

Recollections of a Flight Engineer



Henry Sturrock

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Early Days.

I wanted to join the RAF as a Boy Apprentice when I left school at Fourteen, but my Father said no I was too young, and so he would not sign the consent form. When the war started I was a member of the Boy Scouts, and the group I was in volunteered to be Messenger/Stretchers at the First Aid Post at the Glasgow Green Baths. It was there one evening that we had a visit from an ex member of the post who was an Air Gunner. Talking to him he advised me that if I wanted to get into Air Crew when I was 'Called Up' I should volunteer for Flight Engineer. At the time I was serving an apprenticeship as a Fitter/ Turner at Templetons Carpet Factory and as we were doing defence work it was a reserved occupation. However when I did get my papers and was eventually passed A1, I did as I had been advised and after a trip to Edinburgh I was accepted. My boss was not pleased but there was nothing he could do about it.

After waiting three months I finally set off for London. I remember we left Glasgow at five o'clock Sunday evening, prepared to arrive in London at about seven next morning but alas it was not to be. The journey seemed to last forever and by seven o'clock we were nowhere near London. The people in the compartment who when they left Glasgow did not know each other, were on quite intimate terms having slept the night with heads resting on each others shoulders. We finally arrived in London at two o'clock on Monday afternoon, to be told that there had been bomb damage on the line and we had been diverted a number of times. We eventually finished up at a block of flats in St. James Road and after a meal and a good night's sleep we were ready to go. The RAF was using some buildings at Lords Cricket Ground and this was where we based for kitting out, injections and general administration. One afternoon as we were waiting behind the main stand I was introduced to what I thought was one of the peculiarities of cricket. There was a match on and a number of typical old English Gentlemen were standing around in groups chatting away behind the stand when something happened on the field and the spectators started to applaud I could not believe my eyes when all these old gents joined in the applause. They were unable to see what was happening on the field but

they joined in just the same. I still don't get it. It was intended that we should be posted to an ITW (Initial Training Wing) but as there was a hold up in the system we were posted to a farm in Kent for a week, I seem to remember we were billeted in the local pub and spent our time weeding fields. When we returned to London we only stayed a few days and were posted to Torquay to ITW.

21 I.T/W. (A Flight No. Squadron) Torquay.

It was at Torquay that I came in contact with Sergeant E. Hayter; who was probably the man who made deepest impression on me during my service. The way he handled the flight was a lesson to behold, there was never any ranting and raving as you expected from drill sergeants and he made a point of looking after the welfare of the flight. A few months before we went to Torquay there had been a number of Sneak Bomber Raids on the town and we were soon getting used to the precautions to be observed. There was one occasion when we were doing Dinghy Drill in the harbour when the Air Raid Sirens went. In this drill three dinghies had been placed in the water. We had to jump from the Pier into the water (about fifteen feet) and climb into each of the dinghies in turn. I was just approaching the last one (seven man) when the Alert sounded, the N.C.O. in charge gave the order for all the flight to go to the tunnel where we had Stripped Off and the three of us in the water were told to tow the dinghies under the Pier. It is not difficult to imagine my feelings tugging away at the dinghy and looking over my shoulder for Fw190s. Fortunately it was a false alarm. We finished this course in September, and after one week's leave we were posted to St. Athan in Wales to do our trade course.

Engineers Course St Athan.

We soon settled down to the routine of classroom work and for the next seven months studied the general basics of aircraft. This was followed by two months intensive study on the aircraft of our choice, in my case the Halifax III. At the beginning of the course we were given a one-hour flight in an Anson to see how we reacted. When we were doing the finishing course on the Halifax we spent a week at Rootes Factory in Liverpool. We would have a lecture on a specific part or system of the aircraft, and then tour the factory and be able to examine the subject discussed being built into the aircraft.

While we were on this course we were billeted in civilian homes and four of us were put in with a butcher and his family. And for all that week we did not do so badly for meat. On the Thursday evening when I got back to the house I found a telegram waiting for me from home telling me that my sister Jessie, who had joined the Wrens had been posted to Liverpool. So the next morning when I reported to the Factory I told the Warrant Officer in charge about and he had a word the Officer in charge of the course, who took me first for the oral exam and sent me on my way to try to find my sister. The man in the house where we were staying had suggested that I should go to Naval Headquarters at the Liver Buildings, so as I was standing at a Tram stop a large Wolesley car came past driven by a Wren. She nodded to me and pointed towards town I nodded in agreement so she pulled over and I got in. She asked me where I was going and when I told her what I was doing she told me whom to ask for at the HQ. When I eventually found the correct room and knocked on the door a very gruff voice bade me enter. There she was the Wrens nightmare, a very large Wren Chief Petty Officer, built like a brick outhouse with a voice to match. When I related my tale about my sister she went into action like a motor torpedo boat. In no time at all I had full instructions and a map on how to get to my sisters billet. The Navy turned out to be as well organised as the RAF as when I found the place it was only to find that it was site in Liverpool. After a trip by overhead rail and tram I met my sister and we went for a meal. The lads in the flight had arranged that we should all meet at a particular dance hall and have an end of course party, so I took Jessie along with me. It was a good job I had three witnesses that it was my sister because nobody would believe me when I introduced her as my sister.

