

Biography of Reg Miles

Ex Apprentice No 1 S.of T.T., R.A.F., Halton 39th Entry 34 - 67 M.U.s - 27 A/S
Bloemspruit South Africa - Lyme Kent, Flight Engineer 432 - 420 Squadrons RCAF,
6 Group Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Tholthorpe, Yorkshire / 242- 246 - 511
Squadrons Transport Command Lyneham, RAF

Chapter 1

Ex Apprentice No 1 S.of T.T., R.A.F.

The summer job had ended and there was a few months to go before I would leave for Halton, must get a job Mum said, so I got a job as a paper boy with Smith's Book Shop in Westgate, delivering the morning papers to all the grand houses in the area and woe betide you if you got the houses wrong, no scandal sheets there all Times, Telegraph, Financial Review, and sometimes the Daily Express but certainly no Mirror. A friend worked for the same place and we both rode the Smith's bikes, very distinctive they were, painted dark red with a large panel under the cross bar with the company logo on it and either side of the back wheel large canvas bags to hold the newspapers. Riding towards home together one day we came across a coal ship high and dry on the Nayland rocks , which jutted out into the Margate harbour entrance, the skipper had missed the turn and when the tide went out there he was stuck, the crew were busy shovelling the coal over the side onto the rocks so that the ship could get off on the next tide. Too much of a temptation for two young boys, onto the rocks we went with the bikes and filled up the bags at the back with coal and home to the thanks of a family with a little more fuel for the winter. How the mighty are fallen, as we turned up for work the next morning at the crack of dawn, we were greeted by the manager with the words 'you two are sacked here are your wages now clear off', when we asked why we were shown the front page of just about every newspaper with pictures of us and our Smith's bikes filling the bags with coal, and head office in London were not at all pleased, silly buggers very cheap advertising for them, so ended my last job before entering The Royal Air Force.

On January 24th 1939 I arrived at Wendover Railway Station in Buckingham Shire on a special train from Paddington with about one thousand other new boys, we were all shapes and sizes, colours, and aged between fifteen and eighteen. Halton at that time was the Apprentice Training Establishment for The Royal Air Force in the various aviation trades which included Engine Fitter, Airframe Fitter and other trades that were just starting to be developed. Prior to this most work on aeroplanes was done by the same people., but aircraft were becoming more complicated

and needed specialists for just about every part, guns, radio, electric's and so on. RAF Halton still is a training station for the engine, airframe, and all other bits and pieces of the aircraft.(I was recently told that a cook school was now in operation!!) The bits all have different names now. When I joined in January 1939 there were four wings each one had about 1000 boys in it under training, the course was three years , two entries each year , entry by competitive written examination of many subjects including, Math, English, and a number of science subjects which at my age when I took the exam at 14 made me struggle a bit but I got in! Massive workshops, an airfield and each wing was self-contained with proper three storey brick buildings housing the sleeping accomodation, each wing also had its own parade ground, gymnasium, cookhouse, band and all other facilities, different coloured hat bands were worn by each wing.

Apprentices were known as Brats and when you had passed out from Halton after a three year course you were an Ex Brat and a very close bondship with others who had been through Halton existed. Now March 15 1998!! I seem to have been very busy with all sorts of projects and still have some in the pipe line either incomplete or not even started yet but will endeavour to type a little more to keep this going. The first thing that happened to all us new boys was a medical to see if we were fit enough for service in the R.A.F. The first complete check up for most of us, the M.O. told me I had flat feet, said I did a lot of cross country running perhaps that was the cause!! Strange to say it was recently found that people with high arches were not able to stand the stress of marching and battle fatigue, flat was better. Next was fitting for a uniform, no I did not take size nine boots that Mum had said I would grow into but eight and a half and that still left room for thick socks.

Once all into our uniforms we paraded in sections for the swearing in for which we received an extra shilling (the Kings shilling) Most of us suffered with those boots made from leather so they said, more like sheets of armour plate, toes and ankle bones were rubbed sore after the first few hours, the corporal in charge of our section told us to fill the boots with water, pee was best, and stand them by our beds over night , empty them out and put them on straight away they would never hurt again, he was right but most mothers would have had a fit to see their little darlings squelching about in wet feet all day. I was allocated to four wing and told I would be trained as a Fitter 2E which meant I would become an aero engine fitter, others became Fitters 2A airframe, and others would become instrument, radio, and armament specialists. There were also boys who had joined the Royal Navy and would be trained in the same trades for the Fleet Air Arm, they were known as artificers, tiffys to the rest of us. Our uniform was the same as the regular service with proper trousers instead of a kind of jodhpurs with puttees that were wound around the lower leg, these were still worn by "Boy Entrants"

who were trained in similar trades elsewhere but would end up as mechanics after a much shorter course, I think they were boys who were keen to get into the R.A.F but had not been able to pass the entry examination for apprentices. To distinguish four wing from the other three we had a bright orange- yellow hat band not too sure what the others were, seem to remember red and also black and red squares, we also had on our arm a brass badge that was a wheel with crossed propeller blades inside , and wore small rank badges the same as the adult services if promoted. All of the boys in the new entry were taken in groups to the airfield and given a short flight in a De Haviland Tiger Moth, gave us some idea how big Halton was and in most cases the first taste of airsickness, never had any trouble with this problem when I was flying as crew, but even a short flight at times as a passenger made me hang on to my seat and swallow heavily!! I joined the cross country team of four wing, and competed in many events during my period at Halton, won medals for this event and passed them on to Gillian for safe keeping. I was promoted to leading apprentice and made responsible for one of the rooms which held about thirty boys, one of them called Shaw I will never forget, a good looking boy but had a way of life completely strange to me and I suspect to most of the boys of my age.

This first came to light one night when he returned from a weekend pass with a suit case full of cigarettes, where they came from we didn't ask but we all got some free samples my share being double. He then told me he had a flat in London and a girl friend he kept there and paid for, how this was possible on three shillings a week I just could not understand, but it all came out later on. Because I was responsible for seeing that everyone in my room was present at " lights out" each night and weekend passes were only allowed very rare, Johny Shaw asked me to sign him in nearly every weekend so he could go to London, didn't worry me to do this, hadn't asked to be a leading apprentice, was just given the job and I was never short of a packet of "fags". One night late Johny turned up with another suit case, after climbing through a hole in the fence near our room, instead of cigarettes it contained woman's clothing that he had picked up on the train from London, because it was there! Told him in no uncertain manner that if he didn't do something about returning it to the owner it was the last time I covered for him. He packed up the case and took it out of the room and I expected he would leave it close to the guard room so that it would be found early in the morning and sent on it's way to a very worried female. That was not Johny's way, when I took a detail of boys out at the crack of dawn to make sure there was no rubbish about the place, every post, lamp standard, sign board and railing was draped with all of the contents of the case, we found the case and quickly packed the items back in and I took it to the guard room and stated that it had been found some way away from our room, it was opened by the police and an address found inside and was I presumed sent on to it's owner, but I was very mad at Johny Shaw and never covered for him again,

didn't stop him from going out when he wanted to. Some months later he was found to have been forging instructors signatures on chits to book out micrometer and vernier gauges from the stores and was no doubt selling these in London and perhaps committing other crimes we knew nothing of , he was discharged from the R.A.F and as the second world war started soon after probably had a prosperous war and even ended up rich and famous, may be knighted for his efforts , while the rest of us fought and died! I have recently been contacted as a result of this webpage by Peter Long, another one of our fellows who knew Johnny. He did become very rich eventually, Rolls Royce, Two 'Planes of his own etc.!

R.A.F Halton was at one time a country residence owned by the Rothchild family whether they gave it to the R.A.F I don't know but the "house" was used for the officer's mess and the stables were allocated to the apprentices for a "hobby shop". The stables were a magnificent set of buildings with curved brick walls and big enough to house a dozen families in great comfort. Many of the boys at Halton came from very wealthy families, some sons of aircraft manufacturers because it was recognised that an apprenticeship at Halton was the finest training anywhere in the world in Aircraft engineering. One father had given his son a new Ford car, he was probably in his last year of the three year course, we all helped him to take it completely to pieces and each part was reassembled with great care so that every part was a perfect fit, ran like a sewing machine the quietest Ford I have ever known.

