour every other day and cross country running, gymnastics and battle courses were still on the itinerary.

Apart from learning Morse and improving the receiving speed we also had to learn what was known as “Q” code. These were groups of three letters, each beginning with the letter Q i.e. QED, QDM etc. These represented phrases often used in messages and avoided having to send them in full each time. There were quite a few of them, about 20-25, and we had to remember what each code meant.

Signal	Question
QRG	Will you indicate my exact frequency in kilocycles?
QRH	Does my frequency vary?
QRI	How is the tone of my transmission?
QRJ	Are you receiving me badly? Are my signals weak?
QRK	What is the legibility of my signals (1 to 5)?
QRL	Are you busy?
QRM	Are you being interfered with?
QRN	Are you troubled by static?
QRO	Must I increase power?
QRP	Must I decrease power?
QRQ	Must I send faster?
QRS	Must I send more slowly?
QRT	Must I stop transmission?
QRU	Have you anything for me?
QRV	Are you ready?
QRW	Must I advise ... that you are calling him on ... kc?

QRX	When will you call again?
QRZ	By whom am I being called?
QSA	What is the strength of my signals (1 to 5)?
QSB	Does the strength of my signals vary?
QSD	Is my keying correct? Are my signals distinct?
QSG	Must I transmit ... telegrams (or one telegram) at a time?
QSK	Shall I continue the transmission of all my traffic?
QSL	Can you acknowledge receipt?
QSM	Shall I repeat the last telegram I sent you?
QSO	Can you communicate with ... directly (or through...)?
QSP	Will you relay to ...?
QSV	Shall I send a series of VVV....?
QSX	Will you listen for ... (call sign) on ... kcs?
QSY	Shall I change to ... kilocycles without changing the type of wave?
QSZ	Shall I send each word or group twice?
QTA	Shall I cancel nr ... as if it had not been sent?
QTB	Do you agree with my word count?
QTC	How many telegrams have you to send?
QTH	What is your position (location)?
QTR	What is the exact time?

Towards the end of the course we were sent up in the de Havilland 'Dominie' aircraft. These were two engine bi-planes. Pilot, instructor and four pupils ~ each pupil was given a card on which were his instructions and messages to be sent and answers to be received. Most of the exercise consisted of receiving courses to be flown and passed to the pilot i.e. fly at 8000ft, course 105° for 7 minutes. If the instructor was satisfied you had succeeded in carrying out the message correctly you then had to contact another aircraft and pass messages back and forth. Having satisfied the instructor you were capable of handling the receiver and transmitter you graduated onto the aircraft known as the 'Proctor'. This was a single engine aircraft having a pilot and room behind for wireless operator.



Once in the air the pilot relied on you receiving instructions from ground control as to what you wanted him to do ~ height to fly, course to fly, air speed and time to spend on each course. With any luck we arrived at destination decided on by ground control.

Another aspect of Radio School was instruction on how the transmitters and receivers worked. What certain electrical circuits did, and which valves were responsible for which action in the receiving and transmitting of signals. To assist us in our knowledge of this a fault-finding room had been set up around which there were benches displaying transmitters and receivers with all kinds of faults from simple fuses to dodgy circuits and blown valves. Transmitters had two metal handles, which, once four screws were removed, enabled you to pull the whole body from out of the chassis to make it easier to work on. We soon discovered that one of the faults was to by-pass the power to the two metal handles so the poor bod allocated that particular set soon discovered what the problem was!

In November 1943 we were informed that the position of wireless operator/air gunner was going to be discontinued and the position would be filled by just the job of 'signaller' who would wear the half wing with 'S' in the place of 'AG'. This meant a longer course to obtain the signallers wing as the position was to be more intensive. Although having obtained my W/O badge as being proficient as a wireless operator I didn't want to go onto another course as the theory of the workings of transmitters and receivers was becoming beyond my abilities so I opted to go onto gunnery school.

At about this time we were visited by high-ranking army personnel who were after aircrew bods to transfer to the army with the immediate rank of 'lieutenant'. We thought there was a catch to this and found out that the position was with the Indian Army with immediate posting. Some

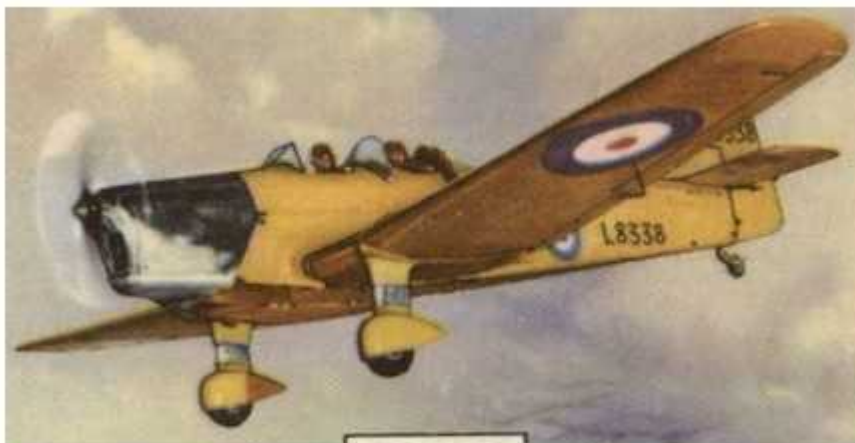
cadets who were finding the radio course hard going, and knowing they were going to fail, took up the offer.

Shortly before leaving Madley I was in the NAAFI and a navy bod put his head in the door and said in a loud voice “The wagon’s outside if anyone’s going ashore”!! We were in the middle of Hereford, miles from any coastline but apparently all shore depots of the navy are known as H.M.S. (Whatever) and if ever they left the depot you were going ashore!!

AIR GUNNERY SCHOOL – PEMBREY – CAMARTHEN BAY



Following Radio School and living conditions at Madley, Pembrey was luxury. Wooden huts, mess hall within 50yds, classrooms just beyond and showers at the end of the huts. The shoreline of Carmarthen Bay was at the opposite side of the airfield beyond a row of fir trees. The gunnery course was to consist of learning how turrets operated – both electrical (Boulton Paul) and the oil pressure Fraser Nash, air to ground practice (sea targets) and air to air practice (drogues towed by Magister aircraft), also air to air attack using camera guns, an intensive



Miles Magister used for towing drogues for target practice

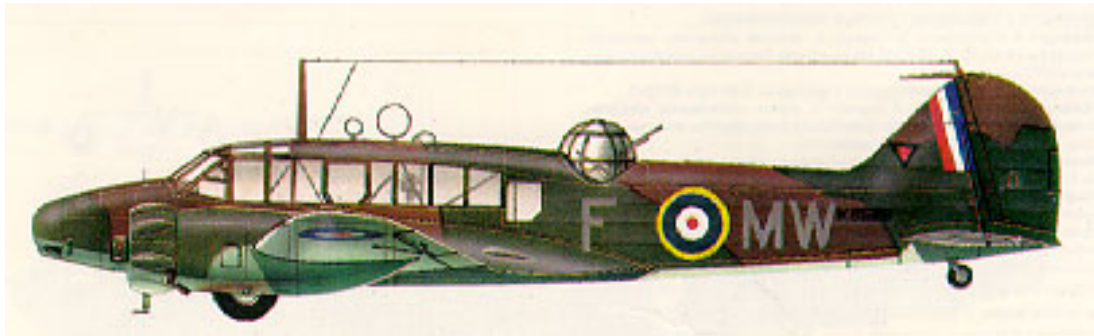
course on the .303 Browning machine gun, how to assemble and strip down blindfold, what faults could occur and how to rectify them. Square bashing, cross-country and physical training continued as part of the course. Aircraft recognition was another part of the course and all courses had tests and exams at different times. Any failures were put back one course until eventually you took the final exams and received your half wing and sergeant's stripes or sent back to A.C.R.C for re-muster to ground staff in the case of failures.

We were issued our flying kit on our first day's training consisting of helmet, headphones, oxygen mask, flying goggles with both clear and tinted lenses, sunglasses, roll neck sweaters, thermal underwear, inner flying suit (electrical) and outer suit, socks, flying boots and flying gloves (four pairs ~ silk, wool, electrical and gauntlets), and kit bag in which to pack our gear ~ imagine trying to get on a crowded train with two kit bags, back pack, side pack and gas mask!

Aircraft recognition required you to recognise the aircraft, know its wingspan, possible armament i.e. cannon, machine gun or a mixture. Knowing the wing span in feet enabled you to know the distance of this aircraft so you could fire at the optimum time, the reflector ring sight enabled this to be done. The sighting rings were reflected onto the Perspex sight screen and consisted of two rings and a bull. When an

aircraft spanned the distance on the sight between bull and inner it was 300yds away if having a 30ft wing span, 400yds for a 40ft wingspan etc. With four machine guns the best distance for concentration of fire is 300yds, to get a 40ft aircraft into the 300yd area the wing had to overlap the inner ring.

The aircraft used for flying were Ansons and Oxfords.



Avro Anson



Avro Anson



Airspeed Oxford

Both were twin-engine monoplanes single fin and rudder with mid-upper turrets installed. Both aircraft were used for air to air, air to ground and aerial combat exercises using cameras instead of guns. The belts of ammunition were fed into the guns from metal containers and for the purpose of recording hits on the drogue (windsock) the tips of the bullets were painted with various colours of paint. Each cadet in the aircraft had his own box of ammo with his designated colour. The idea was that if your bullet hit the drogue it would leave a coloured ring around the hole. On landing the coloured holes were counted and if you had scored any hits it was entered in your records. One of our lads managed to put a couple of holes in the fin and rudder of the towing aircraft! As the pilots of the towing aircraft were invariably experienced fighter pilots on rest between tours I think they would rather have been back on active duty ~ less dangerous!!

The air to ground consisted of a target towed by a high speed air sea rescue launch. The target was a large sail on wooden float and once again hits were recorded. Carmarthen Bay must contain tons of spent bullets and cartridges!!

Aerial combat exercises were good fun. Once again fighter pilots on rest were used only for this exercise. They flew Spitfires and Hurricanes.



Supermarine Spitfire



Hawker Hurricane

The idea was that we would take off, head for an area north of Carmarthen where at some point the waiting fighters would attack us. We then had to give a running commentary to the skipper as to where the attack was coming from, distance and type of aircraft. At the crucial distance, 300yds, we ordered the skipper to corkscrew either left or right (port or starboard) depending on the type of attack. If the attack was from upper port then the corkscrew would begin with a climb to port ~ evasive action always consisted of turning into the attack. If given at the proper time this would mean that the attacking aircraft would be unable to complete the attack because he wouldn't be able to turn tight enough to follow you. All the time this was going on the cadet in the turret was trying to keep the attacking aircraft in his gun sight!

Aircraft recognition was taken in a classroom with all sorts of model aircraft hanging from the ceiling. The main instruction was from slides flashed up onto a screen for some five seconds. This was reduced as the course progressed. Although there were some films of actual combat, all the main German aircraft had to be learnt along with some Italian and most of the American and a few Russian. It was assumed that we knew the English aircraft!!

The nearest town to the camp was Llanelli. [The double “l” in the Welsh language is pronounced “thlan” so sounds something like “thlan-eth-lee”. We used to call it “slash”.]

Also at this time my two younger brothers (Peter and John) were evacuated to Ammanford, approximately 14 miles north-west of Pembrey so it was nice to be able to meet them either at Llanelli or at the farm where they were billeted. The farmer and his wife were strict *Welsh Chapel* and they took turns to hold Sunday services in each others houses. I happened to be visiting when the service was being held at the farm where Peter and John were and all hell was let loose! The preacher was laying down the law about how they were sinners and had a lot of the women crying in shame! Their hymn singing was great; being Welsh they really gave it some wellie!

Having successfully passed the flying tests and the armament course the aircraft recognition exam remained to be tackled. This was quite a nerve racking test as it was taken alone in the room with just you and the instructor who operated the slide projector. He first flashed about half a dozen aircraft on the screen to demonstrate the speed at which the slides would be shown. Then he asked me if I knew any of them. I said I recognised two but the others I didn’t know. We then went into the test proper. About 30 slides were shown, each time they flashed onto the screen we had to state the country, type, wingspan i.e.

“German, Focke-Wulf 190, 32ft “



Focke-Wulf 190

and so on until the last one which I had taken special note of in the classroom tests. This was a Russian 'Corsair' which has dihedral wings and looks very much like the Seagull head-on in flight which we also had a slide of. If given time you could tell the difference between the two but as the times got faster it was more difficult. Being a devious bugger I had noticed that the slide of the Seagull in flight had a faint smudge top right hand corner so as soon as the slide came onto the screen I did a quick take of the top right corner, which told me if it was the Seagull!

Having passed the test we then had to take the final passing out parade practice in the main hanger. This consisted of waiting for your name to be called, marching to the dais on which the C.O. stood, giving him a salute after which he handed you your gunners brevies and sergeant's stripes (four pair for battle dress, best blues, overcoat and overalls) You then took one pace back, saluted again and returned to the ranks, now as sergeant!

The preamble to this parade needed a lot of organisation because having been made up to sergeant you were then posted the same day, with a train waiting to get you away. The reasoning behind this hurried departure was you were now senior in rank to many of your recent instructors, most of who were corporals and if any had given you a hard time you were now in a position to get you own back!! The other problem was getting the stripes sewn on the best blue tunic. This was achieved by attending the parade in a tunic borrowed from a cadet in the following course whilst yours was in the tailors having stripes and brieve sewn on, having been bought from an accessories store. Once we were dismissed from the promotion parade it was a dash to the tailors, pick up your tunic, get the borrowed tunic back to its rightful owner and get off the camp, home for a spot of leave and await orders for posting to O.T.U. (Operational Training Unit). (It has to be realised

that all the various courses meant a collection of exercise books with written notes and manuals of instruction – these were usually stored at the bottom of kitbags).

19 O.T.U KINLOSS

My posting eventually arrived and I was posted to 19 O.T.U Kinloss nr Elgin, Scotland, departure from Kings Cross Station.

Excerpt from RAF Kinloss History website :

In 1940 14 FTS moved south and were replaced by 19 Operational Training Unit (O.T.U) training bomber crews for the offensive.

During those early years contractors worked around the clock to lay concrete runways on the airfield. [One of the main concerns at that time was the possibility of enemy attack and many attempts were made to camouflage the airfield. However one attempt to hide the airfield by painting building outlines on grass apparently amused the Germans more than confused them and the camouflage was photographed by a German aircraft and the pictures published in a magazine!]

The station defences were gradually established and by May 1940, Group Captain Jarman reported that the defence of Kinloss was in order.

As the war continued, Airmen living on camp did not find everything cosy, it was often cold, accommodation was poor and with rationing, finding enough food was always a problem. [Things got so bad that at one time, the Group Captain ordered an aircraft to drop a small bomb in Burghead Bay to collect stunned fish! Something the Group Captain himself would get a rocket for today!]

Of course it was not all work and no play, entertainment was important in maintaining morale. The station sports teams were formed although they obviously lacked practise as Huntly beat the RAF 5-1 in their first football match.

Those activities helped to establish a rapport with the local communities who became involved with the Station through the Home Guard and the local Air Training Corps 446 Forres Squadron. In 1941, with many roads blocked after a particularly severe snow fall and many roads were blocked, the local population, station personnel and the Station Commander, set to with shovels and marched up and down the runway to keep the planes flying.