I finished the course and sat my Exams on June 6th 1944 (D DAY) and I remember thinking as I sat waiting my turn at the Oral that I was sweating just as much as the Bods on the beaches. Once again at the end of the course we had one weeks leave and were posted to Acaster Malbis to be crewed up.

Acaster Malbis

In think I should explain here, that the Engineer was the last member to join the seven man crew of the Halifax, all the others had already been training on twin engined aircraft and it was necessary to have an Engineer for a four engined craft. The method used to allocate Engineers to a crew was quite simple, all the Pilots were put in a room, the Engineers were gathered together in an adjoining room the connecting door was opened and it was every man for himself. In my case it was slightly different, the Officer in charge announced that two pilots wanted to stay together, were there two Engineers willing to oblige? Another lad from Glasgow and I agreed, so we were told to stand to one side, and when the rush subsided we were taken into the room and introduced to two Pilots. I still don't know how it happened but somehow I was talking to Dick English the other two were chatting away and before we were knew it we had drifted apart and I had a Skipper. Dick then took me along to meet the rest of the crew and that was how I started a relationship the likes of which I have never experienced since. We were given a few days to get to know each other and then we were posted to H.C.U.

No 1658 Heavy Conversion Unit Ricall Yorkshire.

At last I was coming into contact with Aircraft. The aircraft we were to be flying were Halifax II's, but first I think it might be an idea to explain the Engineers Duties.

1. To assist the Captain in the operation of the engines and the aircraft general.
2. To deal with any mechanical problems.
3. To deal with the emergency operation of hydraulics.
4. To handle various controls.
5. To compute and log various data relating to the aircraft.
6. To control the distribution of fuel in collaboration with the Pilot.
7. To acts a liaison between the Aircrew and Ground crew.
8. To act as a standby gunner and launch pyrotechnics.
9. When away from base, to supervise maintenance of the Aircraft

We started our course on 27th of June, with the first of instruction flights, where an instructor supervised both the pilot and me. Altogether I did eight flights on various exercises, before going on my own. From my logbook I find that I did 30 hours Daytime and 10 hours night time flying on the course.

There were three incidents that stood out in my mind regarding the course. Firstly as part of our induction, we were given a talk by the chief F/E, in which he mentioned that we might find some difficulty with our skippers, as they were not used to having someone look after their engines it being a four engined machine but he told us. "If you cant sort it out, come and see me). Sure enough, on our daylight cross country Dick did something with the engines which I thought was wrong and I told him so, he did not agree with me so when we landed we had a chat and I mentioned what the F/E had said. Dick's reaction was "O K we'll go and see him but you will find that I am right". When I saw the F/E to make the arrangements, he asked me for my version of the story and when I told him, his reaction was "Well what are you worried about, you have it off pat", he then suggested I bring Dick to see him next

morning and he would have a chat with him. This we did and after it was over Dick came to me and offered his hand and said “You’re the Engineer.” We then went to our billet where the rest of the crew was and as we walked in he said, “By the way Jock’s the Engineer in this crew OK”

It was quite common on short flights to go to the control tower and wait for an aircraft to land so that you could take over. One day as we were waiting one of the control staff came out and said “You will have to wait a bit we have a problem”. Sure enough within minutes a Mosquito made an approach to land and when it had nearly touched down one of its undercarriages fell off. It did another circuit and lo and behold the same thing happened with the other, so we witnessed a lovely belly landing. But that was not the end of it, as the plane skidded along the runway the escape hatch flew off one of the crew jumped onto the wing landed on the runway and ran like hell the other way. The other member soon followed him, and the plane continued on to the end of the runway where it burst into flames. We were treated to a fine Firework display as the ammunition went off.

I have mentioned that the aircraft we were flying on this course were Halifax II’s which had seen service on squadrons and were pretty well past it. A good example of what you could come up against gave us a good laugh. We were on a practice bombing session one day, the bombing range was in Bridlington Bay and we would approach the target firstly from the land and then from the sea. I had opened one of the bomb bay inspection hatches with a view to doing manual release of a bomb (this was one of my duties to check for hang-ups as we came back from an OP.) So I got myself comfortably settled on the floor and proceeded to watch the bombs fall on each run. It was a case of Alex saying “Bomb Gone” and then me saying “ No not yet, not yet, bomb gone now,” as the electric’s were not of the best. On one run from the sea Alex gave his usual “Bomb gone” and I said “Not yet, gone now.” it had gone I had the pleasure of watching it curve down in the direction of Bridlington. I thought, oh dear, we are in for some trouble here, but the bomb overshot Bridlington and went sailing on inland, towards a field of Cows peacefully grazing in the middle of a field. Sure enough the bomb landed bang in the middle of them it being a practice bomb it did no damage but it sure got that herd running.