There were even sons of Indian Princes, in fact it seemed as if every nation was represented there, many of the boys when they had finished their apprenticeship were "bought out" by their parents and returned to their own country or in some cases the firm that their parents owned in Britain, can't remember the cost but did hear at the time it would have bought a row of houses in any town in England! The railway station we all arrived at was Wendover and the nearest large one was Aylesbury, (famous for ducks!) county seat for Buckinghamshire. Halton was set just below a ridge of hills and covered many square miles of country, the workshops were massive, covering all trades that operated in the Royal Air Force, an airfield with a grass runway complete with hangars and numerous aircraft that were used for hands on work and proper lecture halls where we were brought up to date on current affairs, and scientific laboratories with the latest equipment used in the testing of materials. The idea was to give not only complete technical training but a good all round knowledge much like a private college, apart from training in military matters and of course plenty of sporting activities. We were paid 5 shillings a week, four of which was saved for us, to be given when we went on leave, breakages which were deducted for individual items broken or worn out before a replacement was normally issued, boys can be hard on clothes! We were issued with a complete kit of

clothes which included just about every thing required, but out of our weekly shilling we had to purchase things like metal and boot polish, once a week we had kit and barrack inspections when everything had to be spit and polish and all kit in good order, when the war started in September 1939 things changed very rapidly, our three year course was cut down to just over two by stopping all holidays and we worked from dawn to dusk on our training, the subjects did not get shortened just longer days and no holidays or week ends, and we had to do anti invasion patrols and ride around the hills on our bicycles in the evenings to check for land mines that may have been dropped to blow the place up. At this time my father and mother had rented a house at High Wycombe which was not too far away from Halton, Dad was in charge of all military and naval buildings and repairs caused by shelling and bombing in Dover, so Mum lived at High Wycombe and Dad came up when ever he could, he had an old car and special petrol rations because of his work. I managed to get a weekend pass and went to get my bicycle from where it had been requisitioned for use in land mine patrols, the sergeant in charge said I couldn't have mine but let me have a grotty old service bike, think he was using it himself as it was new and my pride and joy, set out to visit Mum and Dad and coming round a corner met a flock of sheep all over the road, no where to go so crashed into the bank and bent the frame so that I could only steer one way, took me ages to get to High Wycombe and could not get anyone to mend it so Dad put it on the roof of his car and took me back to camp, left Halton soon after and took my bike with me.

The entry ages for Halton were 15 to 18, and we signed on for 12 years of service from the age of 18. As I was almost the minimum age, I was 15 in November 1938 and joined in January 1939 , I would have been 18 when I finished the apprenticeship, but due to the war and cutting out holidays etc, I was only 17, I therefore was still classed as a boy when I left Halton and was not informed what rank I had passed my final examinations, so when I arrived at my first operational posting was paid the princely sum of ten shillings a week (about one dollar a week), yet was the only qualified member of the gang and had to tell men much older than myself sometimes the right way to do things.

----- Reg Miles

Those items listed below can be found on the web at

<http://members.aol.com/famjustin/Milesbio.html>

[Biography of Phyllis Miles \(formerly Phyllis Dike\)](#), LACW, WAAF

[Collected Poetry of Reg Miles](#), Flight Engineer, No1SoTT Halton/ MUs/
Snowy Owls, 420 Sqdn RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command,
Tholthorpe, Yorkshire / 511 Transport Command, RAF

[Miss Phyllis Miles nee Dike](#), Photo, LACW, WAAF

[Group Photo](#), 432 Squadron RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command,
Eastmoor, Yorkshire

[420 Squadron Badge](#), Photo, 6 Group Bomber Command, Tholthorpe
Yorkshire, RCAF

[Barrington-Kennett Trophy Winners](#), 1939/40, Photo, Reg Miles, RAF
Halton, RAF

[FIDO](#), Anecdote, Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, RAF

[Flight Engineer Reg Miles](#), Photo of Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, 432
Sqdn RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command, RAF

[Flight Log 1664 HCU page one, page two, 432 Squadron page 1, 2, 3, 4,](#)
[420 Squadron page 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 1332 H.C.U. Page 1, Certificates of](#)
[Competency, 242 Squadron, Page 1, Page 2, Page 3, 246 Squadron, Page](#)
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Snowy Owls, 420 Sqdn RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command,
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[Halifax, E Easy and Crew](#), Photo of Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, 420
Sqdn RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command, RAF

[Mail Plane](#), RAF Joke, Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, RAF

[Missing in Action Telegram](#), Reg Miles, 432 Squadron RCAF, 6 Group
Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Yorkshire

[PLUTO](#), Anecdote, Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, RAF

[Queen Mary](#), Photo, Reg Miles, 67 M.U.s, RAF

[Salvaging a Bristol Beaufort](#), Photo, Reg Miles, 67 M.U.s, RAF

[Tholthorpe Control Tower](#), from Jim Tease, Pilot, Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, 420 Sqdn RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command, RAF

[Wedding Photo](#), Photo of Reg Miles, Flight Engineer, No1SoTT Halton/MUs/ Bomber Command/ 511 Transport Command, RAF

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Chapter 2

Ex Apprentice, 34 - 67 M.U.s, R.A.F.

I was posted to 34 Maintenance Unit Shrewsbury in Shropshire 5-10-1940, this unit was housed in sheds on the out-skirts of Shrewsbury and was responsible for the repair on site of crashed aircraft and the recovery of crashed aircraft that could not be flown away, this included both British, German, Italian, and later on American. The Flight Sergeant in charge of the crew of about six airmen was about sixty, was an optician in civvy street, had been a driver in the 1914-18 war so had no knowledge of aircraft, the rest of the gang were ex-garage workers only about one had any experience with spanners so it was finding out the hard way how 'planes came to bits! We also had a driver for our Chevy truck and could call on "Queen Mary" low loaders and Coles cranes to lift things, but many times we were unable to get cranes or trucks to the site and it was sheer legs and muscle that were used.

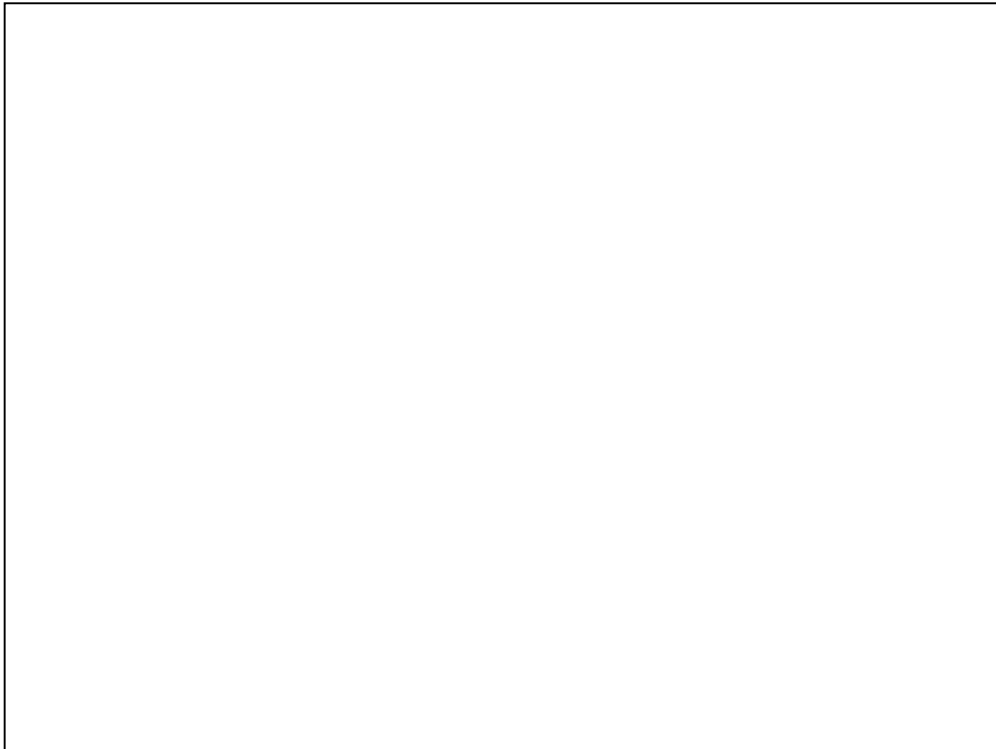


Photo of a crane of the type we used to salvage aircraft during my time with 34 & 67 MUs in 40-41. On show as an Amazon Crane but the same as a Coles one, so have altered it's title. It is on show at the Yorkshire Air Museum based at Elvington airfield a WW2 bomber station flying the dear old Halifax of 77 Squadron RAF and two Free French squadrons 346 Guyenne and 347 Tunisie

The only time I tried to drive a Coles Crane I made a complete mess of it and sheared the drive shaft!! The two Polish operators were not well pleased, but as they could not speak English and I not able to understand a single word of their long and arm waving complaint, it was left to our Flight Sergeant to ball me out , and as he was a geriatric (well must have been all of 50) little notice was taken of it all. The Poles got underneath and removed the bit, replaced it and were operational in a few hours, I was not allowed anywhere near it after!!