Throughout the majority of the war 19 Operational Training Unit was the primary training unit. Between July 1940 and June 1941 it flew over 22,073 hours almost four times the rate achieved by 14 FTS the previous year.

The war seemed a long way off from Kinloss but as the months went by the Station flag appeared to be almost permanently at half mast as aircraft frequently crashed on training sorties. Unfortunately the inexperience of the pilots being pushed through training to supply front line squadrons, the worn-out aircraft and poor weather caused many accidents, over 68 in the first year of 19 OTU's operations. Sadly, many of those arriving at Kinloss for the first time saw the remains of aircraft around the airfield and at one time, even on Tolbooth Street, Forres.

Not surprisingly many trainees ended up ditching in Findhorn Bay which was a Catch 22 situation. If you ended up in the bay when the tide was out the dinghy was useless as the bay was a quagmire, when the tide was in it occasionally flooded the airfield. This caught one crew out totally when they landed and saw the water, thinking they had overshot the runway, they made a distress call and climbed into the dinghies, only to see the fire trucks drive right up beside them.

Arriving at the station I discovered the trains were all over the place due to air raids and diversions and that the next train to Glasgow would be at 18.30, a wait of some 6 hours. By the time the train was due to leave the platform was packed, mostly with servicemen. With two kitbags and the rest of my gear I didn't stand a chance of getting a seat so ended up in the corridor sitting on the kitbags. The horrors of that journey to Glasgow were heartbreaking for a 19 year old. The exit from London was stop/start until clear of the London area due to raids. Most of the trip appeared to be done at half speed, eventually arriving in Glasgow at 10.00 the following morning. However, the connection from Glasgow to Elgin was completely the opposite from my journey from London ~ a seat in a carriage, kitbags etc in guard's van which was next door and no hold-ups. There was a lorry waiting at Elgin to transport us to Kinloss, upon arrival at which we were given a 24 hour stand down to catch up on much needed sleep and to unwind. It was strange being treated as sergeants after so long as cadets.

The O.T.U. is where all grades of aircrew arrive with the object of 'crewing up' and train to crew a four engine bomber – we had arrived!!

'Crewing up' took place in a large hanger which had the names of aircrew categories hanging from the rafters ~ pilots, bomb aimers, navigators, flight engineers, signallers, gunners. The idea was that the pilots would walk round – have words with other crew types and having checked their course results with the relevant office and being happy with their expertise, would end up with seven competent crew members.

I was approached by a Flt Lt who already had a medal ribbon under his brevie. This shook me somewhat; anyway he had other crew members with him, introduced them, and asked me that should my course results be acceptable would I be happy to join his crew? As he was a Flt Lt and

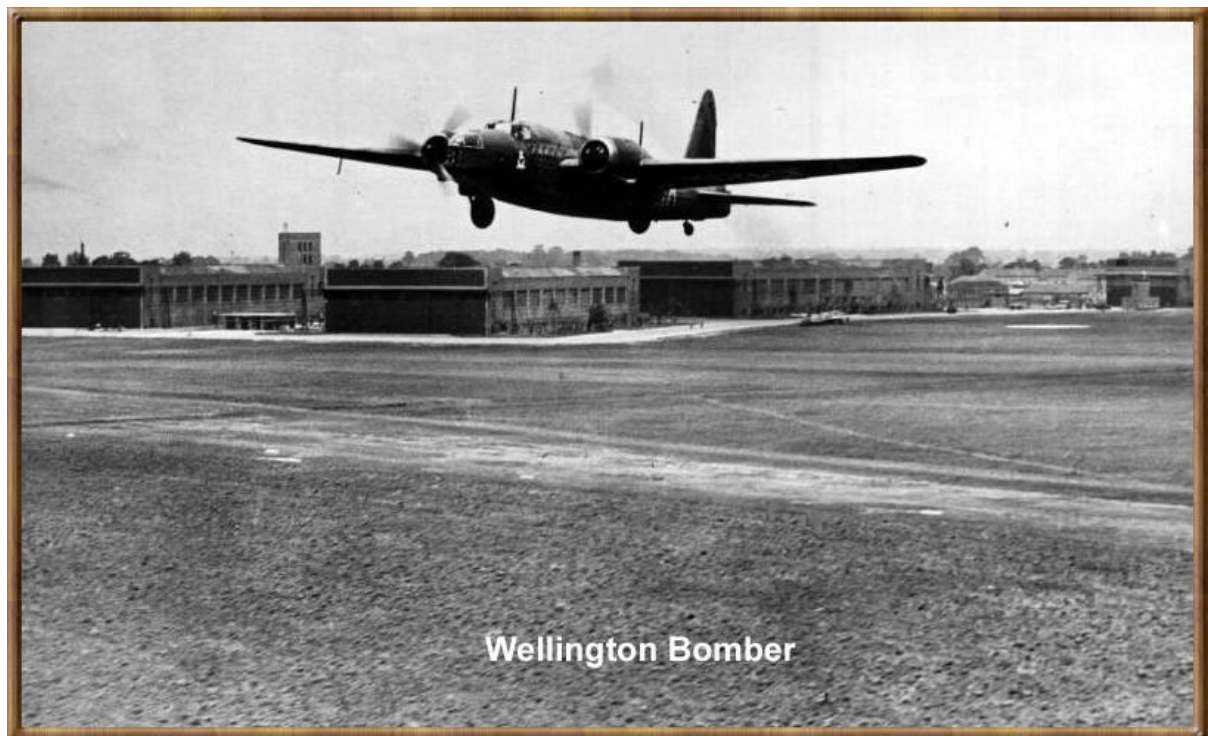
already a medal holder and therefore obviously an experienced pilot, I felt quite honoured to have been chosen. We all walked over to the gunnery office where the Flt Lt examined my course records and welcomed me on to his crew. All we needed now was another gunner. He turned out to be a slim tallish fellow, curly hair who came from Hull, called Joe. The only member of the crew whose surname I remember [other than the signaller who was Mills] was the Skipper (pilot) whose name was Beckett. So let's go through the crew

- Pilot ~ known as Paddy, Irish with very broad accent
- Bombardier ~ Gerry from Croydon who failed his pilots course on his finals
- Flt Eng ~ Bert who was not picked up until our arrival at H.C.U
- Signaller ~ Stan Mills
- Navigator ~ Thomas
- Joe
- Myself

The skipper had already flown operations over Italy in Wellingtons, had bailed out, been captured, escaped, and made his way north. However the invasion came from the south so he had to do an about turn. He didn't go into too much detail except to say that his broad Irish accent helped in some situations and that the Italians weren't happy with the war anyway.

The fact that Paddy was experienced with the Wellingtons was a big step forward. He didn't have to do 'familiarisation' flying to get to know the aircraft. Each member of the crew had a time when flying when they were in sole charge of the aircraft. On take off it was the skipper, when airborne it was the navigator, over the target it was the bomb aimer, in a fighter attack it was the gunner and in the event of engine trouble or damage the engineer gave instructions about engine, rev speeds, fuel consumption and airspeed and the skipper had to comply.

The signaller advised when the aircraft was airborne, any change in course or weather, approximate position in the event of bailing out or ditching, and when the aircraft had landed back at base.



Our first lecture as a crew was the day after we had all met. The C.O. welcomed us onto the camp and warned us we were in for a tough course which would consist of navigation exercises, bombing practice, air attacks, night flying (only when day flying exercises were completed satisfactorily). Needless to say PT and cross country continued and a new one – escape lessons – including dinghy drill and parachute practice. At this point I have to point out that tail gunners were known as ‘tail end Charlies’. It transpired that when Joe was in the training hanger in the mid-upper turret he found it difficult knowing when he was facing forward: starboard was on the right and port on the left and when facing to the rear it was reversed with port on the right and starboard on the left. It is very important in an attack to give the skipper the correct instructions for evasive action and if you can imagine the mid-upper turret swinging from front to back in a matter of seconds and suddenly the whole situation changes, the orders to the skipper have to be right. Joe couldn’t assimilate the changes in

position quick enough so it was decided that he would take over the tail turret and I would man the mid-upper turret. That brought in a new problem. We now had two “Charlies” – so the skipper decided that I would be known as ‘Chuck’.

Around the airfield at strategic places were large square holes set in the ground about 20yds square and some ten feet deep filled with water. These were emergency water supply, or E.W.S., for use should the camp supply be cut off or bombed out. Someone decided that they would make good exercise tanks for dingy drill. We had a lot to learn as a crew before we were allowed to take to the air and dinghy drill was one of them.



Ditching was one of the worst fears for bomber crews, the internal spaces of bombers were cramped and full of protruding equipment, so rapidly exiting a sinking aircraft was a real struggle. Once you were safely out of the aircraft, survival was first order of the day in often freezing temperatures at sea. There was faint hope of rescue, reliant on the position report the wireless operator may have managed to send prior to ditching, which may be several hours old by the time rescuers arrived in the area. All bombers had dinghies on board and the crew were

trained how to use them. The aircraft also carried with them homing pigeons so if a crew ditched or crashed they could release the pigeons with a message of their approximate position. Even with this system some crews were not found for days and many were never found at all. One account describes how 4 members of a crew were afloat on the English Channel for 9 days with only a small tin of Horlicks tablets, a small tin of chocolate and about a pint of water. They were eventually spotted and picked up by an RAF high-speed rescue launch

A very strict routine has to be learned when abandoning the aircraft after ditching and this was practised on a wreck fuselage next to the E.W.S. The dinghy is circular, very thick material and when packed it is quite heavy. It is inflated automatically by a pressured bottle containing gas. When inflated it is very large and will hold all the crew. We were advised that the dinghy did not always inflate in the right position and at times would be upside down!! During the dry land drill we were shown where handles had been placed on the bottom of the dinghy to enable us to turn it over into its correct position. Turning an upturned dinghy over to its proper position on dry land was a doddle, when we were in the E.W.S. with flying gear and Mae Wests on the problem was much more difficult. For one thing the dinghy is floating in

front of your face, 15-18ins high and you have to try and grab one of these handles on the base. Having found one you then leant backwards to force the dinghy upright and then eventually over into its right position. Should a wind be blowing the lift would be made facing the wind. Once the wind got under the dinghy it gave quite a bit of lift and the task made easier. It was discovered that I was by far the strongest swimmer in the crew and in the event of ditching I would be the one to see that the dinghy was safe to get into and assist any poor swimmers of which we had one ~ Joe, the rear gunner. We were informed that dinghy drill could be called at any time, day or night!!

Parachute training took place in a tall hanger with a platform close to the ceiling. Once the harness was on you were winched up to the platform where an instructor attached the parachute cords to your harness, which meant you were now part of a large swing.

The idea was to keep the cords as tight as possible and allow no slack, then step off the platform keeping the cords tight. If you tried to jump the cords would immediately go slack and you were in trouble. On approaching the landing area the idea was to keep the legs together, arrive at the mats facing either left or right and collapse on the mats from ankles upwards until you were lying fully on your side ~ still with the harness on. Some bods jumped from the platform with the result that the cords now had some slack and when that slack was taken up they were pulled up sharp in the harness with painful results!

Some of the cadets had the opportunity of going up in a balloon, which was tethered, and jumping from the basket. Others like myself were winched up a mast with a canopy opened above us and released at the top of the mast to float serenely down to the deck. Again using the aircraft fuselage in the hanger we were shown where our bale out positions were and when told by the skipper to bale out you didn't argue. You did it. The fact that it was raining heavily outside made no

difference!! Discipline in the aircraft when flying was very strict and Paddy wasn't backward in laying down the law. At the time of crewing-up Paddy wanted a non-smoking, non-drinking crew. He was told he was asking the impossible but he did it and we were all well known on the O.T.U. course.

We still had to do physical training and battle courses, now added to them was the escape course ~ how to avoid detection, obtain food, light a fire, where to find a compass (usually in a pen or using the clip of a pen which had been magnetised). Silk maps were hidden in gloves, boots, and forage caps. It is amazing how small an 18" square silk map can be folded. Escape drill was carried out in the wilds of the countryside around Kinloss, including night exercises. The culmination of this part of our training was being ferried by lorries in the late evening, not knowing where we were headed (all the tarpaulins around the lorry were closed) and being dropped off in pairs at various points with instructions to avoid being picked up by members of the RAF regiment who were patrolling all roads leading into the camp and scattered over a 30 mile radius around the camp.

We were allowed to 'borrow' vehicles or bicycles and were given a time limit of 24 hours to make it back to the camp. The last pair back in camp would have to do another escape exercise. Some of the successful ones arrived on the local farmer's pig swill wagon, hidden among the empty containers. Another pair on top of a lorry carrying new arrivals from Elgin station and a brilliant one I will never forget because I witnessed their arrival. This pair overpowered a member of the RAF regiment, 'borrowed' his uniform which one of the pair put on, and marched his partner through the camp gates as a 'prisoner' ~ brilliant!

Having completed our ground training we were now starting our air training as a crew. All the crew would, at various times, be doing an

exercise during the flights. The navigator would be working the whole time getting us to various towns as specified in the briefing.



The navigator's job was to find the way to and from the target. He had repeaters of certain instruments, such as altimeter, airspeed indicator and compass at his desk to assist him in calculations, and in the early years of the war such instruments as a sextant or astrolabe to calculate his position. This training and equipment was insufficient for a variety of reasons, not least of which was the difficulty of predicting and evaluating the upper winds accurately over the continent once it was all in German hands. As a result, in early raids it was common for only one bomb in fifty to fall within 50 miles of its intended target. Great efforts, both scientific and operational, were made to counter this deficiency.

During the course of the war a series of electronic aids were developed to assist navigation, such as Gee and H₂S. The Pathfinder Force was also introduced to act as navigation leaders to the main force, dropping marker flares at turning points and over the target itself as guides, as well as spoof and decoy flares to confuse the defences. The Pathfinders were considered the cream of Bomber Command navigators, a small number of men responsible for the overall effectiveness of an entire force. Consequently, they were often the first units to receive the new navigation aids.

During these flights we would visit the bombing range for the bomb aimer to do his exercise dropping 4lb phosphorous bombs onto a ground target. He was in touch with the target controllers on the deck who told him over the r/t radio where his bomb had hit and to adjust on the next run if necessary.