There was a practice at that time to send diversionary flights towards the coast of Europe at the same time as Streams of aircraft were going out on Raids. The idea was that a number of aircraft would set out for the coast, causing the Germans to think it was a raid and start a defensive action towards that area. Just before the diversion got to the coast of Europe they would turn back. Aircraft from H.C.U's were often used on these diversions and sure enough on the night that we were doing our Night Cross country there was one on, so instead of doing a flight over the U.K. we set off for France. We flew towards the Normandy Beaches and had a good view of the floodlit Invasion Beaches and all the unloading that was going on. It was quite exciting as we felt that we were getting near some action at last.

We finished the course with Daylight Cross-country on August 19th, and were then posted to 640 Squadron at Leconfield.

Of course typical of service logic, the crew whose Pilot had wanted to stay with Dick were posted to Pocklington. We later heard that they had afterwards been posted to Italy and gone missing on a trip to Yugoslavia dropping supplies to Tito's Partisans.

640 Squadron Leconfield Yorkshire

We joined the Squadron at the end of August and had our first flight on a Halifax III. on the 3rd of September. This was Circuits and Landings (Circuits and Bumps) Familiarisation, which lasted ten minutes, and then later in the afternoon we had an hour of Circuits and Landings. On the 4th we had one hour fifteen minutes local flying and then we were declared operational. Unfortunately I had the bad luck to contract a severe cold and was grounded for two days so I missed the first two Operations of the crew, le Harve on the 9th which was aborted for poor visibility and then the same target on the 11th which went well. Operations to the French Ports were known as "Milk Runs. I did my first Operation on the 12th. A daylight to Scholven (an oil target)

My first was certainly an eye opener. It was quite an awesome experience approaching the Rhur as from quite a distance from the target you could see the black puffs of smoke where the Flak shells had burst and I remember thinking " Have we to go through that" after a bit you realised that if you could see the smoke the shell had already burst so it might not be so bad. My next operation on the 13th was another oil target Nordstern, so I felt that I was going in at the deep end. On the 15th I did my first night Operation to Keil. We set course to fly North up the North Sea then turn East to cross Denmark on into the Baltic Sea then turn back and bomb Keil on the return course. Things went well until we approached the Danish coast when we ran into an electrical storm. I had never experienced anything like it in my life, we were thrown about in air currents, lighting was flashing all over the place, St Elmos Fire was dancing on the muzzles of the guns. We could neither get above or below it, so we had quite a hectic time, ploughing our way straight through it.

When we arrived at the target it was a sight to behold. The bomb load we were carrying was mostly Incenduary bombs as the intention was to do as much property damage as possible. The Germans were evacuating troops from Russia and landing them at Keil, and the idea was to deny them any place to shelter. The whole town seemed to be on fire and it was lit up like daylight. As we left the target area Bill (Rear Gunner) gave a corkscrew command as we were being attacked by an FW 190, which made one pass at us and disappeared. We then knew that we had to go back

through the electrical storm, but having dropped our load it didn't seem so bad second time round. All in all I reckon I had had a good "Breaking In" for my tour.

After that we had three trips to the French coast and a number of training flights before we went back to the Rhur. This time it was to Kleve an oil target and this turned out to be a flight with an unusual ending. On our return journey we received a radio message instructing us to land at Old Buckenham in Norfolk an American 8th Airforce Base. This in itself was an experience as we stayed the night and slept in the bunks of US personnel who had gone off for the weekend. We were very well looked after and they even loaned us bicycles and eating irons so that we could go for breakfast. I have mentioned before that when the aircraft is away from base the Engineer is in charge of its maintenance so I had the job of refuelling our Kite. It would not have been so bad but we had to work with US Gallons and not Imperial, I got Dick (Pilot) to sit in my position and watch the fuel gauges I was on the wing operating the nozzle from the bowser. The idea was when the needle reached a certain point he was to give me a shout and I could then turn it off. Well, as you can imagine the inevitable happened and he called to late and I was drenched in 100-octane petrol. I made sure that no one came near me with a lighted cigarette for quite some time.