The lowloader, Queen Mary, was a specially made semi trailer body, very low platform with wheels exterior, from memory would think the platform about 12 inches from ground, also very long able to take most aircraft fuselages and wings. Extending side rails were fitted that could be locked up so that wings could be stood on their leading edges, one on either side (on sand bags to prevent damage) and strapped to these side rails, the rails were also covered in felt to prevent damage, this left the centre of the trailer free to fit the fuselage on trestles, with propellor removed but engine still in place, some aircraft with long bodies could extend over the tail board if put on trestles to clear, open body to the trailer so that there was no height restriction, only the height of bridges and power cables, standard 1939-40 prime mover, 6 cylinder Perkins or Ford, nothing like the monsters on todays roads. It was called "Queen Mary" because they were so long that the only thing to compare them with was the ship of the same name.



photo from David Searle- Baker Queen Mary

Recovering Hawker Tempest Mk. V Wreck

My first job with them was at an aerodrome called Shawbury that was used to train pilots and Navigators, a Spitfire pilot had been shot in a fight with a German fighter and had lost a lot of blood before crash landing beside the main runway and the aircraft had tipped onto its back as he had not been able to lower the undercarriage. The first job was to make the guns safe and remove any bombs before starting to dismantle the 'plane, the next job was always to remove instruments that were either secret or likely to be stolen, this in a Spitfire was the gunsight, compass and a clock if fitted, as the new boy I got the job of crawling into the upside down cockpit to remove these items while the rest of the gang removed the wing fairings and bolts to wobble the wings off. I had to get on hands and knees to get the items off as they were almost on the ground, felt something wet on my head and back as I worked, found when I crawled out that a large pad of congealed blood had come adrift from the floor and I was a right mess, no water anywhere near as we were miles from any buildings, the crew washed me off with the 100 octane petrol we drained from the 'plane, but as we sat and ate our lunch of sandwiches couldn't help keep looking at the blood still under my finger nails. As we sat and ate we saw a training Miles Master coming in to land with the cockpit hood open and the horn blaring loudly to warn the pilot that his under carriage was not down, we all stood up and waved like mad, the pilot, probably doing his first solo landing, waved back with a big smile on his face and crashed, we now had another 'plane to remove!

I don't know how the trainee pilot got on, we helped him out and he had no damage but whether he was "scrubbed " or not have no idea (scrubbed thrown off the pilot's course through some error).

The Spitfire being monocoque construction in aluminium alloys was a very easy aircraft to dismantle and transport, the main wing spar consisted of a series of square tubes fitted inside each other, gradually tapering towards the wing tip, the mating tubes for these being very close to the fuselage, with the propeller removed the body fitted easily into a low loader and the wings were slid in either side being supported on sand bags to prevent damage and strapped to the extendable rails fitted to the sides of the low loader, the guns, ammunition, and propeller being stowed in any suitable position. The Miles Master being of wooden construction was an entirely different proposition, the wing roots were attached about one and a half metres either side of the fuselage making this "centre section" which was not removable about three and a half to four and a half metres wide, when placed on the sides of the low loader these projected out each side a considerable amount and because they were very low often jammed on road side obstructions, this was particularly a problem on the windy narrow country roads with many "hump

back" bridges, we were caught only once when the centre section rode up onto the walls of a hump back bridge and very nearly caused the injury to one of the crew riding in the back of the low loader, three or four sleepers lashed to the side rails lifted this aircraft high enough to clear any road side obstacles. We never had enough red flags to fix to the overhangs so it was almost a game to ride in the back of the low loader and lean over as we motored along and steal the flags placed in empty paint cans by the road gangs, as we used the same route frequently from training airfields to our depot I guess the road workers got fed up with us and one day as one of the gang grabbed a flag found himself flying through the air to land in the road, the rotters had concreted all the flags in and they were very heavy, no damage done just a few bruises and wounded pride. Coming back from the same airfield one day we were held up by a new gang with a Miles Master stuck on the hump back bridge walls, to add to their problems their Coles crane was in front of the low loader so couldn't get to the plane to lift it up, we managed to get our crane in place and help them out, they hadn't read standing orders! Called to the same airfield with instructions to remove some twenty Avro Ansons from a hanger we thought they were being transferred to another airfield, when we got there found the whole lot burnt out in the hanger, looked like an elephant's grave yard with just the steel tubing frames and melting engines and propellers lined up in two long rows. When we asked what had happened were told that during the night an airman on guard duty saw a low flying airplane crossing the field and identified it as a German one so fired his rifle at it, the plane dropped it's bomb which landed on the concrete outside the hanger, bounced over the bomb proof doors, bounced on the hanger floor and just missed going clean out the other end but hit a girder and went off. The airman had been put on a charge for firing at an unidentified aircraft!

I was going on my first leave after being posted to an RAF squadron as an aero engine fitter, and at only 17 in 1940 felt a big wheel, My folks lived in Dover and my brother of 9 years would need something from my war, grabbed a handful of .303" ammunition from a crashed training Hurricane, pulled out the bullets and emptied out the charge, would put the cases in a fire when I got home to get rid of the caps and put the bullets back, would impress my small brother. Put the cases in a fire out in the yard and got a most awful telling off from Mum, they were having more than their share of bangs. Next day was about to leave the house to look up at the "dogfights" going on above, Mother said you'll get killed by falling shrapnel stay indoors, but out I went, and in I went after a few seconds as redhot bits of metal fell around me, I might be in the RAF but my folks and young brother were seeing more of the war than I was, my few bullets were nothing compared to his collection of shrapnel, from both our guns and those firing 12inch shells from France, he had seen more action than I had !!

We had arrived at a very posh looking house set up on a rise with a well maintained garden with small bushes lining the curving path to the front door and a perfect green lawn. I suppose we did look a sorry bunch with our usual costume of rolled down gum boots, white socks turned over the top and greasy overalls that were well over due for a wash, no hats and most with a few days of beard, long uncombed hair in fact even the 'chiefy' could have passed for the robber leader, we had been out on the road for about a week and were tired and hungry when we got yet another job before returning to base for a rest. Chiefy went up to the front door and was answered by a smart looking man who took the Flight Sergeant round the back of the house through a very ornate garden arch way, he soon came back and called us to follow him. The sight that met the eyes was one to make us all laugh, a learner pilot had got into trouble and seeing what looked like a nice open field came into land, too late he found it was a chicken farm with lots of tall wire fences to separate the various chickens, his 'plane had become wrapped up like a parcel as he ploughed through the lot, but to make matters even worse as his 'plane neared the back of the house his engine fell off and landed into a rather nice goldfish pond, this cracked the concrete and all the water ran out stranding the fish. The owner was not a very happy man and refused most emphatically to allow us to clear a wide path way back through the mess so we could get a crane in to lift the whole lot out by a back way, no it all had to go round the side of the house and no damage must be done. What a hope he had the radial engine was levered out of the pond and rolled with great difficulty through the side gate, a few bits came off both as we struggled to hold the engine upright but when we got to the front of the house it just seemed to get a life of it's own and rolled across the lawn leaving giant size foot prints and demolished hedges and flower beds on it's way. The rest of the aircraft was sawn into bits and man handled the same way, miserable sod never even gave us a cup of tea when we had finished, just growled he would report us for damage we had caused, we all hoped his chickens never laid another egg.

As to the Learner who crashed, he was long gone before we got there. This was not always the case as we did come across the odd bits and bobs and even complete bodies at times, not all RAF either.

For about three months we worked all over the north part of England and Wales, even had to close The Mersey Tunnel one time to tow an American light bomber through from Speke don't know why or where we took it. We were then transferred to 67M.U. based in Taunton the county seat of Somerset. The depot was in a large garage on the main road south of the city, had it's own sports field out the back which we used for general storage during transit, all the low loaders, lorries, and cranes were parked in various streets which had to have guards circulating during the night, our five rounds of ammunition and World War 1 rifle must not be lost or even used,

it was all we had, another job for the technical people, office and stores people never got this job, perhaps because they made out the lists, one time when we were back at base had to spend the day shovelling coal at the railway station to fuel the fires for the office staff, couldn't let them get dirty, wonder if Churchill knew that his trained people were waiting on the lazy sods in the office.