At the beginning of the war the navigator also used to do the bomb aiming as well as the navigational duties. As time went on, however, and bomber crews were reorganized, a separate bomb aiming position was created. This meant that the navigator could concentrate more on his main duties, vital to the success of any crew. This resulted in bomber crews becoming more specialised and professional in their fields. The bomb



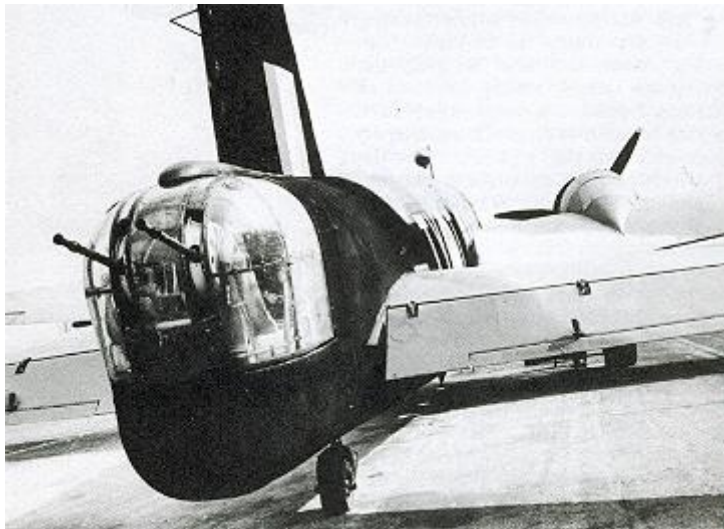
aimer had the duty of releasing the bombs at the right point, which considering they were often released between eighteen and twenty-eight thousand feet, from an aircraft moving at anything up to 380 mph, was a considerable computational task. These variables were further complicated by the wind over the target, known as 'drift' by airmen of the day, and the make-up of the bomb-load itself, different bombs having different aerodynamics. To assist the bomb aimer in this task, the accuracy of bomb-sights improved during the course of the war, culminating in the remarkable SABS bombsight of 1944, an incredibly accurate semi-computerised device, much used by 9 and 617 Squadrons to drop the twelve and twenty-two thousand pound 'Tallboy' and 'Grand Slam' bombs. The bomb aimer also manned the front gun or turret when required.

At some point during the flight we would also be attacked by either spitfires or hurricanes so the gunners had to be on their toes. The

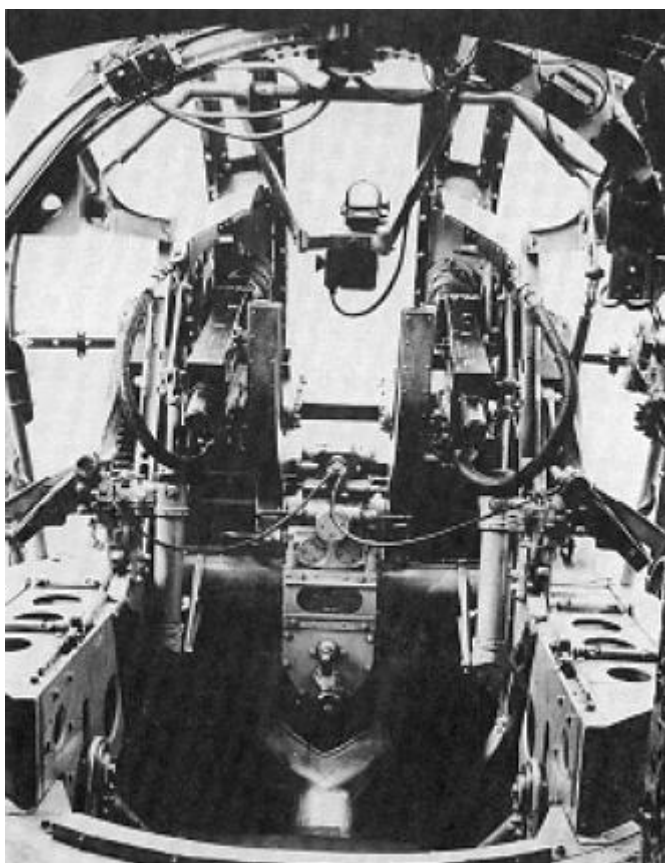
signaller and flight engineer were, like the navigator, busy most of the time. I must point out that the gunners only had camera guns on these trips!!

One trip I recall – we were in the briefing room and the navigators were being given their various dog legs and turning points. The map was up on the wall and our exercise took us right through a red etched area over the Firth of Forth. These areas were forbidden to be flown over by any aircraft and could be shot down by fighters or ground artillery. We pointed this out to the officer in charge of the exercise and he told us to do the exercise and not to worry!! Paddy had his own views about this and after the briefing got together with Tom, the navigator, and asked if it would be possible to use one of the red lines on the “no go” area as a dog leg. This meant that although we wouldn’t be in the area, we certainly wouldn’t be clear of it.

Approaching the Firth of Forth, having had a firing exercise air to sea, Paddy told us to keep our eyes open for any aircraft. The Wellington doesn’t have a mid-upper turret, so after I had done my exercise in the



Rear gun turret Wellington bomber



Inside rear gun turret Wellington bomber

rear turret, I usually sat by Stan to keep my signalling skills up to date, so when Paddy gave orders to watch out for aircraft I went up into the astrodome. This is a Perspex bubble near the navigator used for navigation by the stars and placed on top of the fuselage. Having put my head in the dome and scanning from front to rear I found to my horror that we had a Spitfire sitting no less than 20ft from the rear turret!! The propeller boss looked huge and I wondered what had happened to Joe, not to have seen the Spitfire. I reported to the skipper and he asked Joe what the f----- hell he thought he was doing! It transpired that one of the guns had jammed and he had stripped part of the gun down and had his head down with the parts on his lap, sorting out the problem! The skipper contacted the Spitfire pilot on the r/t, words were exchanged and we were escorted by the Spitfire off the no-go area. Needless to say Paddy wasn't very happy with Joe. Paddy found out from the officer in charge of our original briefing that the

authorities at the Firth of Forth had suggested to Kinloss that they fly an aircraft over the no-go area to keep their guardians on their toes!!

Another of our trips was over Ireland and the Irish Sea. This one was to be an exercise for Joe and I. Somewhere on the trip we were to be attacked by Spitfires and/or Hurricanes so we had camera guns installed. We also had an instructor pilot on board to check Paddy's corkscrew procedure. Joe was first in the turret, spotted the 'bandits' quite early, began his commentary to the skipper, told him to prepare to corkscrew and at 300yds "go".

Paddy immediately threw the aircraft into the corkscrew and the 'bandits' broke off. Words were exchanged between Paddy and one of the two 'bandit' pilots who were going to do another attack after which we were to change gunners. All went well until my second attack when I found they were coming at me from below, one on the starboard the other from port. A corkscrew was useless in this attack so I ordered the skipper to dive on the 300yd mark. At the de-briefing where the films were shown and commented on we were told we had the best result on the course for that particular exercise!

Another exercise in the same area found us in very thick cloud. We went down to 1000ft and were still in it, having started at 15,000ft. Paddy decided at 1000ft to level out and fly into the wind direction. This brought us eventually to a clearing. Beneath us was the Irish Sea. Just as the skipper asked the navigator for a course to base the signaller told Paddy the transmitter had gone u/s and no chance of a repair. In these circumstances the drill is to lob down at the nearest suitable airfield which happened to be the RAF Navigation School Field at Jurby on the Isle of Man. This situation is where the Aldis lamp comes into its own, sighting through the astrodome and using the "Q" code we were given the all clear for landing.

Excerpts from Jurby website

1940 The Luftwaffe menace shipping in the Irish Sea

October 1940 saw the arrival of the Royal Air Force in the Isle of Man. The Luftwaffe had been attacking the North West industrial centres of the United Kingdom under cover of darkness. Using long range Ju 88's they had also been attacking shipping on their way in and out of the Irish Sea ports. If they did not attack then they were relaying shipping movements to U-Boat packs waiting in the southern approaches off the SW Irish coast. To counter the threat fighter squadrons were deployed to new hastily constructed airfields all over the North of England, Northern Ireland and the Isle of Man. Ju88's like this attacked Irish Sea shipping



In the Isle of Man the Jurby airfield accepted its first aircraft in November 1940. Its command centre was to be Preston in Lancashire and became part of 9 Group, Fighter Command. Its sectors covered the Lancashire, Shropshire, and Cheshire. On the other hand a second airfield was being constructed only four miles away, again on the fertile north plain of the Island at Andreas. This was to part of another sector with responsibility for protecting the Irish Sea and its surrounds. These two airfields in the Irish Sea would play a vital part in protecting shipping in and out of the Irish Sea ports of Liverpool, Glasgow, and Belfast.

1941 Air and ground crews need training

By the spring of 1941 Jurby airfield was nearly complete. It was built to the full operational airfield specification of the time. It had the familiar three intersecting runways all joined by a perimeter taxiway. The main runway was NE/SW and 1,100 yards in length and 50 yards wide. This meant it would be able to accept aircraft larger than fighters. A total of 24 blast pens were constructed all around the perimeter.



On arrival at dispersal we were informed that another aircraft from Lossiemouth was also down with the same problem. Paddy contacted the other skipper and asked what the situation was. He said he had been in contact with Lossiemouth and was awaiting further instructions. Paddy contacted Kinloss to advise them of the situation.

The eventual outcome was that spares or replacement sets would be flown out, but it would be about 24 hours before anything would happen. This meant we were stuck on Jurby in just our flying kit over battle dress and flying boots. Arrangements were made for us to pick up socks and shoes from stores as walking any distance in heavy flying boots was out of the question. The skipper got permission from the C.O. for us to go into Ramsey in our flying sweaters and no hats.



Officers Mess ~ Jurby Airfield

The Isle of Man at that time was not on rations, as we knew it on the mainland, neither was it so expensive. We took the opportunity to treat ourselves to what we call an English breakfast with everything ~ sausages, black pudding, mashed potatoes, fried bread, tomatoes, mushrooms etc. The restaurant was recommended by the station adjutant and I could take you there now as it made such an impression!

Having spent two nights at Jurby the spares aircraft arrived early on our third day. It was another 'Wimpy' from Lossiemouth. It didn't take long to fix the two sick aircraft and we were scheduled to take off for base after lunch. Paddy, being the senior skipper, was in charge of the departure and having had words with the two other skippers he went to flying control to advise time of take off and the method. When the station personnel saw our three 'Wimpys' taxiing around the perimeter

towards the main runway everything stopped to watch the take off. Paddy had informed us what he had in mind. The observers were in for a treat. Arriving at the runway Paddy took our aircraft forward and the other two positioned themselves either side to the rear. All three aircraft then began to roll down the runway and took off like three fighter aircraft. Paddy took the flight round the circuit and did a low pass over the flying control building. On arrival at Lossiemouth they were also treated to a low pass of three Wellingtons in flight formation. After this we left our other two aircraft to land at Lossiemouth and we headed to Kinloss just down the road. It was good to be back. Paddy had to report to the C.O. the following day. It transpired that the C.O. of Lossiemouth had phoned to ask our C.O. to thank the skipper of the lead Wellington of the previous days "fly past" for bringing his crews home and mentioned that he had never seen three 'Wimpys' flying in flight formation before. Apparently when Paddy was in Italy it was a usual formation.

As I have mentioned before, the bombs used on target practice were 4lb phosphorous bombs and on one of our bombing exercises we had a "hang up". This is a situation where the release mechanism had malfunctioned and release had not taken place. This does not mean that the bomb was safe ~ the release mechanism could have partially operated and any severe vibration such as landing could dislodge the bomb and we were in trouble. Reporting the defect to the ground operators of the bombing range, we were told that the procedure in such cases was to climb above the range and dive down toward the target and pull up sharply over the target, in the hopes that the bomb would dislodge itself. This unfortunately didn't happen so we had to return to base with the bomb doors open and instructions to avoid build up areas and villages and to stick to open country. On arrival at Kinloss the fire engines, ambulances and armoury detail were waiting our arrival at the end of the runway. The moment we touched down they were onto the runway and chasing after us. Needless to say

Paddy made a very smooth touchdown and we stopped with the bomb still intact. Instructions were given to us to remain in the aircraft, but to be prepared to make exit in a hurry!

After a short while we were informed that the bomb had been removed and made safe ~ an electrical fault was the problem. Should the bomb have fallen whilst we were leaving the aircraft those already on the deck would have received nasty burns around the legs.

Before passing out from O.T.U. and posting to Heavy Conversion Unit (H.C.U.) all members of the crew had to pass all tests and exams in their particular field and to have completed a minimum number of flying hours regardless of having passed. This would mean stepping into the place of a member of another crew who was either sick, dental appointment, or compassionate leave. I found myself short of flying hours having had flu during the course and grounded for 2 weeks so I obtained a flight with another crew whose m/u gunner had a tummy bug. I was informed that the crew I was to fly with had taken off without me for some reason. I was only going to be a passenger for a few hours so I guess they wouldn't have been concerned. It transpired that fate had a hand in all of this because as the aircraft returned to base approaching the runway from over the sea the pilot flew a bit low and the rear landing wheel caught the sand dunes in Findhorn Bay. The rear turret was severely damaged, the gunner critically injured and the rest of the crew severely shaken.

Another rather odd occurrence took place as an aircraft was taking off. The runway being used was one that took the aircraft over a large area of water like an inlet, to the west of Kinloss.

The procedure when taking off is for the skipper to advise the signaller when airborne. He would advise base and the time would be logged. Apparently no signal was received from this aircraft and it was

assumed he had transmitter trouble, would do a circuit and land. This didn't happen. In case the signaller of this aircraft was unaware he had a transmitter fault a signal was sent to the aircraft to abort the exercise and return to base. No response. The following day two aircraft were sent out to search the area around the base for any signs of a wrecked aircraft ~ no joy. The ultimate conclusion was that the aircraft had gone into the water with both engines going full revs for take off as a result of which they had gone straight down. An aircraft and seven lives lost and no evidence.

Our last flight at O.T.U was to form part of an operation over France dropping 'window'. This occasionally happened to enable experienced trainee aircrew to experience what being part of a bombing formation felt like. We were briefed to assemble with other O.T.U. over Southend, Essex some minutes ahead of the main force. We were to be led by a fully experienced member of the Pathfinder Force. Our job was to drop 'window' just ahead of the main force. 'Window' is known today as kitchen foil ~ what we had was in strips about 1/2" wide and some 12-18" long. These were in bundles and dropped down through the flare chute, the intention being to upset radar signals being sent up by the Germans to log on to the main force. The effect was a snow pattern on the German radar screens. Once we had exhausted our bundles of 'window' we headed home and the Pathfinder aircraft continued on to pinpoint the target (*more about Pathfinder later*).

Having completed and passed our exams and tests at O.T.U our next posting was to H.C.U. (Heavy Conversion Unit). This was a moving on from twin engined aircraft to four engines. The unit we were posted to was Marston Moor to the west of York.

HEAVY CONVERSION UNIT ~ MARSTON MOOR

Except from RAF Marston Moor website

RAF Marston Moor is situated at Tockwith, midway between Harrogate and York, taking its name from the nearby historical battlefield. The Airfield opened in November 1941 as a heavy bomber training school for 4 Group Bomber Command. It was home to 1652 H.C.U.







I was happy to discover the aircraft were Halifaxes, which meant electrical operated turrets, which were much cleaner and less smelly than the Fraser Nash turret driven by oil pressure.



Handley Page Halifax Bomber

This aircraft was going to be quite new to Paddy so he, too, was now on a learning curve. Once again we had a lot of ground work to do before we were able to get airborne. The usual PT and cross country, battle courses, dinghy drill with completely new escape procedure (a different aircraft). The flight engineer had a whole new system to learn ~ four sets of gauges, one for each engine and a pumping system for swapping fuel from one tank to another. The navigator would now have the 'gee' box which was used to identify various cities by their shapes. Unarmed combat drill was added, as was grenade and small arms drill. All this once again had to be completed and passed to the instructors' satisfaction.

Unarmed combat instructors were from the RAF Regiment who also taught the grenade and small arms drill. The unarmed combat was for real and if you didn't take it seriously you could end up with a broken wrist or dislocation – it happened!