Before I continue, it would be as well to explain, that during the war it was the custom for personnel to work six days, then have a day off in rotation for Operational Aircrew it was different. They went six weeks without a day off and then had seven days leave with travel warrants and ration cards which meant that you could get home every seven weeks. On 14th and 15th went on two 1000 bomber raids on Duisberg. These were on Friday night Saturday morning, and Saturday night Sunday morning. On the Sunday morning we were due to go on leave so I asked the M/O if I could have a Bensedrine tablet to keep me going till 4 o'clock as I would then be on a train from Leeds to Glasgow and I could then have a sleep. As we left Leconfield to go to Driffield to collect our Pay and Travel warrants etc. I swallowed the tablet. Would you believe it we missed the bus to Hull and the next one was not till four o'clock and so I had there for missed my connection to Leeds. This meant that I had to catch a train at eight o'clock and eventually catch a train from York at midnight to Edinburgh arriving at seven o'clock on Monday morning. When the train pulled into the platform

at York I had the good fortune to have a carriage door stop right in front of me. I opened the door and there was one seat vacant in the compartment, as you can imagine I was just about out on my feet by this time and fell asleep as soon as I sat down. The next thing I knew was a sailor who had been sat in the window seat shaking me by the lapels and saying "Come on Mate we're in Edinburgh". I asked him how I had got to be in the seat that he had been sitting in. He told me that he had seen people who had needed sleep but never anyone as far gone as me so he had lifted me into the window seat. I changed platforms and boarded the train for Glasgow and easily got a seat at a table for four. I was soon joined by an American G.I. who sat opposite me, and we were then joined by two civilians who opened their morning papers, to find splashed across the front page headlines about the two raids that I had just been on. One of the civvies looked at me and on seeing my brevet asked me "What was it like to go on such raids" I asked him to tell me what I looked liked. He replied that quite honestly I looked B*****" so I told him that I had been on both the raids and that was what they had done to me. I have never seen anyone so surprised as those three, they gaped in astonishment and not another word was spoken for the rest of the journey. I must say that it took me the rest of the week to catch up on my sleep as I had only slept for four hours after flying ten hours fifty minutes in forty-eight hours, over that weekend.

One thing that I remember about going on leave was the reception awaiting me from the family especially when I produced the bag of goodies I was able to bring. On each operation we went on we were given flight rations of chewing gum and sweets, usually barley sugars. The ration was quite generous so we had some left when we returned, and at the end of six weeks we had a nice little present to take home. The civilian sweet ration being what it was my little contribution was always welcome.

On November 2nd we did an Operation to Dusseldorf. We were into our return flight about ten minutes when suddenly the sky lit up like daylight and floating behind us at our height was a fighter flare. Bill (Rear Gunner) immediately gave the corkscrew command and Dick (Pilot) made a violent dive to port. The first aid kit came flying out of the rest bay and hit me on the back of the neck, then I saw tracers going past the starboard wing and looking back saw an JU88 firing his cannon at us.

As he got within range I witnessed the neatest piece of shooting it was possible to behold, Bill and Len alternately fired short bursts and the next thing I saw was the cover of his port engine fly off. He dived one way we dived the other way and headed for home.

When we discussed the incident afterwards we reckoned that there must have been two fighters working together one above the stream and one at the same height as the stream. The one above dropped the flare and the one at our height was then to attack from outside the stream. Unfortunately for him the flare ignited behind him and as he was between the flare and us we saw him as he saw us so spoiling his little game. We never heard of this tactic being used again.

On November 6th we went to Gelsinkirchen Nordstern a synthetic oil plant. These targets were always heavily defended by flak, as we were approaching the target I was standing in my position looking through the Astrodome when I looked down and actually saw the flash of an A/A gun firing. For no apparent reason that I can recall I stepped down onto the floor and just as I did so a shell burst just above and forward of us on the starboard side. Shrapnel came through one of the side windows and some Perspex hit Dick (Pilot) on the leg. Another piece went through the Astrodome and went whizzing up the fuselage whilst a third piece went through the mid-upper turret and sliced through the back of Len's (Mid-Upper Gunner) glove but did not cut his silk glove or his hand. When we got back to base we had a look at the angle of the piece that went through the Astrodome and if I had not moved when I did I would have been hit in the head.