This was early in 1941 with the threat of invasion by the German army still a possibility, the sports field was surrounded with a high spiked railing fence. The fence was six feet high made of steel spikes about 3 quarters of an inch in diameter, spaced about six inches apart fitted through holes at top and bottom of steel plates which were made of 2 inch by 1/4 inch steel. I'm sure you must have some around houses or playing fields where you live. The spikes were held in with swaged nibs pressed into the spikes when the sections of fence were made this held the spikes in place. We were given the job of filing off the nibs that held alternate spikes in place. We had to file these nibs off alternate spikes so the fence did not collapse, but the "doctored" spikes could be removed. Each one of these then had a number painted on it, all airmen were allocated a spike and on the call to arms would rush to get out their spike, if they could, and fend off the invading hordes of Germans with their Tiger tanks, machine guns and other lethal weapons, no doubt we should have had a major victory as the German troops fell about laughing!!

The C.O. held a dummy run which became a real pantomime as men fought for a spike having forgotten their number and short people couldn't reach high enough to pull them out of the top rail. Nobody got stabbed but it was a close run thing. We all treated the whole thing as a joke, it is easy when you have your back firmly against the wall to consider defeat impossible, and so many of the daft ideas did work, FIDO, PLUTO, to name just two. This one was one of those that just was stupid!!

The same wally of a C.O. who gave us the spikes decided to make me up to a Corporal, told him he couldn't because I still didn't know what rank I had passed out from Halton, and in any case being technical trade had to pass a trade board before I could be promoted. Threatened to put me on a charge if I didn't put up my stripes straight away to be officially second in charge of the gang, just ignored him and was called up before him a couple of days later to be told he couldn't promote me for the reasons I had given him, but told me I had passed out from Halton as a Fitter 2 Engine with the rank of Aircraftman First class and my pay would start right away because of the work I was doing, so I did get some thing out of it all. Following on this I was given the job as Station Armourer, responsible for sorting and packing for dispatch all bombs, cannons, machine guns and ammunition brought in from crashes. I was given the relevant Air Ministry orders to tell

me what to do because lets face it I was not even 18 and trained as an engine fitter, but perhaps the only real airman on the place, I was given the away team half of the sports changing room, the Station Warrant Officer had the other half, a retread from 14-18 war and responsible for station discipline.

One of the jobs I had to do was strip all guns of any bullets "up the spout" as many had major damage and bent barrels, this was never easy, the breach blocks had to be taken out and packed in separate boxes, with a bullet jammed in, the only way to release the blocks was to fire the gun which sent the bullet up the bent barrel and this released the breach blocks, S.W.O. came in one day when I had a pile of Browning Machine guns on the bench all with bent barrels and was firing them one at a time to get the breach blocks out, nearly wet himself, and then a few days later I was burning all the Very pistol cartridges. These were all different colours and were used to signal and identify aircraft. Usually they just burnt with lots of bright colours but this lot started flying all over the place just as he marched out of his office with his cane under his arm, moved pretty quick for an oldy and got back inside his office, seemed to think I did it on purpose!!

Does seem a bit mad perhaps now to do what I did as an "armourer". But times were a bit desperate you know and everything was in very short supply so if it could be repaired and returned into service we might just survive.

The first 20m/m cannon I dismantled was a problem, had never seen one before had no books on it and had to get the breach block out, barrel was straight and nothing up it, the cannon was about two and a half metres long and the only nut I could see was on the "blunt" end, a large hexagonal nut with a locking tab on it, so behind it must be the return spring and hopefully the breach block, with the "blunt" end sticking out the open door I got to work and the nut kept turning and seemed to have lots of thread, with a bang the last turn flew off and what seemed like yards of spring flew out of the door, and guess who was just leaving his office? The other problem with the 20m/m cannon was the round cartridge drum that fitted on the breach, these always arrived to me battered and bent and the only way to get the shells out was to cut a slot in the case and prise or shake the shells out, I was sitting on the bench with an ammunition box on the floor shaking a drum to get the shells out when the door burst open and a strange sergeant charged in, "Call yourself an armourer" he shouted, "Stop that before you kill us both". When I told him who and what I was he said that he had never seen a cannon gun in fact he didn't know much at all as he had spent the last few years at a place called Shaibah in the Gulf and had only worked on Vickers water cooled guns while there, but he did know the coding for the shells I was dropping into a box and some were of a very delicate contact type to explode on contact with the thin aluminium skin of a 'plane! I filled him in

with all I knew and what had to be done with each type of weapon and worked with him for a week or so until I managed to get back with my old gang.

Shortly after we were sent on detachment to an airfield in Cornwall, called St. Eval, at which were based Bristol Beaufort Torpedo Bombers, they were sent out after German ships and dock installations and had received very heavy casualties.



[Men of 67 MU at Bristol Beaufort Recovery](#) Reg 2nd from left back row

We were housed in one of the Nissen huts and started work right away as there was a Spitfire sitting on top of a dry stone wall at the edge of the airfield, the pilot had overshot, bounced and come to a halt perfectly balanced on the wall, painted on the side was the pilots name and the legend "Sempre in Excreta" (Latin is not my strong point!) Always in the shit! At the end of the runway was a stone quarry and a Beaufort had crashed into it on take off loaded with torpedoes, these had detonated so there was little to move mainly the two large radial engines, one was in the middle of the quarry and our crane soon lifted that into a lorry, the other was partly buried under stone and against the quarry wall so we had to move it out with brute force to get it into a position that the crane could reach. It was hard hot work and we were having trouble keeping our footing because of all the oil that had spilt out when it had hit the wall, except it wasn't oil but half a man buried under the engine, not a pretty sight but a nurse who just happened to be looking on helped us to put the remains in sacks so that they could be buried properly with the rest of the poor devil. We very rarely had a problem with bodies or parts there of, because the bodies were taken away before we arrived on the scene.

We did have one occasion when we were sent onto the moors to remove a Hawker Hurricane, but it was the wrong number and found the pilot still in it, we reported this and found our one a mile or so away. The Hawker Hurricane was a very different type of construction from the Spitfire,

basically a steel tubular frame around which were fitted wooden formers and these were joined together by wooden strips along the length of the fuselage, the wings were very similar and all surfaces were covered with doped fabric, this was very time consuming to make and repair, much like a model aeroplane in appearance. A fitter from Hawker's had almost finished this repair to a Hurricane when German bombers gave us a visit to pay back for what the Beauforts were doing in France, a bomb dropped outside the bomb proof door, blew them in and flattened the poor Hurricane! We got bombed out that night so drove a few miles away to a friendly looking field and slept all in a row under a tarp for a few nights until we were given an empty holiday beach house at Trearnon Bay which became our base for a few weeks, when we were not out on a job. Visited St. Eval in the 1980s and they were only just starting to remove the remains of that hanger blown up in early 1941.

During the next few weeks we were constantly on the move all over Cornwall, from Penzance across to Predanack, which is on the other leg at the base of Cornwall. Working on a Whirlwind, twin engined fighter-bomber, which had nose dived straight into the ground, on a desolate part of the moors, all that showed was the edges of sheets of aluminium in the ground and lying a few feet away, a hand complete with a ring on, we could not salvage the plane and pilot's body without large earth moving gear and instructions were received to pull out what we could and fill the hole in, as we worked we heard the sound of aircraft high up and turned to watch a flight of the same 'planes go by, as we watched one peeled off and dived into the ground a few miles away, heard later that the tail planes of this aircraft were a bit suspect. We always had billets in the nearest place to where we worked, sometimes this was an Army Camp or a pub and in this case we were living in a cafe at Predanack, after a wash we all trooped into the dining room for our first meal and on came a Cornish pastie, about a foot long and looked delicious but didn't think it was a lot for six or seven hungry blokes to share, but then in came the rest and we had one each!