Grenade and small arms drill consisted of learning how to throw a hand grenade with accuracy and using revolvers and daggers. The hand grenades were thrown from behind a sandbag wall. The firing mechanism of the grenade is a lever held in place by a ring pull and to arm the grenade you held it in the palm of the hand with the fingers over the lever and pulled the pin. At no time now must you release your pressure on the lever until ready to throw. To throw the grenade the arm is placed to the rear with the hand low down and is brought over the head with the arm straight in a lobbing action releasing the grenade at the highest point. Our navigator, Tom, was really scared handling grenades and as soon as he pulled the pin he wanted to throw it. He was terrified. To add a bit of fun to the exercise we used to obtain large empty tins from behind the mess kitchen, take them to the range, place them in the target area and see who could get their grenade in the tin. We always knew when a hit had been scored, the sound was terrific.

The time arrived for our introduction to the Halifax.



Each member of the crew was given individual introduction to his particular roll by an experienced instructor. This took place on an aircraft in the hanger. My tutor was a Warrant Officer (W/O) with operational experience. I did not know until this point that the m/u turret had a high speed button for quick traverse from front to rear or vice versa. The fuselage of the Halifax is very roomy in comparison to the Lancaster, which is oval in section.



Lancaster

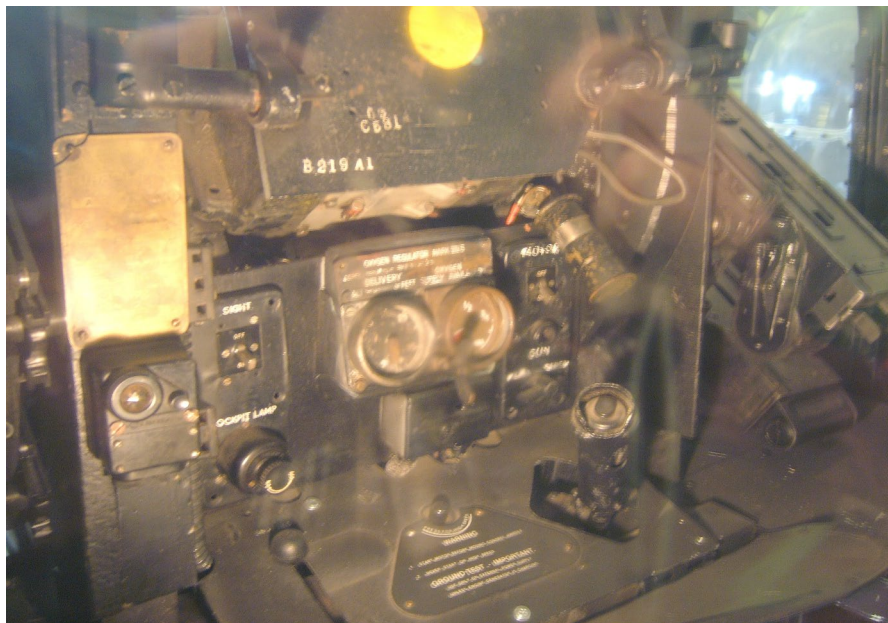
(During the only flight I ever had in a Lancaster I managed to get the release handle of my parachute caught up, which entailed collecting the parachute together and returning to the drying and packing hanger for a new one and paying a 2/6d fine [12½ p]). The fuselage of the Halifax is so spacious that in some middle and far eastern countries they were used solely as transport aircraft.



The training followed much the same routine as O.T.U; air to air and air to sea gunnery, mock fighter attacks with camera guns, bombing range exercises and lots of night flying and a chance to try out the heated inner suit which plugged into the electrical system.



Rear Gunner's Position ~ Halifax Bomber



Inside Upper Turret ~ Halifax Bomber



A Boulton Paul MkVIII Type 'A' Turret.
Ref No. 50A 108-109
Recovered from a Handley Page Halifax, Serial DK116 of 1660 Heavy Conversion Unit, which crashed on the 15th October 1944 after an engine failure at 12,000 Ft. It struck high ground on Grapstone Fell, near the Kielder Forest.
During restoration work, it was found that the turret was actually an earlier MkII of the type fitted to Boulton Paul Defiant night fighters.
The MkVIII modifications were carried out by a French engineering company called S.A.M.M.

The flying training started with the skipper being overseen by an experienced pilot. Landing and take offs (circuits and bumps) were conducted at a local disused operational aerodrome ~ Acaster Malbis ~ the runway had sunk, but was quite safe for our purpose.

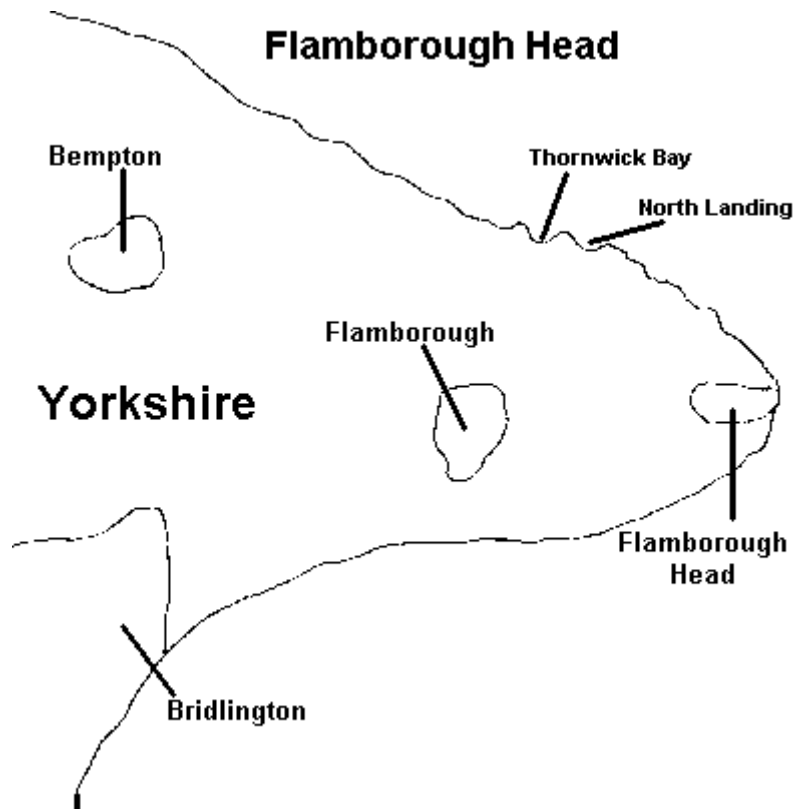




It was rather strange at first to witness the aircraft starts its run, gradually disappear then reappear again some distance further on and still on the deck. The dip wasn't noticed when in the aircraft. Although Acaster Malbis was only used for circuits and bumps it did have its own kitchen and mess hall and at one particular time there was a delivery of stacks of crates of eggs! The crates were quite long, about 10" deep, two feet wide and full of eggs. No one knew who ordered them or from where they came. We had eggs cooked in every conceivable way and some were transported over to Marston Moor.

The time for Paddy's solo arrived having completed his period of instruction and we all wished him the best of luck and hung on for dear life. He taxied to the end of the runway, checked all the crew were in position (bomb aimer in co pilots seat, m/u by signaller) and we were off. We seemed to be a long time getting airborne but at least we felt lift off ~ now for the landing ~ all eyes peeled for other aircraft. Turn to port, downwind, into funnel, skipper sweating like hell, over perimeter fence, touchdown, no problem, open up engines for another circuit. Next exercise for Paddy is the overshoot. This occurs if you approach too high, too fast or some idiot has decided to taxi across the runway or even turn onto the runway as you make your approach. This entails bringing flaps up, wheels up and opening up throttles to gain airspeed and height ~ easier said than done.

Before we had done any cross country exercises, we were detailed to do a square search off Flamborough Head, following a ditching from the previous night's raid.



This is a tedious job and a nightmare for the navigator. The idea is to start a run out to sea for a set number of minutes at a set speed, then turn and backtrack at the same speed for the exact same number of minutes.

The bombardier is in the nose, the flight engineer in the co-pilots seat, mid upper turret and tail gunner in turret all searching the water. Needless to say this is a low flying exercise ~ we found nothing and returned to base.

As we progressed on our course and got a few flying hours under our belt, Paddy broke the news that he wanted all members of the crew to be able to fly the aircraft straight and level. That entails two instruments ~ the artificial horizon which indicates whether you are flying level, climbing or falling and the bank and turn instrument which indicates a turn in either direction, or if the wings are straight and level. What Paddy didn't tell us was that this was to be achieved from having put the aircraft into a turning dive!! So we got into the co-pilots seat and strapped in. The skipper did a dummy run to show what we would

have to do. Immediately he went into a dive all the instruments went haywire and all we had to do, he said, was to line them all up again by pulling back on the control columns to get flying straight and level and use the pedals and control column to get the bank and turn instruments in line ~ keep concentrating on the instruments and not to worry what was going on outside. It was surprising how much strength was needed to pull the aircraft out of the dive and it made us realise what was needed when we ordered the skipper to corkscrew during an attack. I have no idea how all this affected the navigators calculations as to our position, but he must have had a few headaches!!

Our H.C.U consisted not only of us Brits but also some Canadians and Aussies. The Canadians were very free and easy, mad on the card game “shoot pontoon” which is played with two packs of cards and the kitty could grow to £100 or more which, at that time, was a fortune. We also had a few French crews, one of whom we had to fly out, locate and escort back to base as the navigator was completely disorientated and had not the faintest idea where he was!

Being in the wilds of Yorkshire, and being winter, some of the Aussies were getting excited at the prospect of seeing snow for the first time!! They weren't disappointed. It started and didn't stop!! No flying took place; instructions were issued on how to melt snow to obtain water (not easy). Next thing we knew the Aussies had stripped naked and were having a snow bath, rolling around in it, quite mad!!

We were given permission not to shave whilst on camp but if we were stupid enough to try and get into York then we had to shave. Some did this by melting the snow to obtain hot water; others went to the mess site, obtained tea from the urn, took this to the ablutions and used it as hot water for a shave!!

On one of our exercises we returned to base, joined the circuit for landing and discovered that the indicator light for the starboard undercarriage had not gone from red to green indicating that the wheel was not down and locked. The port wheel was showing green. Now the skipper had a problem ~ was the wheel down and locked? Did we have a circuit fault? Was the wheel down but not locked ~ in which case the undercarriage on the starboard side would collapse on landing. Reporting the problem to flying controls the skipper was told a flight mechanic would be called for. When he arrived the skipper would be asked to do a slow, low pass over the control tower and the mechanic would examine the faulty leg with binoculars to see if he could spot any fault.

The skipper did this but unfortunately they couldn't come to a definite decision. We were then told to repeat our attempted cure for the bomb hang up we had ~ out into the country, get decent height, dive and pull the aircraft up sharply hoping that if the undercarriage wasn't locked the action of pulling the aircraft up would force the undercarriage into the locked position, complete the circuit and the light would show green ~ NO JOY.

The skipper was told he now had two choices (1) bring the undercarriage up and land on the grass beside the runway (belly landing) or (2) keeping the undercarriage down, make a landing holding the starboard side up until the airspeed dropped too low to keep it up and the wheel either held the aircraft up or the wheel collapsed and the starboard wing would hit the deck and we would skew round.

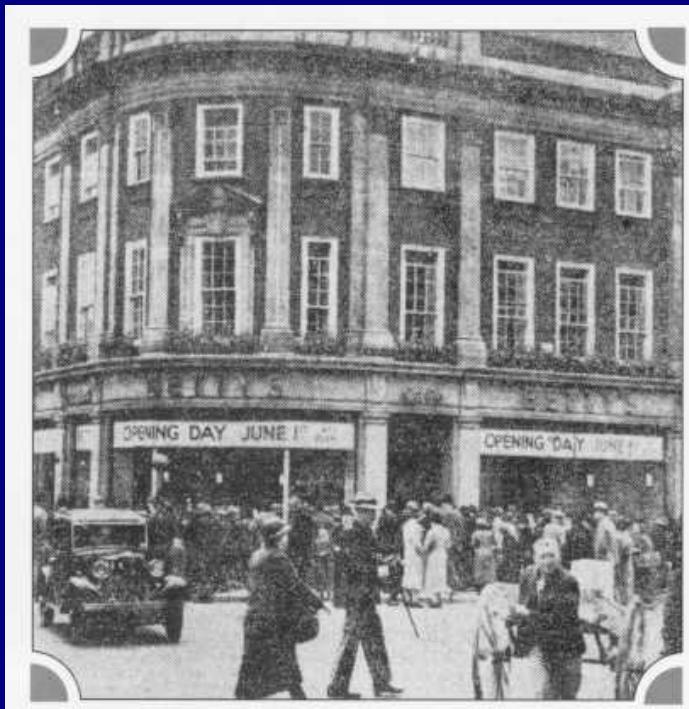
The skipper decided to take a chance on the latter and we all took up our crash positions. The bombardier was in the co-pilots seat keeping the skipper advised as to what was happening on the starboard side. I thought we were never going to touch down; it appeared to take ages

before we felt the port wheel touch the deck, then a slight bump when the starboard wheel touched. We were all relieved when the undercarriage held and nothing further happened so obviously it was either a faulty circuit, switch or bulb, but whatever, it caused a great deal of anxiety!!

It would appear that we had our fair share of trouble with aircraft ~ duff transmitter, bomb hang-up, undercarriage indicator circuit ~ it has to be remembered that the aircraft at O.T.U. and H.C.U were being flown day and night by different crews, taking a lot of pounding.

York city, our nearest town of any size, was very picturesque and stands on the River Ouse. It has a very impressive cathedral and if walking around the small streets adjoining the cathedral, looking up you will see the old houses practically touching on the top floors. These are very old properties and you can visualise a window opening and a “gazzunda” being emptied into the street below!

Another very famous building in York was ‘Betty’s Bar’ known to all air crew in the area. She kept a huge pair of scissors on the counter and a pen with white ink. If it was your first visit out would come the scissors, off would come the top layer of your tie with one deft snip, placed in front of you and you were given the pen to sign your name and where you came from. The tie remnant was then stapled to the board at the back of the bar with many others. ‘Betty’s Bar’ has been mentioned in a number of books I have read written by ex-aircrew.



The war years changed Betty's in many other ways. Thanks to rationing, Betty's customers enjoyed the unusual delights of fish cakes, spam fritters, and corned beef hash. And one



evening an incendiary bomb crashed through the roof of Betty's, although thanks to the swift action of our own nightly fire-watcher, the building was saved. Betty's housed many mirrors, including a huge picture mirror behind the bar. Here wartime 'Bomber Boys', often many thousands of miles from home, used to engrave their name before flying off on dangerous missions. No one is entirely sure how the practice started. By the end of the war the mirror featured nearly 600 names. Sadly many of the young men who signed their name never returned from their dangerous missions overseas. Today several sections of the mirror, which was damaged during an air raid, hang in the downstairs Oak Room as a reminder of all our wartime patrons.

Reaching the end of our training at H.C.U we had the usual exams and tests to pass. I had received my promotion to Flt/Sgt so I now had a crown above my stripes (another piece of brass to clean). Paddy had recommended that we should all apply for officer promotion. Stan and I were the only two to take it up (Gerry the bombardier was already a pilot officer). To cut a long story short I terminated the interview before the promotion board – your record didn't account for very much.