The only other time that we landed away from base was on November 21st when we had bombed Sterkrade (another oil target) but first I should explain that previous to this we had some trouble with the aircraft "O" Oboe. It was found that when we had been flying this aircraft my fuel logs had been showing an error of 10%. This could have been fatal if we had been flying to our limit, so we asked for a calibrated check on the consumption and it proved that the engines were using more fuel than they should have been. The aircraft was scrapped and we were told that a new aircraft would be arriving next day and we could consider it ours, thus we got NR237 "W" Willie. The Operation to Sterkrade was our first on our brand new kite. On our way

back we were diverted to Elsham Wold, as Leconfield was fog-bound. As we approached Elsham Wold the starboard outer engine started to heat up very badly and we lost oil pressure to such an extent that I told Dick to feather it and we landed on three engines. Next morning I decided to go out to the aircraft and find out if the ground staff had found the problem. On the way there I met Dick and the Engineering Officer returning from the aircraft. They told me they had run the engine and it seemed all right and it would be OK for takeoff. I still felt uneasy when we prepared for take off so I warned Dick to be ready for any eventuality as we took off. Sure enough we had hardly left the runway when the temperature shot up and the oil pressure dropped rapidly. We immediately feathered it and went home on three engines. I reported the problem when we landed at base and the following morning I went out to the dispersal to see what was happening. When I got there the fitters had scaffolding up and were working on the engine. I asked them what they had found and one of them told me to put my hand in the bucket that was underneath the engine and was full of oil that had been drained from the engine. I pushed up my sleeve and did as requested and was surprised to find the bottom covered with brass swarfe, the main bearing had gone so this meant a new engine.

Our problems did not end there. On our next three Ops we had trouble with the hydraulics and I had to close the bomb doors by hand the third time blowing the safety valve on the hand pump. It was decided to replace the whole system and this solved the problem. From then till the end of our tour we had no more problems with Willie.

As a crew we regularly had discussions on how the job was going and at one of these we discussed the length of time we spent over the target. As we considered this to be the most dangerous period of the flight we posed the question how can we cut this time down? Someone suggested that on our approach we should climb a couple of thousand feet above the stream and at the appropriate time commence a slight dive to increase our speed. The Navigator could give the Bomb Aimer the necessary data for his bombing calculations. The question was raised "What about fighters." The gunners suggested that if we all kept a good look out it should not be a problem. On the next OP that we went on we tried it out and it worked a treat. We had done this a few times when on going to a briefing one night the C.O. Informed

us that he had an idea to propose for a try out. He then proceeded to give a run down on an idea exactly like ours, nothing must be said about it outside the briefing room as group might take a dim view of it.

At this we (our crew) started to laugh but the C.O. did not think it was funny and told us to stay put when the others had left. When we were alone he asked us "What was so funny? Dick told him we had been using this method for the last three or four Ops. He then asked "Did it work?" and Dick said "Well we are still here". He then asked why we had said nothing about it and Dicks reply was "Well you said group might be upset if they found out the squadron was using this method and we thought that he might have taken a dim view if we had said anything". The squadron adopted this method and I believe used it from then on.

It was probably just before this that we went on an Air to Sea Firing practice, when we had an event worth recording. The object of the exercise was to give the Gunners some practice. We used an Aluminium Sea Marker as the target, this was cardboard tube about six inches in diameter by about three feet long which when I launched it through the flare chute and it burst on contact with the sea making a large patch on the surface at which the gunners could have their fun. On this occasion I went back to the flare chute and plugged in my intercom and gave the word I that was ready to commence when everyone was ready. Bill (Rear Gunner) gave the OK so I dropped the marker and just as I was about to unplug my intercom I heard a Brrp from the rear guns and Bill saying "Got it? Des (navigator) said "Got what?" "Got the marker before it hit the water of course." We were about five hundred feet up Des did not believe him and bet him Ten shillings he could not do it again Bill's reaction was "You're on stand by to drop another marker Jock." Des said he wanted to come back to the rear of the plane to witness this so when he was in position, I dropped another with the same result. This one made a nice splash in the sea and the gunners had a picnic.

There was a recognition system we called "Colours Of The Day." It worked like this, the day was split into four hour periods starting at midnight, each period had a colour which was the colour of a Very Cartridge which would be fired off if an aircraft was challenged, this was the F/E's job. One night as we were returning from an Op. and we were flying over Brussels which was in Allied hands, when one

solitary Ack Ack shell burst in the stream. The colour of the period was Red Red, we nearly died laughing when the sky was suddenly covered in Red Red flares. We must have been the only Kite not to have fired we couldn't we were too busy laughing.

On another occasion it was decided that we should fly in formation on the journey to and from the target. The idea was that the lead aircraft should on take off circle the drome and at regular intervals fire off a Yellow Yellow cartridge. When we approached the target we were to attack individually and then on leaving the target the lead aircraft should do the necessary to reform the squadron for the return flight. After a few days practice we were told at briefing one day that we would try out the Formation Flight on this trip and the Lead Aircraft would be "W" FO English. I was issued with a large ammo box of cartridges and once we set off I had the time my life. All went well on the flight out but after we had bombed and I had done my bit to get them all to reform and finding that the best we could do was to get about four aircraft to form on us, the rest decided to push off home on their own. We never did any more formation flying.