Once we had to go to a Fleet Air Arm station to dismantle an aircraft, it was in a hanger and we were dressed in our usual scruffy outfits, all these Naval types marching about at the double, and the public address system nearly drove us mad, never seemed to stop with lots of whistles and incomprehensible bellowing, asked one of the sailors what it all meant and his answer left us just as ignorant as before. We were in one of the huts and left our truck at the hanger to walk to the mess hall to get some lunch, as we strolled by a hut the window flew open and a loud voice wanted to know what we were doing walking on the Quarter deck and tried to make us run across, not in gum boots we couldn't and didn't try. That night being near a town, after 50 years have no idea which one, we all thought a night on the town would be a good change, so managed to tidy ourselves up and found

out when the bus left and got to the guard room at the main gate just as a sailor closed and locked it, outside was the queue for the bus which had yet to arrive. "Open" we all said, can't was the reply because the liberty boat has gone, what a load of rubbish, if you were on a ship you could understand it, if the Navy still do things that way it's about time they changed from the days of Rum, bum and Nelson!! Soon got away from that stupid place probably didn't know there was a war on we certainly did and spent all our days clearing away the rubbish caused by it. Often we had to remove crashed German aircraft that had been shot down, most were just a heap of burnt wreckage with often the remains of the crew inside, not recognisable as such just bits of bone that had not been found for burial, at other times we would have a complete 'plane with little or no damage, these we took to pieces if not able to fly out from where they were, went to a special place to be put together perhaps with parts from other 'planes to make them airworthy, and test flown to find out more about that type. Once we were called to an aerodrome near the coast where, I think it was a J.U.88 had landed the pilot thinking he was over the channel in France, the duty officer seeing the plane land had driven out in a jeep and crashed into the tail to stop it taking off again, we had to get the bits from a depot that was full of German 'planes and replace the damaged parts. Some of the early R.A.F. bombers such as the twin engined Handley Page Hampden were fitted with special balloon cable cutters to the leading edge of the main wings, these in theory would be tripped as the cable slid into it's jaws and an explosive charge would fire a razor sharp chisel cutting the cable allowing the plane to get free, after a number of M.U. airmen had lost fingers while man handling wings during salvage instructions were issued that these had to be tripped before any work was done on the aircraft, I tripped the only one I worked on and it chopped the end from my screwdriver! An American Flying Fortress had crashed somewhere in Devonshire, can't remember where, and what it was doing in England I don't know, thought the Yanks came in much later, anyhow we were told to get it and it must be sent up to Liverpool. The biggest thing we had tackled, got the fuselage, wings and engines away alright but the centre section was very wide and when stood on it's leading edge was exceptionally high.

The local police were always asked for advice on getting past low bridges and electricity wires, spent more than a week travelling a few miles only to find yet another low bridge in our way, chiefly was fed up and so were we camping along the road where ever we got stuck, most aircraft that we worked on had a fire axe stowed on board so we had a good selection of sharp ones we used for all sorts of jobs, we cut foot and hand holes in the centre section and cut off with the axes quite a few feet from the trailing edge which was now the top and were able to get back to the depot next day, thing was only worth scrap anyway. After about 5 months of this work which in most cases was just garbage collection, not what I had been trained

at great expense to do, I saw a notice on orders calling for volunteers to go over seas. I put in my application and was accepted, given seven days posting leave and reported to the assembly camp called I think Paddington, hundreds or more like thousands of airmen of all trades were gathered there and we were all issued with both tropical and cold weather equipment, had two large kit bags of the stuff to lug about plus personal kit in a small bag. After about ten days of this which included a medical we were all paraded on the very large parade ground to get our instructions to move to lorries and get aboard a ship, suddenly a voice bellowed out " 575931 Miles R.J. fall out and report to the parade adjutant" "was that me?" yes" said a bloke next to me who had become a friend. So out I marched dragging bags in front of all these assembled airmen, saluted after dropping the bags and reported my name and number, still not 18 I was told I was too young to go where these men were going and told to hand in my kit and report back to my unit, this lot went to Russia I found out later and many did not return, some drowned when their ship was sunk and others just died from the cold!

----- Reg Miles

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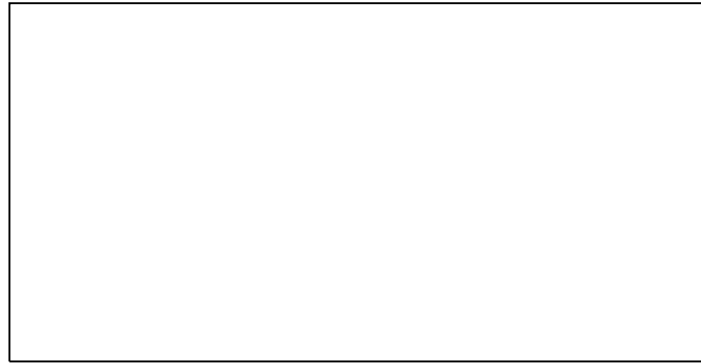
Biography of Reg Miles

Ex Apprentice No 1 S.of T.T., R.A.F., Halton 39th Entry 34 - 67 M.U.s - 27 A/S
Bloemspruit South Africa - Lyme Kent, Flight Engineer 432 - 420 Squadrons RCAF,
6 Group Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Tholthorpe, Yorkshire / 242- 246 - 511
Squadrons Transport Command Lyneham, RAF

Chapter 3

27 Air School, Bloemspruit South Africa,

B Squadron, Service Unit, R.A.F.



I didn't spend long back at Taunton before the call came again to report for over seas posting, I'd had the special leave so on the train to Blackpool this time.

The Leaving of Liverpool " ring any bells " a film about children forcefully taken from England during and shortly after the war, the parents and children never told if the others were alive and the children taken to Church run HOMES in Australia and treated as slave labour, in fact in many cases the children built the homes (as in collective enclaves) As I said a very different life style, we were all led to believe that they (as in any one in authority even self proclaimed) knew best and slavishly carried out their instructions to the letter. Children were abused, physically, mentally and sexually, both boys and girls, how did it happen, only because authority was not questioned until recently and only now is the truth coming out of those children's tragic lives.

Bearing all that in mind you may not be surprised to read that I like my peers did as I was told without question.

The journey out to South Africa started from the joys of Blackpool, a holiday resort in the north of England, no work, billeted in houses normally

used to accommodate the vast numbers of "visitors" from the industrial towns of the north during their summer holidays. The local "landladies" welcomed us with open arms, we were a source of income to them, not that they opened too wide the food cupboards, but many daughters opened their hearts and arms to us, we were all young healthy and free. Had my first go on ice skates at the local rink and after a few falls soon mastered it and really enjoyed it. Soon became time to board ship S.S. Mooltan 20,000 tons of sheer misery at Liverpool and head out into the Atlantic that was waiting for us with all the dirty weather it could find. April 1941, could well have been April fools day for all I know.

By buses we arrived at grey Liverpool to stand for hours on a grey dockside in front of a grey wall that stretched to the sky and disappeared into the grey distance, only relieved by a black hole in it's side through which countless airmen staggered carrying all their worldly goods contained in two kitbags and a small case. One of the kitbags contained our normal selection of issue clothing, the other, two complete outfits one of tropical shorts shirts etc, the other cold weather clothes suitable for Russia!! We had no idea where we were headed and it was hoped neither did the enemy! The kitbag not required was taken off us well into the voyage, the Russian one I am now very happy to say!!

The Mooltan 20,000 tons of aging ship, massive to us but now would only be classed as a small ship 100,000 tons seems to be the average, 250,000 tons on the large size!!

Our turn came at last and through the hole we trooped to find ourselves in a black cavern, directed through doors that were about a foot off the floor so that dragging kitbags jammed and brought forth words of complaint not heard very frequently in church. Now completely lost and descending even deeper into the bowels of this black tank we were at last told that is where you stay until told to move and that heap there contain hammocks and those hooks there are where you swing them and those tables and benches are where you eat and some can sleep on them and the heads are there and don't move!!

So we sat and surrounded with our bags wondered what we had done to deserve this, after all we had volunteered for overseas posting, but this?

A few thought to see what was through the next doorway but only more of the same lots of airmen sat sitting waiting to be told what to do. Ah a sergeant has arrived, 'you and you come with me', not me but a couple near who left their kit and followed as detailed, who returned some time later with urns of tea, a scramble to find our own kitbag and delve into it's contents to find our 'mugs airmen' hopefully still in one piece.

These two had been delegated as our mess orderlies and would fetch our food at the times arranged, well at least we should be fed and the tea was hot strong and sweet, by this time it was getting late in the day not that we had any idea whether the sun was shining or it was raining, the urns were returned and the message came back to sling your hammocks and get in.

I was just about 18 from memory and certainly the youngest in our "room", places on the benches and tables had already been taken by those in the know. The Mooltan was a slow old converted cargo ship. As such the accommodations were happenstance and crowded. The only hammock hook left was over the stairwell and passage way. This is where I had to sling my hammock, which was over the stair case leading to the lower toilets. I slung my hammock and endeavoured to climb in and found myself on the floor the opposite side, I had tied it too tight and had no head room so that as I climbed in I pushed myself out again, instructions from those near who were well bedded down soon got things "ship shape" and I crawled in to assume the shape of a banana, not at all comfortable and desperately aware that a trip to the heads should have been made before becoming cocooned like this.

Sleep came but was soon interrupted by the rustling noise as hammocks swayed and rubbed together, we were on the move but this soon stopped and dawn found us moored in mid river, we had been allowed on deck soon after stowing our hammocks and being fed, strict instructions being issued that not too many on one side as the ship could capsize!! A sea of men everywhere, no small piece of deck was vacant, and only the grey Mersey, grey sky, and crowds of grey clad men were in view.

There we stayed all day and other ships moored near, we were fed during the day and tried to wash with the salt water soap we were issued with, it didn't foam and certainly did not remove dirt, in fact it left a grey sort of coating on the hands which was difficult to remove, seems that life from now on was going to contain lots of grey!!