Questions asked were

- “What is your father's occupation?”
- “What paper does he read?”
- “Where do you have your bank account?”

Having been an apprentice in civvy street, joining up and receiving the grand sum of three shillings (15p) a day (twenty one shillings per week of which I allocated 7 shillings to be sent home to my mother) the opportunity to save was minimal.

One of our last trips at H.C.U resulted in being diverted because of fog at our base at Marston Moor. Having been on an exercise over Scotland we were told to put down at Dyce Airport near Aberdeen.



Luftwaffe photograph of Dyce taken in 1941.

The runway was much wider than ours – Paddy had a habit of landing ‘hands off’ – this meant he flew the aircraft into the funnel at the approach to the runway then took his hands off the control columns and just used the pedals to steer the aircraft in. Unfortunately owing to the difference in runway width and it was a night landing we were too high and it seemed ages before we eventually touch down with a hell of a thump. No damage sustained, thank goodness. Paddy apologised for the grotty landing when we met up next morning to return to base, pointing out in daylight that the extra width of the runway caused the misjudgement.

Our time at H.C.U came to an end with a party held in the gym hanger to which all passing out crews were invited, accompanied by one guest, following which we were sent off on leave to await posting to an operation squadron. We couldn’t believe that all our training was over and that we were now a competent bomber crew.

It was nearly two years since I had reported to A.C.R.C at St John's Wood as a raw recruit and now I was a Flt/Sgt member of aircrew.

This is the first part of my book, the second part will deal with operations – and re-muster to Ground Staff following cessations of hostilities in Europe.

I was not yet 21 years old!!

* * * * *

Aircraft Type:	Miles Magister
Mark:	M.14A Magister I
Primary Role:	Two seat Trainer
First Flight:	1937
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	1937-1945
Manufacturer:	Miles
Engine:	One De Havilland Gipsy Major 1 engine
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Wingspan 33 ft 10 in (10.31 m), Length 24 ft 7.5 in (7.50 m), Height 6 ft 8 in (2.03 m)
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	Empty 1,286 lbs (583 kg), Loaded 1,900 lbs (862 kg)
Speed:	Max Speed 115 kts (212 kph), Cruise 107 kts (198 kph), Ceiling 18,000 ft (5,486 m)
Ceiling:	
Range:	
Armament:	None
Crew:	2
Squadrons:	778,780
Battle honours:	None with FAA

Aircraft Type:	Avro Anson I
Mark:	Avro Anson Mk.I
Primary Role:	TAG Training, Communications
First Flight:	1935
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	September 1943-post 1945
Manufacturer:	Avro
Engine:	Two 350 hp Armstrong Siddley Cheetah IX engines
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Wingspan: 17.22 m Length: 12.88 m Wing area: 38 m2
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	4286 kg
Speed: Ceiling: Range:	Max. speed: 303 km/h Ceiling: 5800 m Range: 1250 km
Armament:	Payload: 224kg bombs Armament: Four 7.69mm guns
Crew:	3-4
Squadrons:	700,703,707,710,711,719,720,724,725,728,732,735,737,739,740,742,744,745,747,749,750,751,758,762,763,766,771,772,778,781,782,783,784,785,786,787,787X,789,790,792,798,799,809,1830,1832,1833,1840,1841
Battle honours:	None
Additional references and notes:	Sturtivant, R. & Burrow, M (1995) 'Fleet Air Arm Aircraft 1939 to 1945' Published by Air Britain (Historians) Ltd, 1995 ISBN: 0 85130 232 7

Aircraft Type:	Airspeed AS 10 Oxford
Mark:	I, II
Primary Role:	Three-seat advanced trainer, wooden structure, plywood covered.
First Flight:	1938
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	1939/1940-1945/46
Manufacturer:	Airspeed, Portsmouth
Engine:	Two 375 hp Armstrong-Siddeley Cheetah X engines
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Span, 53 ft 4 ins (16.3m); length, 34 ft 6 ins (10.5m); height, 11 ft 1 in.(3.3m)
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	Empty, 5,380 lb (2575kg); loaded, 7,600 lb (3632kg)
Speed:	Max Speed 188 mph (325 km/h) Ceiling 19,500 ft (6400m) Climb 960 ft per minute (15.1 m/s)
Ceiling:	
Range:	
Armament:	None
Crew:	2
Squadrons:	700, 701, 702, 703, 720, 727, 728, 729, 730, 739, 740, 750, 751, 758, 759, 760, 761, 762, 765, 766, 780, 781, 782, 787, 789, 790, 792, 798, 799, and 1701
Battle honours:	None with FAA
Additional references and notes:	-

Aircraft Type:	Supermarine Spitfire
Mark:	Mk.VC detailed here Mk 1a, Mk IIa, Mk IIb, Mk Va (some hooked), Mk Vb (half hooked), Mk Vc, Mk VIII, Mk PR.XIII, Mk L.Vb, Mk LF.Vb, F.Vb, Mk XI, Mk HF.IX, XII, XVI, Seafire Mk IIb prototype
Primary Role:	shore-based fighter, carrier borne fighter
First Flight:	Prototype 5.3.1936 (Mk.IA)
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	1940-1945
Manufacturer:	Supermarine
Engine:	One 1,440 hp Rolls-Royce Merlin 45 engine
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Wingspan 36.8 ft (11.23 m) Length 29.9 ft (9.12 m) Height 11.4 ft (3.48 m)
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	Weight empty 5,100 lb (2,313 kg) max. 6,786 lb (3,078 kg)
Speed: Ceiling: Range:	Speed 374 mph (602 km/h) Ceiling 37,000 ft (11,280 m) Range 470 mi (756 km)
Armament:	Two 20mm cannons and two .50 calibre machine guns in wings Two 250-lb bombs plus one 500-lb bomb on center line
Crew:	1
Squadrons:	718,719,736,748,759,761,762,768,770,775,778,787,790,791,794,798 801,808,809,879,880,884,885,886,887,897,899
Battle honours:	
Additional references and notes:	Differences between Spitfire Marks by the Spitfire Society

Aircraft Type:	Hawker Hurricane
Mark:	Hurricane Mk I, Ia, Ib, IIa, IIb, Hurricane I/tropical, FB.IIc, IV. Sea Hurricane Mk I, Ib, II
Primary Role:	Carrier-Borne Fighter
First Flight:	Prototype 6.11.1936
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	1941-1945
Manufacturer:	Hawker
Engine:	One Rolls-Royce (Packard) Merlin XX V-engine Sea hurricane: 1280 hp Rolls-Royce Merlin XII
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Wingspan : 40 feet (12.20 m) Length: 31 feet; 4 inches (9.82 m)
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	Weight: 7,200 lbs combat-loaded (3500 kg)
Speed: Ceiling: Range:	Max. speed: 340 mph (530 km/h) Ceiling : 35,000 feet (9500 m) Rate of climb: 3,150 feet per minute Range: 468 miles (740 km)
Armament:	Eight .303 calibre Browning machine guns Two 500-lb bombs or eight rockets
Crew:	1
Squadrons:	700,727,728,748,760,770,771,772,774,775,776,779,784,787Z,788,794, 803,805,806,877,889
Battle honours:	Battle of Britain (FAA serving crew), North Africa, Western Desert, Atlantic, Arctic, Malta, Madagascar, Italy.
Additional references and notes:	General information about the aircraft

Aircraft Type:	Vickers Wellington
Mark:	Wellington Mk.X, XI, XVII
Primary Role:	Medium bomber for RAF, FAA duties included ASV training, fighter affiliation
First Flight:	Prototype 15.6.1936
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	1942-1946
Manufacturer:	Vickers
Engine:	Mk I - two Bristol Pegasus Mk X, XI, XVII - two 1675 hp Bristol Hercules engines Mk II - two Rolls-Royce Merlin
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Wingspan 86.2 ft (26.26 m) Length 64.6 ft (19.68 m) Height 17 ft (5.17 m) Wing area 840 sq ft (78.04 sq m)
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	Weight empty 26,323 lb (11,940 kg) max. 36,500 lb (16,556 kg)
Speed: Ceiling: Range:	Speed 255 mph (410 km/h) Initial climb rate 1,050 ft/min (320 m/min) Ceiling 22,000 ft (6,710 m) Range 2,200 mi (3,540 km)
Armament:	Eight 7.7mm machine gun; 2,014 kg bombs
Crew:	6
Squadrons:	716, 785, 762, 765, 782 and 783 , 765
Battle honours:	None with FAA
Additional references and notes:	-

HALIFAX

Nationality	British
Aircraft Type	Heavy Bomber
First Flight	25 October 1939
Entered Service	November 1940
Crew	7
Notes	Developed in response to Air Ministry Specification P.31/36.Details for B. Mk III. Where the Lancaster was in the main a single role target destroyer, the Halifax was the multi-role aircraft of Bomber Command
Specification	
Powerplant	Four 1.615 hp Bristol Hercules XVI radial piston engines
Performance	
Speed	454 km/h at 4.115 m. Long range Crusie 346 km/h at 6.100 m
Range	1.658 km with maximum bomb load
Service Ceiling	7.315 m
Dimensions	
Wingspan	31,75 m
Wing Area	118,45 m²
Length	21,36 m
Height	6,32 m
Weights	
Empty Weight	17.345 kg
Maximum Take Off Weight	29.484 kg
Weaponry	
Guns	One 0,303 in machine guns on flexible nose mount, four in dorsal and tail turrets
Bombs etc.	13.000 lb bombload
Versions	
Prototypes	Four 1.280 hp Rolls-Royce Merlin IX engines
B. Mk I Series I	Initial production version; Merlin X engines
B. Mk I Series II	Stressed for extra weight; Merlin X engines
B. Mk I Series III	Increased tankage; Four Merlin X or XX engines
B. Mk II Series I	Increased tankage. Merlin XXS or XXII engines with 4-gun dorsal turret
B. Mk I Series I (Special) & Series IA	Merlin 22 engines; dorsal turret; One .303 in Vickers K gun in perspex nose
B. Mk II Series II	Merlin 65 engines
B. Mk III Prototype	Hercules XVI engines, One Mk II conversion
A. Mk III	Mk III conversions to glider-tug
C. Mk III	Mk III conversions to transport
Mk IV	Project only
MK V	Modified Mk II; Built in Series I. IA and Series IA (Special) corresponding to Mk IIs eries; Some converted to maritime and Ground reconnaissance
C.Mk VIII variants	1.675 hp Bristol Hercules 100 engines
B. Mk VI	Modified Mk III; increased tankage; filters; 1,675 hp Hercules 100s
C. Mk VI	Mk Vi conversions to transport
A. Mk VII	Glider tug version
B. Mk VII	Final bomber version; As Mk VI but Hercules XVI engines
C. Mk VII	Mk VII conversion to transport of 24 troops
C. Mk VIII	Transport version 11 passengers

Aircraft Type:	Percival Procter
Mark:	I,II, III
Primary Role:	trainer
First Flight:	1932
Date operating with FAA squadrons:	1939-
Manufacturer:	Procter
Engine:	One 208hp DH Gypsy Queen 2 engine
Wing Span: Length: Height: Wing Area:	Span : 12.04m (39'6ft) Length : 8.60m (28'2ft) Height : 2.20m (7'3ft)
Empty Weight: Max.Weight:	empty : 1,111kg (2,450lb) max : 1,588kg (3,500lb)
Speed:	max speed : 250km/h (157mph)
Ceiling:	max climb : 680ft/min (207m/min)
Range:	ceiling : 14,000ft (4270m) range : 805km (500miles)
Armament:	None
Crew:	2
Squadrons:	746,752,754,755,756,758,759,761,767,770,772,778,780,781,782,784,787,794
Battle honours:	None with FAA
Additional references and notes:	-

PART TWO



102 SQUADRON POCKLINGTON, YORKSHIRE
No 4 GROUP



The memorial (pictured above) bears the words:

'RAF Pocklington Airfield. The home of No 102 (Ceylon) Squadron RAF and No 405 Squadron No 4 RCAF. Group Bomber Command during World War II. From where so many gave their lives in the cause of freedom.

No 102 Squadron will always be associated with the name of Leonard Cheshire. On the night of 12/13th November 1940, Pilot Officer - as he then was - GL Cheshire was captain of Whitley V P5005 "N - Nuts" detailed to attack an oil refinery at Wesseling, not far from Cologne. It appears that he arrived in the target area within a few minutes of the ETA but owing to intercom trouble was unable to discover his exact position until some twenty minutes later, by which time the target was blanketed by cloud. He decided to attack the railway marshalling yards at Cologne instead and while he was approaching this target his aircraft was suddenly shaken by a succession of violent explosions. The cockpit filled with black fumes and Cheshire lost control of the aircraft, which dived about 2,000 feet, with its fuselage on fire. Cheshire regained control, the fire was extinguished and the

Whitley, with a gaping hole in its fuselage, was brought safely back to base after, being in the air for 8 1/2 hours. Cheshire gained an immediate DSO. He was later awarded the DFC for operations with No 102 Squadron.

In 1942 No 102 Squadron re-equipped with Halifaxes and continued with aircraft of this type for the rest of the European war. It took part in each of the three historic 1,000-bomber raids in May/June 1942, and, later, in the battles of the Ruhr, Hamburg, and Berlin. It was well to the fore in the pre-invasion attacks on railway communications in Northern France and on the eve of D-Day sent 26 aircraft - the largest number it had yet dispatched - to bomb an enemy gun battery on the coast of Normandy. In September/October 1944, it undertook the transportation of petrol to Belgium for the Second Army and in just over one week carried 134,250 gallons without mishap. In the great day and night 1,000 - bomber attacks on Duisburg in the closing stages of the war some of its crews made two round trips within twenty-four hours.

Among the awards gained by its personnel were 5 DSOs 115 DFCs, two bars to the DFC, and 34 DFM.

On 7th May 1945, No 102 was transferred to Transport Command.

Bomber Command WWII Bases:

- Driffield : Jul 1938-Aug 1940
- Detachments in France (Villeneuve, code name Sister) at various times during period Oct 1939-Feb 1940).
- Detachments at Kinloss Nov/Dec 1939 (on loan to Coastal Command) & Apr-May 1940.
- Leeming : Aug 1940-Sep 1940 Sqdn loaned to Coastal Command Sep-Oct 1940 & based at Prestwick; a/c were detached to Aldergrove & operated from there.
- Linton-on-Ouse : Oct 1940-Nov 1940
- Topcliffe : Nov 1940-Nov 1941
- Dalton : Nov 1941-Jun 1942
- Topcliffe : Jun 1942-Aug 1942
- Pocklington : Aug 1942-May 1945
-

Transferred from Bomber Command to Transport Command 7.5.45.

The following is from "Pocklington Memories" website



In 1944, with 102 Squadron based at Pocklington & equipped with Halifax BIII's, I was a nineteen year old rear gunner, one of two 'Brits' in a crew of Australians & New Zealanders.