January 14th 1945 was a day to remember. On the 13th we had been detailed to fly as passengers with another crew and go to Manston in Kent to pick up an aircraft of our squadron which had landed there. It had been going on an OP when it encountered heavy Flak and the Flight Engineer had been hit in the head. The skipper had considered him so seriously injured that they dropped their bombs and returned to Manston an emergency landing ground. Unfortunately the Engineer died on the operating table; the crew left the aircraft and returned to base by rail. We had just got settled down ready for the flight when one of the control tower personnel came up and told them the flight was scrubbed as they were on an OP that night. We were to get our small kit and proceed to Manston by rail. When we got to London we split up for the night and I went with Len to his home in Hemmel Hempsted for the night. Next morning we travelled to Manston getting there in time for lunch. We prepared the aircraft for take off went round the perimeter track to the end of the runway and were waiting for instructions when somebody said "What the Hells that?" and when I looked up I saw three peculiar aircraft flying across the centre of the air field. They were flying at about one hundred feet and they had no propeller. Len our aircraft

recognition expert said “Oh they are Meteor fighters, they are Jet Propelled”. Thus were we introduced to a new type of flying?

On February 14th eight hours and ten minutes to Chemnitz, a town near the Polish border that had never been bombed before. We were told that we were attacking it to assist the Russians who were advancing in that area. It was our longest flight but otherwise not very spectacular.

Our last Operation (My 35th) was daylight on Cologne on March 2nd. The aiming point was the junction of the two roads leading into the Dom Platz as these roads were being used as an escape route to the Railway Bridge over the Rhine for the retreating German army. We were given instructions to avoid hitting the Cathedral. You can imagine our feelings when we returned to base and were told that we were Screened, we had completed our tour.

I thought that this was the end of the excitement but I was in for a shock that night. We had decided to go to Beverly that night and I finished up at a dance. When it was over and I was just about to leave Beverly the Air Raid Sirens sounded, so I set off back to camp in the middle of an alert. The Squadron was on an operation and I should mention that for a couple of weeks previous to this we had been given Bandits reminders before we went out. The Bandits Warning was given when enemy intruders were in the vicinity of base and when it was given returning aircraft went on a prearranged diversion until the area was clear. Sure enough as one of the aircraft was on the approach I saw and heard cannon fire over the airfield. It was a Ju 88 having a go at the aircraft about to land. He over flew the field then turned round and had a go at the runway and continued on to shoot up Beverly. When I looked in the sky I saw a number of burning objects and I thought they must be scarecrows but then I realised that we don't use scarecrows and sure enough they were burning kites. By this time I had had enough scares and risks so I nipped sharply into the ditch and waited until the fun was over.

It was the practice when you finished a tour that you were given a long leave and a six months rest period so after that weekend (March 3rd/4th 1945) we were sent off on indefinite leave. VE day came shortly after I arrived home then after about six

weeks I had to go to RAF Dishforth for a week to be assessed for another job. After a further six weeks I was posted to North Killingholme (near Grimsby) as an A/AH. GD. U/T. (Aircraft Hand. General Duties Untrained) not even qualified to clean toilets.

Most accounts that I have read of wartime experiences have usually stopped at this juncture but I think some of my experiences in the post war period may be worth recording.

North Killingholme.

My arrival here was not without incident. The morning when I went to breakfast I saw a sergeant who had been on I.T.W. with me, sitting at a table with two other sergeants so when I had picked up my meal I went and sat at the same table. I spoke to him but he did not seem very commutative and when they had finished their meal all three got up together and left without a word. Just after they had left another man came over to me and asked if I knew the sergeant I told him I did and where we had met, he then suggested that I should have nothing to do with him as he was under close arrest. It seemed that that he had been going round RAF camps and spending the night stealing wallets and watches etc. He was sentenced to two years imprisonment and ignominious discharge. This meant we had a parade, which we had heard about but never experienced. The whole of the station personnel paraded on the parade ground forming a three sided square and the prisoner was marched to the centre, the station adjutant then read out the charges and the sentence, after which the station warrant officer proceeded to strip all the buttons, badges and insignia from the prisoners uniform. He was then escorted off and went to serve his sentence. Going back to my first day at this station I had almost completed my signing in and reported to the Officer IC. Technical Wing (Squadron Leader Coleman). When he saw my qualifications (ACH-GD-UT) his reaction was "You're no good to me" so I picked up my papers and said "I had better go then Sir." He then said "Hang on a minute there is more to this than meets the eye, what did you do in civvy street? When I told him I had completed three years of my apprenticeship as a fitter and turner he said "Just the man I am looking for, the station turner is retiring in two weeks so go and have a word with him and see how things work out". I went to the workshops and found the corporal who was the turner and arranged to meet him next morning. When I turned up next day he was in the middle of a job and asked if I wanted to finish it, I said, "No as he had started it so he might as well finish it. When he had done I set to and had a go at the next job that was waiting and very shortly afterwards he vanished. I must confess I have never seen the man since but next morning Sq. Ldr. Coleman came in to the workshop and asked how I was getting on. I replied that that things were going well but where had the turner got to. He replied "Oh he came to see me yesterday and told him that there didn't seem to be much he could show you so he would just get on with his retirement." He then told me the job was mine if I wanted it but there were to

be no gash jobs done if a RAF job was waiting. This was the start of a very pleasant and interesting time at Killingholme.