And so to "bed" or do you say and so to hammock? only to be woken up feeling very sick and scrambled out of the hammock to find most others were doing the same and a rush to get on deck for some fresh air which may stop that horrible feeling. It was dawn a very grey dawn, and directly behind us was a very large grey ship, completely without modesty showing us her (it's ?) grey bottom as it lunged up and down, we likewise were playing silly buggers and this motion was no doubt the cause of our distress, in the distance could be seen other ships, some had things like broom sticks pointing about them and we presumed that they were there to protect us, I like many other now wished that we could be torpedoed and sunk, the only relief in sight for that awful sinking feeling!

That night, all the hammocks swung together as the ship rocked in the heavy seas and the rush by some people during the night to get to the "bogs" before they spewed up often ended just below me, perhaps it is no wonder that I spent as much time as I was allowed on deck away from the stench, but always got herded down when it got dark, the Atlantic was not a very pleasant place to be at that time apart from the gale that seemed to rage more each day, we were only too aware that U Boats would enjoy sinking a troop ship and the chances of being saved in that stormy water was about nil! It was cold and smelly in my hammock as we sailed out into the Atlantic Ocean.

The days passed and gradually we were able to take a small sip of tea a tiny crumb of bread without heaving it up straight away, as we and the other ships headed into the grey Atlantic, the clever ones amongst us saying that we were headed for America, others convinced we were going into the Med, and an even more knowledgeable bunch with a compass sure we were going south. The sea was empty but for our escort. Our convoy, being one with important cargo, a troop ship, was doubtless given a course away from the shorter more populated routes. We saw no planes escorting us or other ships other than our own convoy and escort. Some bits and bobs were sighted in the sea, just a few empty crates probably slung over board by any ship friend or foe going that way. Nothing else.

Funny things that stick in the memory after all these years, apart from the agony of sea-sickness which passed after about a week, was and still is the smell and taste of the bread loaves we were all given each day as part of our food ration. I had now recovered from sea sickness and was able to eat my share of the food on offer, what we were served up I have no recollection apart from the small loaf of bread we were issued with each morning which had to do us for the rest of the day. Eat it when you like but you won't get any more until the next morning. It was the most enjoyable bread I have ever tasted, of course I had teeth then and was very hungry, as all young people are, but after so many years I can almost taste it in my memory!!

The grey days passed and the grey ships with guns, one of which was a battleship, left us as we entered Freetown, not the town you understand but the estuary leading to it. We called into Freetown after three weeks of utter misery. Freetown is on the west African coast, so it did look as if we might end up somewhere hot but where no one knew. Apart from one poor sod, one of our airmen though not from our mess, who had not stopped bringing up just bile for the last three weeks, no one from the troops got on shore. The lad who was taken ashore with seasickness that had lasted since leaving UK, was in a very bad way with dehydration.

We moored away from the town itself and have no memory of other ships near us but guess they were there. We did not get ashore, not that it looked very inviting, mud huts and mud was all we could see moored out in the channel. After one day on a ship that actually stayed in one place horizontally we set sail again for parts unknown.

I developed a raging tooth ache and reported sick, the ships doctor showed me his equipment for treating tooth aches, it consisted of an armchair and a few rusty looking plier type instruments, said he hadn't pulled out any teeth and which one hurt, showed him and tapped on the wrong one and told me to come back in the morning if it still bothered me, funny thing the pain went away and only returned very many years later when all that was left was a hollow shell which crumbled to pieces when the dentist gripped it!!

Sailing away from Freetown the weather became much sunnier and it was now quite evident that south was the way we were going, the sea became less grey, but cannot remember the other ships, perhaps they no longer were showing their bottoms, flying fishes flew from our path dolphins rode our wash, and life became just about perfect, apart from the fact that the 10 shillings (about a dollar) I had boarded with was long gone (no pay until we arrived where ever we were going). I smoked a pipe but would smoke cigarettes as well and the only ones on offer free from my "room"mates were Springbok, a very strong South African fag oval in section and only given to me because those that had bought them felt sick after a few puffs. It is one of the other things that I remember after all these years, the horrible smell of the Springbok cigarettes, which was all I had to smoke the six weeks we were aboard. Perhaps in retrospect a good time to give up smoking you might say, but in those days they were issued free to some units and certainly the Salvo's and other friends of the forces gave them out to all service men. The opiate of the masses it would appear!!

We got into smoother waters and the sun shone and most of the Navy escort left us, and there really is a sort of magic about the sea when you are far from land, suppose most of us got a good rest and were well fed for six weeks and enjoyed the days just relaxing in the sun, watching the flying fish, dolphins and strange patches of seaweed, and of course we all had to be "welcomed" by King Neptune.

One thing about a troop ship there is no such thing as privacy, we slept close to one another, ate our food touching elbows, and washed and showered in sea water which does not get any dirt off only ingrains it further into the skin, even using the special soap that was provided. Toilets had to be increased and the solution on this ship was to construct on the top deck a trough about 30ft or 9 meters long and fix along this some 20 or so squares

of wood with holes in, water was pumped in from the sea one end and ran over board out of the other, a very friendly loo indeed, the rocking of the ship was a worry some times when your next door neighbour's evacuation born on a tidal wave came visiting!! To enliven an activity that was already fraught with some peril, people with a distorted sense of humour nailed a stub of candle to a piece of wood, lit the candle and then set it on its journey down stream to warm the posteriors and other appendages of the poor captive sufferers!!

We travelled south but then to confuse all and sundry we started to go north and with our very limited knowledge of where things were on the earth's surface we were again lost, after six weeks of a war time sea cruise we entered the Port of Durban and once more were on dry land which to our consternation would not keep still and behaved much like the Mooltan had in Liverpool.

Perhaps it is not to be unexpected that most if not all were glad to get off the Mooltan after six weeks when she docked in Durban on the east coast of South Africa. The group I was with were taken from the ship to the rail and we began the last part of our journey to our final destination which was Bloemspruit R.A.F Pilot training station near Bloemfontein in the Orange Free State, where we were to keep the 104 Miles Master aircraft flying day and night. A much better job than I had been doing since leaving Halton.

The railway journey from Durban to Bloemfontein lasted one whole day but can't say I remember anything at all about it, on arrival at 27 Air School about ten miles outside the city which is the capital of the Orange Free State we were shown to our barracks, decent brick buildings, single storey, with stable type split doors and the usual basic beds and lockers, but heaven after the ship. Food was so strange at first, lots of fruit most of which we had never seen or heard of and many different dishes made from maize, one like porridge called "mealie meal" served at breakfast I thought wasn't too bad but soon learnt that the natives ate it so South African whites wouldn't, beneath their dignity. We had a lot to learn about the South African white way of life, to see the native workers on the flight line covered in oil and grease as they did the dirty jobs and then watch them fishing in the bins where we emptied the left overs from our plates, made us recent arrivals very angry, but we were told not to interfere, we were guests in the country and our ways were not the right way to treat these "savages". If we offered them the "butts " left from our cigarettes they had to hold out both hands in case they had a knife in the other and would stab us, it did seem and still does to me that the white population went in fear of their lives and in many cases rightly so because they did treat the natives in a terrible way and at last the right thing has been done but the Dutch Boer has a lot to answer for. These Boers had an organisation based in the Orange Free State (think they

now call it The Free State) that went about blowing up power lines and post offices and was very pro German know the name but my spelling of it will be far from correct (Osiver Brantvag) told you it was all wrong!! I made a number of friends while stationed at Bloemfontein, the Florie family for one, they picked me up at the bus stop when I had missed it one night and gave me a lift back to camp, he was an accountant and she was after a bit of 'rough' not 18 and dim as a Toch H lamp didn't recognise the invitations handed out every time I stayed over night, frilly things always had been left on my bed by mistake, "I'll just put them away, do you like them?" was only one of the things and her husband I'm sure thought I was giving her one, would have done if I hadn't been so thick!! One night at their house they were having the usual meeting of the tennis club, very few blokes but lots of pretty young girls, suggested that they might like me to do some toast on the open fire for all of them, funny thing it wasn't some thing they had ever done, so there I sat toasting slice after slice and spreading each with lots of butter, calls for more coming all the time, the family cat came to see what I was doing and I just spoke to it calling it "Pussy", a deathly hush descended over the room and then a few stifled giggles and one of the chaps wanted to tell me some thing outside, pussy was the local name for that part of a girls body that men seem to want to get into so no more calling cats pussy.