"Over the months we flew 45 operations. Day & night attacks on most of the major targets, & laying mines from as far north as Oslo Fjord to as far south as La Rochelle. We survived fighter attacks over Stuttgart & Bochum, picked up more than a fair share of flak, & one night collided with a Lancaster over the Zuider Zee. 'Twould seem we were an irresistible attraction for enemy 'hardware', & as a result, became very familiar with the emergency airfields at Manston & Carnaby. The late 'Gus' Walker, at the

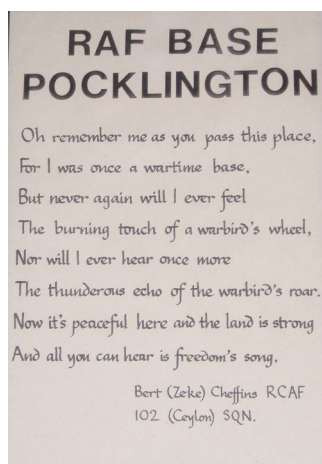
time Air Commodore & resident 'brass' at Pocklington, remarked on one occasion that we seemed to be making rather a habit of returning to base via road or rail, & that perhaps we'd occasionally like to try flying back. Shortly afterwards, we were able to oblige him.

Returning from Bocage one morning - after attacking the V2 site there - with our port fin & rudder all but shot away, & with severe damage to the rear turret (often wondered who in France found the cupola & side panels of my turret), we'd been obliged to put out a 'Mayday' call, the result of which had been timely guidance to the huge American base [Mildenhall?], near Bury-St-Edmunds.

We'd made a bit of a mess of their runway on landing, but, being Yanks, they had been very understanding & helpful. After feeding us royally, they returned us to Pocklington aboard one of their B17's. We never did hear from 'Gus' whether or not that was a satisfactory mode of return.



We were a happy crew, extremely fortunate, too. We'd been one of 6 crews posted to Pocklington from the conversion unit at Rufforth; only 2 of the 6 were to survive."



*A framed poem written by Bert (Zeke) Cheffins
now on the wall of the clubhouse of Pocklington Airfield Gliding Club*

The first duty for us was to get the dreaded "arrivals" chitty signed. This was difficult enough on a training camp where everything was more or less static, but on a busy operational station it was a nightmare, but had to be completed as soon as possible.

Walking around the camp with the chitty you noticed things not seen on training stations : bare patches of grass beside the runway (burnt out aircraft), skid trails (belly landings) and filled in craters.

After a few days getting settled in we were allocated an aircraft which, although not new, looked in good condition. We got to know our

ground crew (fitters, mechanics, armourers, electricians etc). These were a very necessary part of our team and endeavoured to ensure that our aircraft were in the best possible condition before any trip. A form 700 was signed by the skipper when the aircraft was handed over by ground staff indicating that it was in airworthy condition. This ritual was carried out following any activity in which the aircraft could have been damaged: flak (metal fragments from exploding shells), engine problems, undercarriage damage from heavy landing etc.

The invasion of Europe was well under way by the time we arrived at Pocklington so a great deal of our job was to make life for our troops a bit easier by mass bombing of towns to cut down on “house to house” fighting having first dropped leaflets to warn any civilians of impending activity, laying of land mines to stop shipping from returning to port and submarines returning to base.

Our first detail was duly posted on the flight board. We were to be part of a decoy raid to attract attention away from the main bombing force. It felt rather odd being in on a briefing for an actual raid over enemy territory ~ elation after all the hard months of training, fear of the unknown mixed with a certain amount of pride. We were detailed to carry incendiary bombs; our target was a large industrial area already having had attention from previous raids.

The pilot's seat had armour plating panels on the back but Paddy's big fear was shrapnel up his backside!! To this end (no pun intended) he had the ground crew scrounge for him a large square of sorbo rubber (obtained from clapped out gymnasium mats) which he gouged out from the centre to allow his tin hat to set in upside down. This he placed in the hollow of his seat with another square of sorbo on top.

Apparently he used the same set up when he was flying ops in “Wimpys”. I tried his seat and it was quite comfortable!

After the briefing for our first raid and being given time for take off we had time for a cup of tea in the canteen. Paddy took this opportunity to try and set our minds at rest and settle our nerves.

The ride out to dispersal was very quiet. No one said much, the other crews wished us luck knowing it was our first op. The skipper did his usual routine of having a word with the ground staff and we were in the aircraft and getting busy checking our various stations for power and sound. Then we were rolling. The crawl around the perimeter track to the designated take off runway seemed to take an age, only the presence of other aircraft made us aware that we were about to fly over enemy territory. Our turn came at last. Paddy lined her up on the runway, got the signal from the control wagon at the side of the runway and with a "Good luck, lads" from Paddy we were off. This was to be the routine for a further 18 ops.

Having got airborne we set course and joined the rest of our bomber force to our target, crossing the coast into enemy air space felt unreal until up ahead we could see the searchlights probing the sky and realised this was for real. Suddenly the ack-ack opened up and all hell was let loose. The sound of shells bursting outside the aircraft was like 'whoomph whoopmh' ~ a muted yet sharp noise. Flak began to rain down on the aircraft having exploded some way above us. Pinging sounds of flak from shells exploding below us. To do any appreciable damage the shells needed to explode in close proximity to the aircraft but either way it feels uncomfortable!!

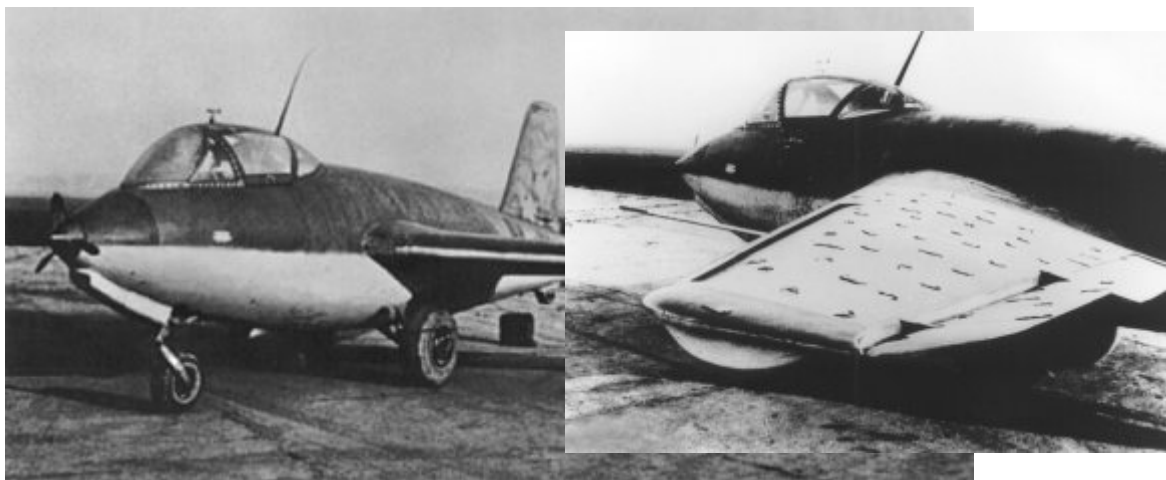
We were caught by a searchlight but before others could join the first one *(being caught by more than one searchlight was known as 'coned')* the skipper had dived out of the beam and we were again in darkness. It was surprising how bright it was in the aircraft for the short time we were lit up.

Nearing the dropping zone we could see coloured markers which were our bombing markers. As we were not carrying high explosive bombs, just incendiaries, we were able to let the bombs go altogether.

Gerry took his position in the nose of the aircraft and began his instructions to the skipper as to how he should fly. This would be “left a bit, steady, right a bit, steady, steady ~ bombs gone”. We would then turn for home, keeping with the rest of the force. Having not met any fighters on the outward flight we fully expected to meet up with them on the homeward, and we did, tracers appeared and aircraft were all over the sky. Bombers taking evasive action, fighters diving in to attack, not a bit like training exercises!! Bringing the aircraft onto course and flying straight and level we were able to take stock and settle down until Joe gave out with “Bandits, prepare to corkscrew starboard” but the jerry didn’t attack. We saw several planes going down with engines and wings on fire over the target area and a possible direct hit on an aircraft still with bombs on board. The navigator told us we were passing over the Dutch coast and should soon be home followed by a comment from the skipper that this was not time to relax. It was not unknown for enemy aircraft to join the stream of aircraft and attack whilst on circuit waiting to land. We had been warned of this in training. The navigator was spot on with his directions to the skipper and we arrived at base hoping the skipper would get us down OK. All the electrics appeared to be OK and the right lights were showing. He made the circuit, entered the funnel and greased her onto the runway.

We couldn’t wait to exit the aircraft to see what damage we had picked up. A few flak holes in the fin and rudders otherwise damage free. Our first op completed and being the first, remains the most vivid. The squadron was commended by the officer commanding the main bomber force for a job well done. We boarded the crew bus having finished our inspection of the aircraft and headed for our first de-

briefing. This was a very detailed inquisition on all aspects of the raid, the smallest piece of information being of importance. The gunnery officer asked if we had seen or witnessed any unusual happenings with enemy bandits. Nothing could be recalled until I remembered Joe's aborted attack from starboard. He said he saw an aircraft unidentified coming to attack and suddenly disappear. Other crews had also had similar experiences. We were told that there was a report of a jet type enemy aircraft having been sighted in the area of our raid and that the next sortie in that area would be going up with cameras. Film of the aircraft was obtained; it appeared to be an aircraft with conventional engine for climbing, take off and landing but also had a jet engine giving it about 20 seconds of flight (about 3 attacks) at high speed. If my memory serves me correctly it was an ME 263.



Following de-briefing and the completion of our first operation we made for the mess and the usual fry up of the type favoured by my son-in-law, Chris ~ fried bread, bacon, sausage, black pudding, mushrooms etc. We now had to try and get some sleep.

Most of our raids followed a similar pattern – the invasion of Europe was well advanced and a number of our trips were to assist the ground forces to advance by bombing enemy ack-ack units and retreating columns and the dropping of supplies. The bombing of large cities –

Köln, Berlin, Hamburg, and Mannheim etc – was a necessary evil to make life easier for the ground forces.



Cologne Cathedral survived the saturation bombing

Dresden was the one city that we hated bombing. We were aware of it's many old building but the job had to be done. Flying over the town after hostilities finished it was not surprising the damage done having seen the town from 15,000 ft at night where everything appeared to be on fire.



On one of our raids in the industrial Ruhr (Happy Valley), we had the misfortune to have one of our engines hit and put out of action. The Halifax can quite happily fly on three engines, but we had only just dropped our bombs and headed for home. Any problems with 'bandits' would find us making very sluggish evasive action. With three engines diving and climbing would be difficult. The skipper decided to lose height gradually until we were at a comfortable 'baling out' altitude. Without any warning a second engine packed up. This meant we would now have to throw out as much heavy equipment as possible. The skipper asked Tom how far we were from the coast so he could decide whether to bale out or try for a ditching or with any luck make a landfall on British soil.

The skipper gave the option that anyone wishing to bale out could do so but there were no takers. So all heavy and not so heavy equipment was jettisoned; guns, ammo and any other junk. Stan was busy on the transmitter passing on positions as given by Tom the navigator. Gerry the bombardier was in the co-pilots seat giving Paddy some help. Joe and I were trying to jettison as much stuff as possible. The engineer, Bert, was keeping an eye on the two good engines and the distribution of fuel from various tanks to others to help balance the aircraft. Height was being lost and we past over the coast and over the North Sea at quite a low altitude. We were not in our ditching positions in the aircraft and it was obvious we would not make landfall. The skipper put the aircraft down on the water perfectly – tail first, followed by a bloody great thump as the belly settled onto the water. All the crew appeared to be injury free and as I was in charge of the dinghy I took up my station by the exit and fortunately discovered the dinghy the right way up.

Survival equipment was put on board including the automatic radio. All the crew clambered aboard the dinghy and with a check that we had all the survival gear we cast off. The sea was fairly calm, dawn was

breaking and Paddy did a check of what we had; compass, paddles *(these were the type into which one put ones arm and having a large flat area against which you placed your hand and paddled – basic but very effective)*, sea sickness pills, water, biscuits and chocolate in air tight tins, sun cream and the very important radio. This was a transmitter powered by cranking a handle approximately 120 turns per minute (if my memory serves me correctly) and sent out a distress signal in Morse covering quite a large area. Whilst all this checking was going on the aircraft, now some distance away, although still afloat was beginning to settle down and just slipped below the water, no tipping up on end as do ships, just sunk.

With the aircraft no longer visible we felt quite alone. According to Tom we were about 10 miles from the enemy coast in an area void of shipping activity. The North Sea has some very strong currents where it meets up with the English Channel and we could feel the pull very strongly. Fortunately no one had got completely wet. Myself and the engineer had soaked flying boots and we all had wet bottoms from water which had managed to get into the dinghy but after a while was unnoticeable. The radio was passed round the crew and each turned the handle for a given time.

Along the coast the Germans had placed rescue cabins (for want of a better word). These were wooden structures, anchored, to enable ditched pilots to clamber into to await rescue by patrolling sea vessels which were similar to our air sea rescue boats. It was not unknown for British pilots to make use of them, as our air sea rescue vessels used to check them out if in the area.

We saw several aircraft during our time in the water but were too high or too far away to attract attention. The navigator thought we had travelled some distance from our original splash down.

It was midday on the second day that Joe spotted a vessel travelling at high speed. The skipper loaded the flare gun ready to fire should the vessel be friendly. It was one of our air sea rescue launches and Paddy fired off the flare to be answered by an Aldis message read by Stan as “you’re home and dry, congratulations”.

We were taken aboard the launch, given dry clothing in the form of long johns and overalls, and sea socks. Hot drinks and flasks of soup followed. It was strange ploughing through the water in a high speed launch after floating around in a dinghy for a day and a half. Bert, the engineer, had his head in the engine room but Gerry wasn’t enjoying the dash for home, leaping from wave top to wave top one little bit – bad case of sea sickness. We landed at Scarborough and were taken to a special unit some miles inland for de-briefing and arranging passage home to base and re-kitting. Paddy discovered that we had been fixed by a receiver at Whitby and another at Cromer but due to the fast tides we were never in one place for long enough, which was the reason for the delay in our rescue. A big fuss was made in the press recently concerning a radio which had been invented which needed no batteries or connection to any electrical supply ~ you turned a handle to generate the power. We did that in our dinghy 60 years ago!!

Arriving at base was a very emotional experience. We apparently were the only casualties from our squadron. We were given 48 hours stand down which meant we were free to do whatever we wished, just as long as we reported for duty at the end of that time.

The war in Europe was coming to a climax – advances were being made on all fronts and the job of bomber command nearly at an end. We were given a job of dropping urgent medical supplies just outside Köln (Cologne). The city had been taken and civilian casualties were large. This meant a low level crossing of the North Sea and overland until arrival at the target area. Most of the stores were in the bomb bay

attached with static lines. These were long lines which when the crates and boxes were dropped, remained anchored to the aircraft and when fully extended pulled the parachute release. Not all the supplies were suitable for the bomb bay ~ some were in the fuselage and we pushed them through escape hatches and doors. Another operation was landing at captured airfields with supplies and returning with released P.O.W.s. This was a job the Lancaster couldn't do, the fuselage was too narrow, it did mean that we had to fly at less than 10,000 ft because of oxygen problems.