There was a squadron of Lancasters based at the station and one of the jobs they did was to ferry army personnel who were due for demob home from Italy. The aircraft were marked out on the floor in squares, which allocated the seating space for about twenty or thirty men. The problem was their luggage, as the only place it could be stored was in the bomb bay. A large hessian bag had been devised which could be fixed in the bay and the luggage was placed in it. These bags were made in the workshop and of course no spares were ever kept. I was in the workshop office one day when in came Sqd. Ldr. Coleman all of a lather, the Squadron was going to Italy next day for a pick up and two bags were required. He thought it was impossible to get two made in time, but after a bit of discussion I suggested that if we stopped everything else and we all got stuck in, we might just manage it. We got everyone together, split the jobs up and I suggested that we keep at it until the job was finished, even cutting meal breaks to a minimum. This we did and about seven o'clock Coleman came into the workshop very puzzled wanting to know what was going on. When we told him that we were working till the job was done he went out muttering something about never having come across anything like it in all his time in the RAF. He came back about nine o'clock with a big tray of sandwiches and a crate of beer, which went down well. The job was finally completed about one o'clock in the morning with the bags ready to go with the aircraft. Later that morning we were all called together and told that the Station Commander was so impressed with what we had done he authorised a forty eight-hour pass for each of us.

I was stationed at Killingholme for about eighteen months and then the station was closed down (About November 1946) and I was posted to Hemswell (near Gainsborough).

Hemswell

Whereas Killingholme was a Wartime Station (built during the war) Hemswell was a Peacetime Station (built before the war) The accommodation was permanent buildings and we were housed in "H" blocks which made life very comfortable When I got there the first thing I found was that there was no Turner on the Station so I walked straight into a job. The set-up was similar to Killingholme but the Officer I/C was quite different, apart from being not all that good at his job he was a rather nasty piece of work. I soon found out that although I was still ACH-GD-UT, When it came to doing the job I seemed to have more experience than the others do and as a consequence when the Flight Sergeant in charge of the workshops was absent, I was landed with his job. By this time National Service had been introduced and it was soon apparent that a three-class system was evolving in the Service. It had been noticeable that there had always been a difference in attitude between the Regulars and the Hostilities only but now with a third class added the differences were much more noticeable. Although they all mixed at work the National Service personnel were left pretty much alone off duty and they were fair game for tricks at all times. I remember one day I was in the office when a young airman came in and he was obviously a "Sprog" shyly asked us " if we had we any Red Oil for Rear Lamps." He was from another unit on the station, so I called one of the lads in the shop and asked him to go into the stores and check if we had any, he came back with a very straight face and informed us that it seemed we were out of stock. Now I should point out at this stage that the Warrant Officer I/C of the Main Stores was a Regular who had the reputation of being a bit of a tyrant and I thought as this lad was probably wandering all over the place I might be able to nip the lark in the bud by sending him to this W/O. When I suggested this to him he said "Oh I've been there and it was him who sent me here." This I thought I had better continue the sequence so I sent him to the Transport Department. When I went to the mess that lunchtime I saw the W/O from stores and asked him what he had been playing at, I can see him now shaking with laughter as he said "It was the funniest thing he had seen in years." I should point out that he was about six feet tall with a big beer belly so he was quite a sight. It was at

this station that I was able to put into practice some of the ideas that had rubbed off on me from Sgt. Hayter (ITW).

When I was doing Orderly Sergeant it was sometimes the case that there was a man short for Guard Duty or Fire Picket and it was my job to find someone to fill the gap. I had noticed in the past that most people having to do this task usually went into the nearest billet and picked the first person they saw and ordered them to do the duty. I had never considered this to be fair, so the technique that I adopted especially if it was mid-week, was to go to a billet farthest away from the guardroom go in get the attention of the people there and ask "Anyone on duty this Weekend". When someone acknowledged I would tell him or her they were on that night and I would ensure that they were excused their weekend duty. I found that the people involved like this were keener to do a better job than those who had been forced by the other method were. The only comment I ever remember being made about this was a remark of the SWO one day when he asked "Why I always found someone on weekend duty when I needed a spare man?"