Another person I got to know was Nabiha Masoud (think that's how to spell it) she and her large family were all from Lebanon and would you believe classed as coloured, which is only one degree above black and not to be mixed with, the Florie family would have nothing to do with her even though she had her own ladies hairdressing business and good at it, tried to get me not to see her or her family, but apart from "Dad" the rest of her folks were very nice to me and always had a place at their table for me, Dad thought things were serious so didn't want her getting involved with a Pom, we were in fact just good friends and perhaps I saw her just to say "up you" to the white population. There is a town called Margate down the coast from Durban and I did write to the Mayor who invited me to visit the town and be their guest, but never took up the offer. Dac Dacre was an ex Halton "Brat" like I was and we got on very well together, we arranged to take a leave together and as we could get a free railway pass decided to go to a place called Muizenburg this is a seaside holiday town on the shores of False Bay, we had booked into a YMCA hostel and spent our leave there but the train journey lasted all of two days and did get a bit boring after a while, miles and miles of very little followed but some more, had a look at Cape Town and little did we realise that not too many months would pass before we again found ourselves in the area, in fact in a transit camp between Muizenburg and Cape Town waiting to board ship back to England and flying over Germany as crews of bombers. My mother's father had a brother who had moved to South Africa many years before and I managed to find them in a small town called Krugersdorp near Johannesburg, they invited

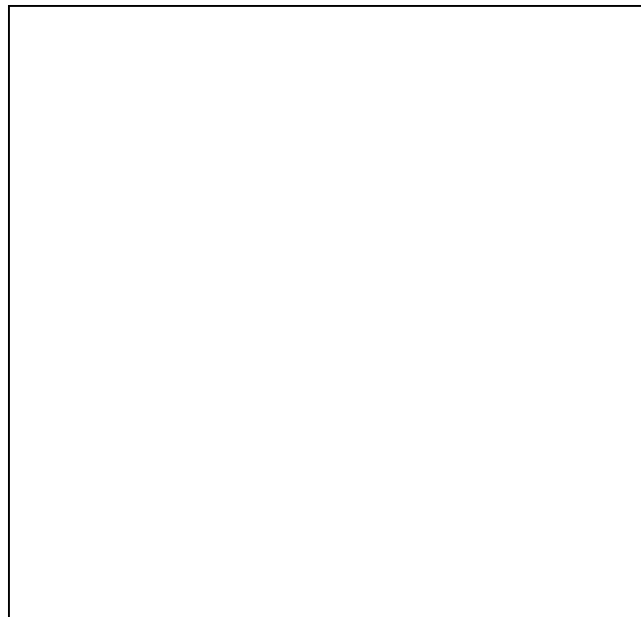
me to stay with them on one of my leaves so I took the offer up and spent two weeks with them. Very interesting for me as my uncle had a building firm and I went about to see how things were done, one of the sons was an inspector of mines and arranged for me to go down a gold mine and also see all the processes of getting gold from the ore.

There are two reefs bearing gold in that area, called north and south, can't remember which is which but one is very wide and is made up of very white quartz pebbles around which can be seen the glitter of gold flecks, the other reef is quite narrow and in places only inches wide but is very dark even black in colour and the gold can be seen quite easily as small nuggets. Both of these reefs go down into the ground at an angle so that new shafts are sunk to reach the reefs as they get deeper in the earth and further away from the original shaft, each new shaft being much deeper before it reaches the gold bearing ore. The very large heaps of brilliant white dust from the treatment plants can be seen for miles around Joh/burg and when the wind blows cause painful eyes and noses.

The mine I went down was very deep indeed and the lift travelled at such speed that one felt slightly air-borne as it descended the earth. The area at the bottom was huge and the passage ways leading off very large and well lit, as we moved away towards the mine face things got steadily hotter until we reached a place where a native was working a jack-hammer in a steeply sloping crack removing the small but very rich ore piece by piece, all jack-hammers also have a water pipe connected to prevent that miners curse of silicosis, so we had a very wet large black man working hard in a very narrow and hot space, he still was able to give me a big white toothy grin, but what he said I do not know, the noise of the hammer was terrible! After an hour or so of this we returned to the surface, glad of the fresh air and my shirt at least a chance to dry off from the high humidity underground. The first part we visited was the Stamp house, the noise here was unbelievable, row upon row of steel hammers pounding the ore as it slid beneath them washed down by streams of water, sheets of corduroy were used to catch any free gold after the stamps, these sheets were taken out periodically and burn to get the gold, the slurry then passed over copper sheets with mercury on them which also collected gold, not sure how or in which order this happened, it is a long time ago!! The slurry then entered very large tanks open at the top in which cyanide was dissolved in water (cyanide is a very deadly poison) the gold was dissolved by this mixture, this fluid was then pumped to a centrifuge where any remaining rock particles were extracted, the fluid which now looked like clean drinking water, but was far from it, was pumped again and ended up in mile long sheds which were full of troughs that contained hundreds of separate boxes filled with zinc shavings, as the liquid passed through the zinc the gold stuck to the zinc, and the next process melted the zinc shavings in a furnace which was then poured into an

inverted cone shaped mold, on cooling the cone was turned upside down, banged and out fell a very large cone of zinc with a small gold top, these gold knobs were cut off by hacksaw and tossed in one corner, when enough had been made, were themselves melted and poured into newspaper lined ingot moulds, lots of these bars of gold were stacked against the wall and I was invited to help myself if I could carry one away, tried but it flattened me to the floor and had to be lifted off me by the ever grinning black workers. The zinc was re-rolled into sheets and in one corner was being turned again into shavings on a very old lathe by the still grinning workers.

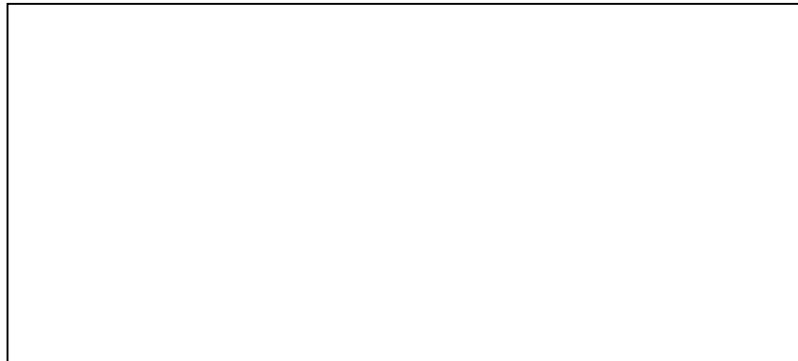
So far it would seem that all I did was visit and enjoy but this was a pilot training 'drome, flying went on 24 hours a day and our days were spent servicing the 104 Miles Master 'planes on the daily inspections. The Masters was made of wood and plywood, much like the Mosquito of later and much greater fame. The Miles Master was an advanced training aircraft that trained pilots in fast single engine 'plane management before they became operational on Hurricanes or Spitfires. Mark 1 Masters were fitted with Rolls Royce Kestrel engines (fore runner of the Merlin) some of these were even equipped as fighters with four Browning guns during the panic of 1940, Mark 2 Masters were fitted with Bristol Mercury Radial engines and Mark 3 Masters had Pratt and Whitney Junior Twin Wasps.



[Servicing Miles Master Trainers at 27 Air School](#)

With the many hours they were flown each day, some very hard landings and the general wear and tear of pupil pilot use they were becoming very hard to keep airworthy, even had one do a forced landing at a place called

Dewetsdorp which ended up on it's back. As I had spent some time in England salvaging Miles Masters I was in the gang that went to collect it, still have some photos of the job.



Miles Master Recovery

The salvage crew was led by Sergeant "Jock" Brown and was made up of members of the flight servicing crews at 27 A/S. A Queen Mary low loader was not available nor was a crane which made the task more difficult, sheer legs being used to lift, turn and load the 'plane. As far as I know the pilot did not die but would have needed to "duck" a lot from the amount of cockpit damage. As bad as the airplane was, great care was taken to salvage the 'plane without further doing further damage. This took a great deal of work, including some careful maneuvering over a narrow bridge on the way back.

104 American Harvards were flown in and my mate Dac and myself were given the job of checking these and making them airworthy for use, they had been shipped to Durban as deck cargo, and although sealed before loading, some had had their canopies opened by the ship's crew, salt water had entered and caused much damage, not only to things that could be seen but many radios had been ruined and props had been turned so that ports had opened, we found many that had damaged pistons on the con rods due to salt water no wonder the delivery pilots had complained that some were gutless and rattled a lot. I joined the Camp Concert Party and band, played the fool on the camp and Bloemfontein stage and played the trumpet very badly at camp dances, practiced like mad but still caused the lead trumpeter to shake his head in disgust.