The day the war ended in Europe we were on "stand down" at Pocklington. Everyone obviously wanted to go home and celebrate.



York being a garrison town surrounded by airfields and army camps was immediately made out of bounds to all military personnel unless holding special passes. The railway station could not have coped with the influx of servicemen wanting to get home. Leave and passes were issued on a rotary basis if it was due and we all eventually got our leave.

Returning from leave we discovered that the squadron was to be transferred to Transport Command and to be based in India. Only a

crew of six was required and orders stipulated that one gunner would stand down and re-muster and the other would join the crew as cargo assistant. We tossed for it, Joe won and I lost. Most of us still had about two years to go before our demob number came up (mine was 54). I think Paddy was to be the first to be demobbed, but still had time to do a tour in India. A lot of farewell celebrations were being held on the base, all ending with our popular air-crew son

There were fighters, fighters lots of ruddy fighters
In the Ruhr, in the Ruhr
There were fighters, fighters lots of ruddy fighters
In the Valley of the Ruhr

Chorus :

*My eyes are dim, I cannot see
The searchlights they are blinding me
The searchlights they are blinding me*

There was flak, flak, bags of ruddy flak
In the Ruhr, in the Ruhr
There was flak, flak bags of ruddy flak
In the valley of the Ruhr

Chorus :

My eyes are dim, I cannot see.....

Our last trip as a crew was taking our ground staff on a circular tour of German cities which they had often heard mentioned as targets but to them just a name. I think, like myself, they were very saddened by the devastation they saw, not realising how much damage had been done to some very old cities, and our armourers enjoyed operating the turrets. Paddy let them take the co-pilots control column and Gerry took them down into the bomb aimers position in the nose. The day ended with drinks in the sergeant's mess with special permission of the mess committee.

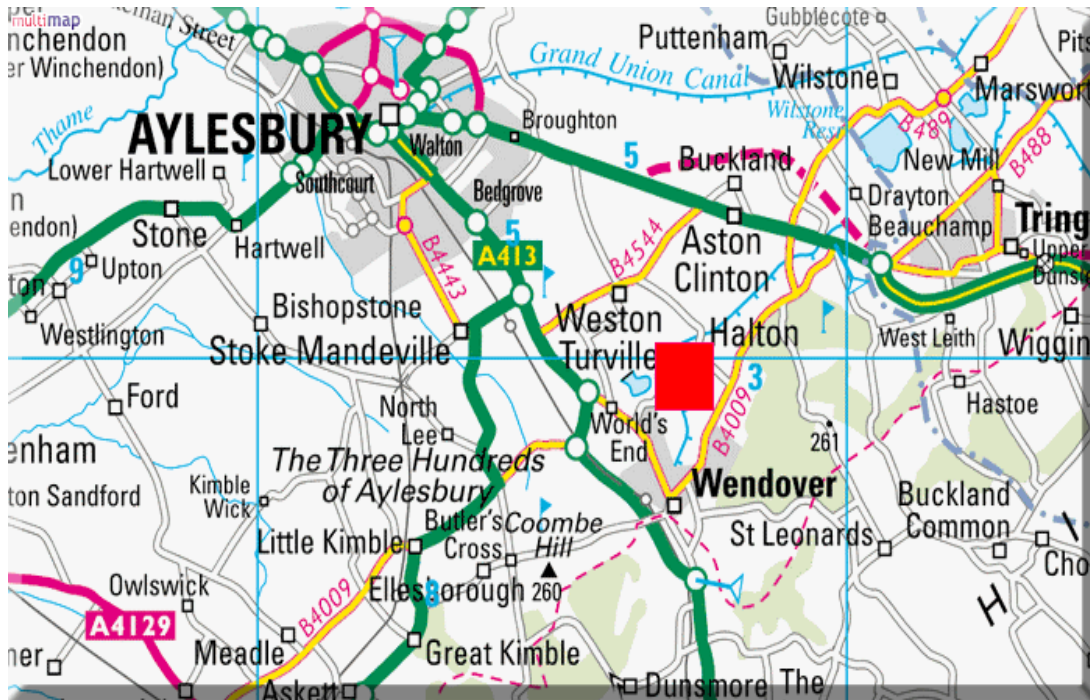
Cessation of hostilities meant that we were now to be rid of the flying kit kit-bag for those of us who had to re-muster. A lot of ex air crew had to be absorbed into ground trades. A special centre on an old airfield was opened up for this purpose to which I was posted. I don't know why but although I remember arriving there I cannot remember where it was. The day after arrival we were given a lecture in the hanger by a Squadron Leader who informed us that we would be given questionnaires and application forms which would have to be filled in. At the back of the hanger, we were informed, was a blackboard with some 30 or so ground trades for which we could apply, pending our demob. As you can imagine here you have some 200 ex air crew having enjoyed the comradeship found on an active squadron now having to transfer to a ground job.

A group of flight engineers discovered that a Flight Lieutenant had a Bentley car (complete with straps over the bonnet) which was in need of some attention!! To kill time and with his permission, they proceeded to strip, clean and re-assemble the car to the obvious delight of the Flight Lieutenant and the bods who gathered to watch proceedings. On completion of the exercise the Flight Lieutenant and four bods took the car round the perimeter, lined it up on the runway and, to the joy of those of us watching and listening, the Bentley roared down the runway followed by the noise that only a Bentley can make!

Having handed in our application forms a meeting was called in the hanger. The Squadron Leader was not a happy man. We were so browned off that we had decided as a whole not to fill in any of the questions. The Squadron Leader mentioned that he had been given the task of getting us into a ground trade, he'd had no choice, it was to be his last job before demob and suggested we comply with the request for three trades on the form, hand them in and get on with it. As he was one of us with a job to do, we duly filled in the application forms. I had

chosen 'radiographer', 'photographer' and 'clerk'. We were then sent on indefinite leave pending recall to our new roles.

The leave lasted seven weeks and began to get very boring until I received a posting to report to M.T.E. 7 D. RAF Halton, Nr Aylesbury, Bucks.....



This transpired to be Medical Training Establishment Depot – I had been chosen to train as a radiographer with all that entails – anatomy, physiology, electricity, radiography and photography.

Anatomy	Bone structure of the body
Physiology	Organs and workings of the body
Electricity	How this is used to produce x rays
Radiography	How to produce skeletal images for the radiologist to read and make a diagnosis from
Photography	The use of 35mm film in mass chest X ray and plate film for general radiography

Our accommodation at Halton was in semi detached three bedroom houses. Although RAF Halton was an established station having been used for the training of ground engineers in civilian times, the hospital was part of the camp and a very established and well known training unit.

The camp was, of course, unlike what we were used to, it had no runways or dispersal units, just a conglomeration of various buildings with classrooms around the main hospital. The usual arrival chitty had to be signed by the usual offices, but due to the close set up of the buildings, was considerably quicker and easier.



I am in the back row, second from left

I was in a class some of whom were ex air crew like me. For some reason the powers that had be decreed that Flight Sergeants would not wear the crown above the stripes whilst on camp but leaving camp had to be fully dressed i.e. crown in place. I have yet to discover the logic behind this ruling. For our first lesson we sat in the classroom surrounded by charts of the human skeleton including a full size model standing in the corner ~ Fred.

We were told that there were 207 bones in the skeleton and we were to learn the names of them all. This was not as difficult as it sounds as some bones are grouped i.e. carpal and meta-carpal (bones in the hand), tarsal and meta-tarsal (bones in the feet). The difficult part for me was remembering the Latin names, not only did we have to know the names but also to recognise them. The weekly test consisted of going before the tutor who had a box of actual human bones and he would ask you to hand him a particular bone he named, state which part of the body it belonged to and which way up.

Having at last managed to get my tongue around the Latin names of the bones and getting a Pass + in the tests, we now had to move on to Physiology. This was much more interesting than bones because the various organs formed different functions and were each responsible for a healthy body. We were shown the actual organs in storage jars containing formaldehyde which is a preserving agent. Another reason for the interest was that various problems with organs could be highlighted by the introduction of liquid by injection or a drink such as barium, both being opaque to X rays and showing any abnormalities.

We also had a lecture on anaesthetics ~ I made the wrong move here by sitting in the front row of the class as a result of which I was “volunteered” to act as a guinea pig! Standing in front of the class the anaesthetist sprayed my thumb with a liquid, which made the thumb

numb. Holding my thumb up for all to see he then proceeded to stick about half a dozen needles in it. After that he injected a local anaesthetic and pushed a needle in one side and out the other – my thumb looked like a pin cushion. I think some of the students felt worse than I did!!

Whilst I was at Halton the head radiographer, a Warrant Officer, died of cirrhosis of the liver brought about by excessive drink abuse. His meals consisted of gin and tonic for breakfast, lunch and dinner, it never appeared to affect his ability to lecture or produce X rays.

We moved on to learning how an X ray machine operates and the variety of X rays it is possible to do. X ray of a bone fracture is probably the most basic, then the bronchiogram that entails passing a tube up the nose and into the lungs. Fish oil containing liquid opaque to X rays is then passed into the tube by syringe. The patient is turned onto their side, the liquid flows into the lung area, and X ray is taken which will show the amount of congestion present. I suppose you could liken the lungs to a tree on its side ~ you have the main branch (trunk) then the minor branches, then the twigs (areoles).

Returning to the lecture rooms after lunch one day we were told to fall in outside. The sergeant said that a class of WAAFs (Women's Air Force) were in need of the help of some airmen and would we volunteer?

Being young and red-blooded we did, couldn't wait, IDIOTS!! We were marched to the dental block and found we were to be guinea pigs for the first class of WAAF dental hygienists taking their final exams. We were shown into a large room with dentists' chairs all around, surrounded by the usual dental equipment. We sat in our allocated chairs, the WAAF stood behind the chair and after the instructor had examined my mouth, he told the WAAF to begin the cleaning of my

teeth. As each WAAF finished, she stood to attention behind the chair. The examiner then came over and asked me if I had any problems or soreness. He then examined my teeth making notes, thanked me for volunteering to help and should I have any trouble to report to the dental department.

The following day the WAAF who had done my teeth come over to me in the NAAFI, thanked me for making her test easier than it might have been and thought I should know that she had passed her finals.

Not far from Halton was Stoke Mandeville Hospital, famous for specialising in spinal injuries and still functions today. They had quite a good gym and swimming pool, which we were allowed to use, whilst at the same time assisting in getting the patients to exercise. We also took them into Aylesbury to look around the shops, which was great fun.

Having finished our theory course at Halton and obtained the required exam results, we were posted to Wroughton RAF hospital Nr Swindon and close to Lyneham RAF base. Here we would be putting all our theory into practice and doing a lot more practical work.

After being introduced to our various instructors the W/O in charge explained that it was usual for all students on the course to contribute a set amount each payday toward an end of course party at the village pub. Having explained that I was teetotal (it never failed ~ “How can you be ex aircrew and teetotal!!??) but would contribute anyway, everyone went away happy.

My first insight into how important and gruesome the job of a radiographer can be was when I was attached to the duty radiographer for seven days. The duty radiographer is on stand down during normal working hours but on call outside normal working hours. RAF Lyneham

operated quite a large gliding school, most of the gliders being launched by winch. This entailed attaching the hawser (tow rope) to a ring in the nose of the glider and hauling the glider down the runway. To release the glider from the tow rope, a pedal is stamped on with the foot, the ring opens and the glider is freed. Failing to release the tow rope can result in being pulled into the ground with nasty injuries. During my stint with the duty radiographer we had a man brought in who had failed to disengage from the winch. His ankles were fracture to such an extent his feet were facing backwards. We took X rays before he went to theatre, as these were required, to see what the extent of damage was. After the surgeon had sorted him out we were called into the theatre to take X rays from various angles to see if any movement had taken place during plastering. He did get back on his feet eventually, but had a noticeable limp – very lucky all things considered.

Another incident that stands out is that of an airman thumbing lifts on the continent. One of his lifts involved an RAF petrol bowser, which developed trouble with a wheel. This entailed getting under the tanker. The report was vague at this point because apparently the tanker blew up. Whether the brake had jammed and was running hot, or the bearings were hot, are possible conjectures. The result was the airman had severe burns from head to toe. He was flown to Lyneham with his clothes still sticking to his burnt flesh. I was one of the team detailed to the task of removing his clothing. When not in agony from movement he was in a comatose state. The method of getting his clothing from the burnt flesh was to get him into a saline bath and wash the clothing away from the flesh. This was a very painful procedure for him and exceedingly distressing for us, added to the fact that he was built like a heavyweight rugby player about 6' 6" tall and thick set. If you have never experienced the smell of burnt flesh it is something that can't be forgotten. It is very pungent and infiltrates everywhere. We had to move him into a side ward from the main ward because the other

patients complained of the smell. We were losing our battle with him and he died in the early hours of the morning. I was informed the next day and asked if I would volunteer to help sister to prepare him before his parents arrived in the afternoon. We had to bathe him, put a gown on him and a black bowtie at the neck, transfer him to a casket and convey him to the Chapel. We were assisted by two medical orderlies, one of whom had to leave for a while to be sick, needless to say with the deceased body being covered in water blisters and squelching every time he was moved, and peculiar noises coming from his mouth it was not a pleasant experience. As I have said before, the stench of burnt flesh is very overpowering and pervades everywhere. I had to get a chitty from the M.O. in charge of the base to exchange my battledress; the smell just clings to everything.

I am not certain whether the following took place at Halton or Lyneham ~ “Bomber” Arthur Harris, the chief of Bomber Command during the air raids on Germany and responsible for deciding which cities would be bombed and by how many aircraft, was due to arrive for X rays following a suspected duodenal ulcer. Having the rank of Air Marshall spit and polish was the order of the day!!



I found myself assisting the Head Radiographer and responsible for liaising between the radiographer and radiologist (he reads the X rays). The process involves the patient having to swallow a barium meal. This is a liquid not unlike Horlicks but opaque to X rays. As the liquid travels down the gullet and into the stomach the action shows up white on the screen and pictures are taken at crucial times. The patient cannot leave the hospital until the barium meal has been evacuated.

The Air Marshall was invited to have coffee in the Officers Mess accompanied by the radiologist and Station Commander. Apparently the conversation got round to the staff and the radiologist told the A.M. that one of the team was an ex air-crew of his and now training as a radiographer. He asked if any other trainees were ex-aircrew, apart from another trainee radiographer there were another three scattered around the hospital. He made it clear that before he left he would meet with them. We were gathered in the C.O.s office, he came in, shook hands all round, recognised me and said that as I was wearing a white coat had had no idea I was one of his boys. "Bomber Harris was very proud of "his boys" as he called them, and was most annoyed when his suggestion of striking a special medal for aircrew personnel was turned down. He cited special medals such as the Burma Star and the Middle East Campaign but nothing happened. A medal was issued for members of Bomber Command as a whole, to include ground staff and rightly so, but he wanted a medal for "his boys".

The end of the course arrived and we had a week of exams to complete, written, oral and practical. The pub in the local village was the venue for the celebrations.

During the exams we were faced with tables containing bones, jars with body parts, photographs of different types of fracture.

Another room had X ray illuminators on the wall and X ray plates attached. We had to walk round with the examiner who asked us to explain the reason for the X rays having been taken i.e. various fractures, ulcers, chest problems (pleurisy, emphysema etc).