One job stands out in my mind at Hemswell, the Squadron Leader came to me one day and asked me to go with him. We went to the control tower and he told me the instruction had come from Group that all stations had to write the name of the station in front of the Control tower, in letters large enough to be read from 5,000 feet. He suggested that we could get some "Breeze Blocks" from the maintenance depot write the name with them and paint them white. I pointed out that this was not very practical, as the time taken moving them back and forth every time the grass needed cutting would be tremendous. I suggested that if we could form the letters with corrugated sheeting we could have handles on the corners and movement would be much easier. His reaction was to get on with it as he was going on leave. I got the two fitters from the workshops and we started the job on site. The second day we were there the C.O. came past and stopped to find out what we were doing. When I explained he asked "how are you going to make the "S" as all the letters is straight and the "S is curved, I told him we had been puzzled with this but had worked it out and challenged him to come up with an answer.

The job took us about a week and each when he passed he scratched his head but he was quite taken aback when we did the “S,” and he saw how simple it was. All we did was to make all the letters from straight pieces of sheeting and when we painted them we rounded the corners of the “S” with green paint to match the grass. The day we finished an Oxford came overhead circled the airfield and then approached to land, the CO came up to us and told us that it was the Group AOC and he was making an inspection of all stations to see the results of the group order. When he came and looked at what we had done, instructed me to submit a report as this was how he wanted the job done throughout the group.

Hemswell was my last station, as I was demobbed from there I left the RAF and
Came to work in Sheffield, but then

That's another story.



August 1944



End of Tour Photo for Dick English's crew in front of Halifax III NR237/W in March 1945

Left to Right standing - Sgt. H. Sturrock, F/E; F/O A. Unsworth, DFC, B/A; Sgt. L.J. Greenham, M/U; F/O R.S. English, DFC, Pilot; F/O D.J.E. Turner, DFC, Nav; Sgt. W. Nealey, R/G; Sgt. T. Williams, W/Op.

Ground crew in front: Tom, Bill, Jack, Blondie, Les, Lofty and the dog was called Trixie.

Operations

<u>Date</u>	<u>A/c</u>	<u>Target</u>	<u>Main Force</u>	<u>Missing</u>	<u>640</u>
Sept 12th	LV823 "O"	Scholven	412	7	1
Sept 13th	LV823"O"	Gelsenkirchen	140	2	0
Sept 15/16th	MZ308"W"	Keil	490	6	0
Sept 17th	LV823"O"	Boulogne	762	2	0
Sept 25th	LV823 "O"	Calais	872	0	0
Sept 27th	MZ409 "O"	Calais	341	1	0
Oct 7th	LV823"O"	Kleve, Landed at Old Buckenham	351	2	0
Oct 9th	NP965"Y"	Bochum	435	5	0
Oct 14th	NP997"Z"	Duisburg	1013	14	0
Oct14/15th	LV823"O"	Duisburg	1005	8	0
Oct 23rd	NP965"Y"	Essen	1005	8	0
Oct25th	LW554"Q"	Essen	771	4	0
Oct28th	NP958"V"	Walcheren	277	2	0
Oct30/31st	NP965"Y"	Cologne	905	0	0
Oct31st	MZ930"K"	Cologne	493	3	0
Nov2nd	MZ740"R"	Dusseldorf	992	19	0
Nov4th	NP965"Y"	Bochum	749	28	2
Nov6th	MZ856"S"	Gelsenkirchen	738	5	0
Nov21/22	NR237"W"	Sterkrade, Landed at Elsham Wold	270	2	0
Nov23rd	NR237"W"	Essen	316	0	0
Dec2/3rd	NR237"W"	Hagen	504	2	0
Dec12th	NR237"W"	Essen	540	6	0
Dec24th	MZ407"R"	Essen (Mullheim)	338	6	0
Dec28th	NR237"W"	Oplanden	328	2	0
Dec30th	MZ931"U"	Cologne	470	2	0
Jan5th	NR237"W"	Hannover	664	31	0
Jan6th	NR237"W"	Hanau	482	6	0
Jan16/17	NR237"W"	Magdeburg	371	17	1
Feb2nd	NR237"W"	Wanne/Eikel (1 crashed on take-off)	323	4	1
Feb4th	NR237"W"	Gelsenkirchen(Nordstern)	120	0	0
Feb7/8th	NR237"W"	Goch	464	2	0
Feb9th	NR237"W"	Wanne/Eikel(1 crashed on take-off)	228	2	1
Feb13/14th	PN182"N"	Bohlen	368	1	0
Feb14/15th	NR237"W"	Chemnitz	717	13	1
March2nd	NR237"W"	Cologne(1 crashed at Woodbridge)	858	9	1
		Total	19112	221	8

35 Operations, Missed the first two that the crew went on to France