Procedures had to be explained for taking of bronchiograms and the kidney, stomach and other organs by X ray.

We had two failures that were put back one course and we celebrated our passing the exams down at the local. I insisted on sticking with orange juice but got so fed up with being badgered to have an alcoholic drink that eventually I said "Put it in front of me, I'll drink it!!" I was told the following morning that I insisted on walking in the ditch that I knew would take me back to the station!!

Being now a fully fledged radiographer I could wear any rank insignia from L.A.C. to Flt/Sgt quite legally. Basic Trade is AC (Air Craftsman). Passing first part radio course entitled me to wear the propellers and signal badge (Leading A/C). Passing my radiography course gave me the rank of corporal, not being allowed to wear the crown above my stripes whilst on camp I had the status of Sergeant. Off camp I wore the crown as a fully blown Flt/Sgt!!

Passing the radiography course made me a member of the Medical Section of the RAF and as such was awarded two badges of the medical insignia – staff and entwining serpents – one for each side of my collar (more brass to clean).

My first posting as a radiographer was to Hednesford, Nr Rugeley. This camp was originally opened as a POW holding unit for Italians in the First World War. It is situated on the top of a hill and quite large. It was handed over to the Navy for the training of artificers. When we arrived the camp was rather a shambles.

WAAF recruits were being trained in the rudiments of square bashing; another part of the camp was given over to the artificers. Our job was to set up a unit for the purpose of operating a mass chest X ray unit to X ray demobees who were returning to the RAF on a 2 year bounty scheme. Civvy Street was being saturated with all the service personnel being demobbed and was unable to absorb them all. The government had stated that previous employers were to re-employ ex-

service staff but in many cases the firms had been bombed out, gone out of business or changed over to another trade.

The £25 bounty scheme was devised to get some of them back into the forces, whereby they signed on for two years received £25 on signing on and £75 at the completion of the two years.

After the War

At the end of the war it became a personnel dispatch centre and service personnel were demobilised. Between 1950 and 1956 it was used for National Service Training there, including the dreaded "square - bashing".

Immediately after it closed as a training camp it was reopened as a resettlement camp for Hungarian refugees fleeing from the Russian Invasion of Budapest. After further weekend use by the Territorial Army, many of the buildings were sold off and the site fell into disrepair.

In the 1960's and 70's the remains of the camp were demolished and the whole site became part of the Cannock Chase Country Park.

We discovered that our chest unit was to be a mobile one comprising of a radiologist (Flt/Lt Toye), myself, a corporal WAFF radiographer, two WAAF medical orderlies, a photographer (developing of X rays) and a general duties aircraftsman, not forgetting a typist. We came under the administration of RAF Medical HQ situated in Holborn, London. As a mobile unit we were responsible to Flt/Lt Toye as our CO and he was directly responsible to the station CO wherever we happened to be ordered to set up a unit. Whenever a move was made an advanced party from HQ would be sent to the station to inspect the building to house the X ray equipment. The property could not be adjoining other buildings and partition walls had to be of brick or concrete. This is to avoid build up of X rays affecting personnel. The walls were painted with a special lead paint. The X ray control panel was sited behind a special screen containing an observation panel of special leaded glass. Operators wore barium tabards to protect organs from the build up effect of X rays. They also wore a dental film attached by clip that had to be developed after a given period to see if the operator had been receiving too much radiation. If one can imagine a room, which is absolutely black with white walls, a very small beam of light is played onto the wall, not only will the spot be illuminated but the room will be lit

up by the refracted light. This happens to X rays, they bounce around, getting weaker.

Although not a member of the camp's strength I was still a Senior NCO and as such had certain responsibilities. My sleeping quarter was a room at the end of the usual type wooden hut in which were some 28 or so "bounty" airmen. They were being kitted out and given revision on square bashing and physical training. The hut was my responsibility and on camp inspection I had to make sure everything was ship shape.

Mass chest X rays are recorded on 35mm film – 30 exposures per roll, instead of a single X ray plate the illuminated screen of the chest is photographed by a 35mm camera attached to the end of a funnel.

The 35mm film was then projected on to a screen approximately 14 x 12 and the radiologist examines them. If he found any abnormality (and at the time there were some 47 possible abnormalities from the common cold to pulmonary tuberculosis) the patient was recalled for a single plate X ray. The re-call rate was about 10% and could have been that the picture was fuzzy because the patient was breathing at the time the X ray was taken. Of the 10 re-calls about 1 was required to have a follow up procedure.

As previously mentioned, we had WAAF recruits on the station and one intake was due to be posted to Italy on completion of the initial training. Someone of the hierarchy decided it would be beneficial if these WAAFs had a chest X ray prior to being posted. We had not had any dealings with WAAFs before so Flt/Lt Toye called a meeting of staff to decide protocol. Toye had previous dealings with X raying female chests before, the usual procedure being that the WAAFs were given triangular bandages to wear when having the X ray taken but Flt/Lt Toye was of the opinion that the bandages affected the clarity of the X rays. This was not because the Flt/Lt would get any sexual titillation

(sorry for the pun) from this because he never actually saw patients unless they were one of the 10% and needed further investigation. It was I, a 21 year old shy young airman, who was in the thick of it!!

The WAAF corporal radiographer and I would receive the WAAFs in the changing room. We would explain that they were to strip off to the waist, remove any jewellery and put the battledress top back on. The WAAFs would then be asked individually to enter the X ray room, approach the female medical orderly standing at the X ray machine who would remove the battle dress top, place them against the machine and position them for the X ray to be taken. After this they would return to the changing room and dress. This all sounds very straight forward but somehow the radiographer has to get some idea of how the WAAF was built because the electrical input had to be adjusted dependent upon the size of the WAAF's bust. If too much power was given to a slight build the X ray will be too dark, not enough power for a heavier build and the X ray is too light. We always got the odd one who would walk into the X ray room and before arrival at the machine would have the battle dress top off, walking proud!! Meeting these WAAFs on camp or in the NAAFI was rather embarrassing!! Because I wore a white jacket they had no idea I was a Flt/Sgt and ex-aircrew.

The intake of "bounty airmen" was drying up; Flt/Lt Toye told us that we could soon be posted elsewhere or the unit disbanded. Being a mobile unit was a very easy life, full of freedom but it was quite frustrating when, after a move to another camp, it took a while for the laundry to catch up!!

Unfortunately we were split up ~ the mobile unit was to be disbanded and staff were being posted to various hospital bases.

Aerial views of Burtonwood Air Base



The first case I attended was in the theatre. We had an ex-aircrew officer who, at one time during his flying career had his thigh bone and both tibia and fibula broken and had been left with a slight limp. Investigation by X ray discovered that the thigh bone (femur) had healed with a slight misalignment, which was the cause of the limp. He was assured that the fracture and re-setting of the bone could rid him of the limp. The first thing was to X ray the bone from front and side. He was then anaesthetised and taken into theatre. We followed with a portable X ray machine. A contraption was fitted onto the patient's thigh for the purpose of breaking the bone in the exact spot. Once broken the job of re-setting and aligning the fracture took place.

Further X rays were taken after which the leg was plastered and the patient was returned to bed surrounded by heavy bags and pulleys to ensure there was no movement. The end result was that the patient recovered without the limp.

The nearest town was Warrington that had a canteen run for the forces by the ladies of the local churches. They had a rota for manning the canteen and we chose a day for our visit when four of the younger ladies were in attendance. Having been introduced and got to know one another it transpired that the following Saturday a 21st birthday party was being held for one of the girls and we were asked if we would like to attend. I wasn't much bothered, being spoken for, but didn't

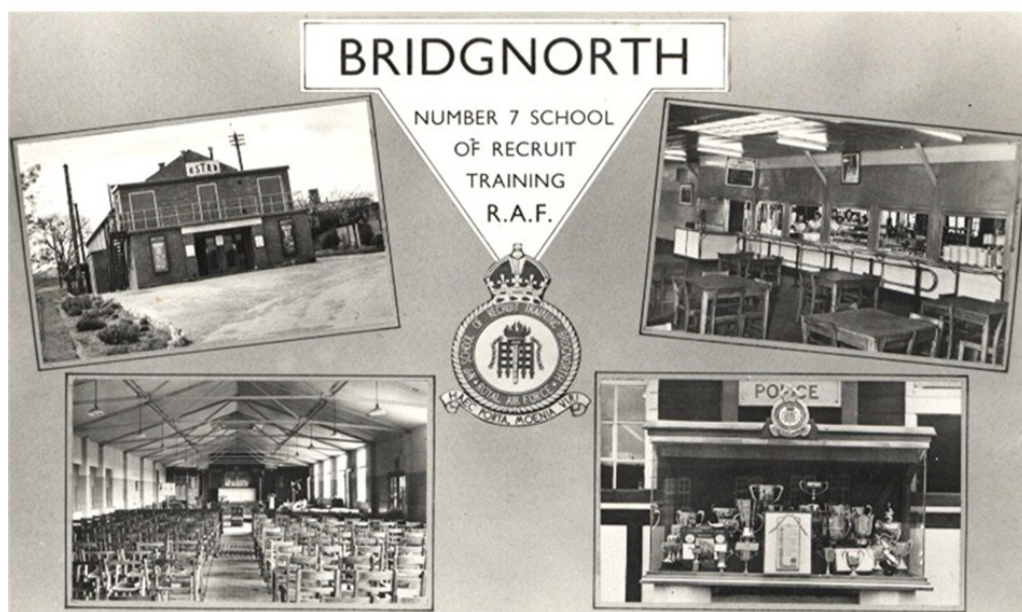
want to spoil the fun. We arrived at the house the following Saturday to discover that the parents had gone out leaving the grandmother as chaperone. She was being well lubricated by her granddaughter and as the evening wore on some of the party games became a bit risqué culminating in couples retiring to the back room for a snogging session. This was not the kind of activity one associated with ladies of the church!!

The other thing I recall about Warrington was the Chinese laundry run by pucker Chinese with the usual pigtails. They did a very brisk trade with the forces camps scattered locally. To watch them iron and starch a collar was amazing. They had a very square flat iron heated on a gas ring. A spray bottle was close to hand and a small rigid ironing board on a table. The collars were passed from the washing area in large bowls; a worker proceeded to flatten them out and spray both sides then lay them on the table next to the ironer. He was the expert. He laid the collar on the small ironing board, pressed one side, folded the collar, pressed both sides, following which the collar automatically rolled up, all rigid and shining. A fascinating operation to watch and there was always a crowd outside watching as the job was done in the window area.

As I have said previously the camp had a number of German POWs and the runways were housing many fuselages of Flying Fortress and Lightnings. A lot of planes still had the Perspex window in. Most were shattered or cracked but the odd complete one could be found. Also parts of radar equipment could be salvaged. The POWs were very clever at making use of the Perspex by producing all kinds of things from cigarette lighters to photo frames. One object I remember very well was a large globe about 10 inches in diameter. It looked like a large round electric light bulb; plaster had been pushed into the globe via the neck until half way up the orb. On top of the plaster was a scene of a harbour with boats, huts, trees etc. I never did find out how it was

done. Another I recall was a Swiss mountain scene complete with lake. The globe was mounted on a wooden base finished with a coat of varnish. The objects were usually brought around the huts on Thursday evenings and were very popular with the lads.

My next posting after Burtonwood was quite a surprise ~ Bridgnorth ~ home from home, where it all started as an initial training wing, square bashing, only this time I was an established Flt/Sgt and not a raw rookie!!



The camp was no longer a camp for receiving trainee aircrew, hostilities having ceased, it was now a training camp for catering staff, clerks and a large contingent of WAAFs doing initial training.

As usual the arrival chitty had to be filled in but as Bridgnorth was a training unit the various offices requiring a signature were quite close. As always the most difficult signature to get were the padre's ~ they never appeared to be in.

I was to be attached to the sick bay/hospital as a radiographer working with another two radiographers covering 24 hours. This meant shift work. Attached to the hospital were three POWs on general duties. All three had been at university prior to call up and spoke very passable

English. They were treated very well and enjoyed the same food as the airmen, having a table in the airmen's mess and all getting along together very well. One weekend they went mushrooming on an adjoining field to the camp. The field was often visited by staff and was very popular. Unfortunately the POWs had picked some dodgy mushrooms and landed up in hospital with food poisoning. Unfortunately one of the prisoners had a very severe attack and died. The other two prisoners were devastated as they had been through a lot of war together. The field was put out of bounds and anyone found in it was severely dealt with. The CO ordered a service to be held to which everyone not on duty was to attend. The body was flown to Germany by the RAF.

One evening, being duty radiographer, I received a call to attend the hospital immediately. When I arrived at the X ray unit I was met by the duty surgeon. "Charles, I have a WAAF complaining of severe stomach pains, indications are it is possibly acute appendicitis but I'm not happy about her other signs. I want X rays of the abdomen anterior and posterior". Surprise!! The X rays showed severe wind, the stomach area was full of gas! The doctor prescribed a liquid drink, which I presume contained strong peppermint. The WAAF was taken to a side ward where she remained until the effect of the drink took place!! Although the case had its amusing side, the doctor said that the effects are extremely painful but fortunately those cases were rare.

The only other memorable incident at Bridgnorth was the COs wife asking if her pregnant bitch could be X rayed to ascertain how many pups she was going to have!!

My career with the RAF began at Bridgnorth and I was more than happy to end it there. It is a lovely town straddling the River Severn. Darleys Tea Rooms was on the bank and it usually flooded when the Severn Bore was a five star one.

My demob number came up and I reported to Padgate de-mob unit just outside Blackpool for handing in RAF kit and being kitted out with civilian clothing. This took place in a large hanger divided into various sections having suits of various colours staffed by civilian tailors. I opted for sports coat and flannels as the majority of suits appeared to be grey with a pin stripe. I found some brown suede shoes in the shoe store and then onto haberdashery for shirts (2), socks (2 pairs), tie and underwear. We then had to present ourselves to a tailor who advised us on fit. If he thought we should try a larger or smaller jacket then a swap was made. I did gather that better quality suits were available in the back room for a consideration! The last item was a mackintosh, which I chose rather than an overcoat and I have to say that all the items I chose, wore very well.

A visit to the pay office and records office completed my service career. I did not apply for medals due on my release and the records office wanted to know why. I explained that because a possible recipient wore a different uniform he was awarded a different medal i.e. if you were an officer you were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross (DFC) but if you were a non-commissioning airman you were awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal (DFM) but both awards were made for a similar act of bravery. Medals didn't bother me much; I was given a railway pass and monies due, boarded the bus and was on the way to the railway station, once again a civilian now 23 years of age, having spent 5 years in the RAF.

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I am now 80 years of age. I married a girl who was secretary to my Air Training Corps CO. We met up again at a local street party, whether it was celebrating the European or Japanese victory I cannot remember but we were both on leave. She was a member of the Women's Land Army. We married and were blessed with a lovely daughter who has presented us with a granddaughter and grandson. My granddaughter has now given us two great granddaughters all of whom we love dearly.

This year, 2005, will celebrate 60 years since the end of world War Two. Let us not forget those not here to celebrate it and give thanks for those who made it.

This book of my memories and events was the idea of my daughter, Karen, and son-in-law Chris who suggested I write it for the family to read.....

Charles Francis Saunders

July, 2005