Notices were on the boards for aircrew volunteers, Dac and I were a bit fed up with our treatment regarding promotion, we did the work and others got the credit, funny it's still the same fifty years later!! We put our names in and after various interviews were sent to Cape Town to await shipment back to England.

----- Reg Miles

The URL Of This Webpage is

<http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/Bunker/7797/Milesbio3.html>

Biography of Reg Miles

Ex Apprentice No 1 S.of T.T., R.A.F., Halton 39th Entry 34 - 67 M.U.s - 27 A/S
Bloemspruit South Africa - Lympe Kent, Flight Engineer 432 - 420 Squadrons RCAF,
6 Group Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Tholthorpe, Yorkshire / 242- 246 - 511
Squadrons Transport Command Lyneham, RAF

Chapter 4

Lympe, Kent, Flight Engineer 432 - 420 Squadrons RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Tholthorpe, Yorkshire

Unescorted fast ship Mauritania II brought us home in just two weeks. This was more like a holiday cruise, she was a large new fast ship, not over crowded, weather sunny, no real worries about the enemy, just too ignorant to have a care. And good food, all very pleasant !!

We came into port during the night, I suggest for security reasons. We would be confined below decks after dark so that no lights would be shone and any portholes on our decks would be welded shut. As we had no idea where we were it was only at dawn that we found ourselves suddenly in harbour.

We returned to a cold and rationed England, which was a bit of a shock after the land of plenty that was South Africa. I got to spend some time at home. Home was River outside Dover where Dad was responsible for building work for all the various Navy, Army and Airforce units stationed in and around the port of Dover.

After a couple of weeks I was posted to Lympne RAF Base near Folkstone in Kent, not too far away from home. I could cycle home on the odd day off. I was at a servicing echelon on Typhoons there from August 1943, making myself useful until the Flight Engineer course came through.

I arrived at this very basic airfield, grass runway, no hangar that I can recall, road to the village went through the place and we were living in requisitioned houses on the floor, the Guardhouse miles away so we never booked out or in, just went! There I was fit, brown, and fairly knowledgable, and there they were the service crews, lilly white, half starved, most hadn't a clue about the RAF. The CO wanted me to stay, rather than take the flight engineer course. He did everything to make me, even tried to bribe me with promotion and an instructors course, turned him down flat, not the best way to make friends!!

A few days later I watched as the flight sergeant in charge of the service crew was trying to unlock a propellor, up on the steps with a very, very large lead hammer and a long spanner thumping away to release the lock, told him it was the wrong rotation, what would I know ?, the engine shaft sheered off and prop and F/S landed on the ground, another job now to remove the whole Napier Sabre and fit a new one, suppose the F/S got promoted and probably blamed me!!

The Typhoons were very heavy fast fighters. They were fitted with Napier Sabre H section sleeve valved 24 cylinder engines, had 20mm cannon and rocket rails, and were hell to fly and worse to service. The engines were proto-types and only could do 20 hours or so between engine changes, never saw even one do that much while I was there, the single prop was the biggest in service and only cleared the ground when in flying position by 4 inches, many were bent on take off, and many came back from ops with bullet holes in as the 'plane went faster than the bullets' in a dive and caught up with it's own fire!!

When I was working on Typhoons heard many yarns, but all "driversairframe" are a bit like fisher men I think. While the story teller was giving the the usual flyers tale, with lots of arm waving indicating who did what, even the other pilots had a "I don't believe him" smile on their faces.

The Typh's were used as tank and train busters and also for downing V-1 Bombs and did a mighty job. Despite their success, some of the Typhoon pilots were very keen to improve the speed of the Typhoon so they could catch the enemy, be it pilotless V-1 Bombs, or piloted fighters. They were always wanting a few more miles an hour out of them and "if only the bloody thing went faster I would have shot down " probably the whole German Airforce!! Adjustments to the engines were very difficult because they were so complicated and really just prototypes still. So they spent many hours with car polish rubbing and polishing every bit to reduce drag. They got us to help also, big things Typh's and we got very tired of it. Guess they were like me, young and keen and a bit stupid as well, you'd have to be to risk life and limb for peanuts!!

Of course battle was not the only thing the pilots were keen on. The Typhoons were flown from a small grass runway. A sergeant's mess party was being held one evening when I was on duty crew, we had to see the "dusk" patrol in and prepare them for the "dawn" patrol, check everything and rearm and refuel and make sure every thing was as it should be. The small 'drome was crowded with visitors 'planes from surrounding units and many were parked at the ends of the runway, fog was closing in and the last few of the dusk patrol had been told to divert to Manston, which was a very large aerodrome fitted with FIDO, by air it was seconds away by road it was

too far to get a lift and still get to the party. All their mates would be there plus many of the local girls and if you didn't turn up some one else would try their luck with your girl!! All managed to get back in, just one left to land, and here he comes he's too low can't see the row of 'planes at the end of the runway.

Yes he has but too late the massive undergear crashes through about six aircraft of all types and sizes and comes to earth with one wing low, the prop touches, that one won't be on dawn patrol, as it taxis to our flight position where we are standing with torches to direct the pilot and hook the 'plane to our tractor and tow it into position for the morning, the pilot climbs out, says "shit" and heads off for a shower and no doubt a bullet from the CO and even grounding if senior officers have had their 'plane destroyed. We check the undergear to make sure it won't collapse as we tow it and generally check the damage, this takes a while and as we are doing this we hear the bell of the "blood wagon" in the distance, bit too late for any injuries we say so I lay on the ground with one leg in the air and groan as the medical orderly rushes over, but it's not the usual medical orderly it's the senior medical officer, who wants to make a name for himself as all the top brass are on the base for the party. Well we didn't part as friends I must say, but he really enjoyed chewing me out so perhaps that made his day!!

Arriving back at camp after a day with my parents, we slept in empty houses really outside the camp boundaries so no booking in or out, supposed to but why go a long way to the guard room if nobody cared, any how it was early in the morning, near midnight, not late at night as it should have been as I cycled to my billet, as I got off my bike the sergeant of my ground crew called for me to get moving and handed me a bucket of white paint. Our flight line was very close to our billet, and I was told to start painting wide white stripes under the wings of the Typhoons, other bods had black paint. So I crawled under them with buckets of white paint late at night in my best uniform. No idea where the Typhoons were off to, but we were told it was for identification purposes for an operation, but which one? It might have been coastal or near to it, and in support of either Commando's or Navy, both tended to fire at all aircraft without any idea who flew what!! But why do it in the middle of the night with far from clever painters with large distemper brushes and I'm sure it was water based paint? On 15 November 1943, 2nd Tactical Air Force is formed, perhaps the Squadron I was on was made part of this force and some "stay in bed get the boys out" prat thought it would be nice if the new force were correctly dressed for Dawn Patrol. Whatever the reason for the early morning paint job, my best uniform was never quite the same, every one else had on their overalls!

As it turns out this was the first time that this type of identification was used on allied aircraft, and I Did It!!! These black and white stripes were

called invasion stripes by others much later. They were widely in use for the Normandy invasion. They were painted to clearly show our ground forces that they were friendly aircraft so we would not lose aircraft to our own flak. Only the Tactical Air Force had the invasion stripes. Well before the invasion some aircraft were painted with the stripes to be used as Targets for spotters and Anti aircraft units and also for ground troops to get familiar with our own planes, as marked. Apparently this Typhoon squadron was one of those painted early to get our troops used to the stripes.

I was stationed at Lympne until the end of 1943 when my posting came through to report at St Athan in South Wales to start my Flight Engineers training. Because of my training at Halton and my service work on aircraft, my training would be specific to the type of bomber I would be doing my operations on, that was the plan anyhow.

It might be best to spend a moment reviewing the various RAF bombers. First there were the Medium Bombers. The Hampden, outdated before the war started so not used much - bit of a death trap so not to be included.

Bristol Blenheim private design as all decent ones are, Beaufort a torpedo version did lots of damage and raids on shipping in French ports, made the Germans angry. Beaufighter very fast version called "Whispering Death" also used as a night fighter with radar, all types with twin radial aircooled engines also by Bristol.

De Havilland Mosquito, best all round fighter, bomber etc of the war, just look up it's stats and learn ! 4000lb bomb load, faster than any thing until the jets arrived, 42600 ft ceiling, used by the Master Bombers, fitted with 4 cannon and even with a single 57mm cannon. Don't know what a Master bomber is ? They first used Lancasters, would circle the target at a low height during all of the raid, and direct the "Pathfinders" where to drop more target markers, all this done at night of course and we would be called up as "main force" and directed which colour markers to use as an aiming point, and woe betide you if you came in from the wrong direction or dropped anywhere but the correct place. we were usually at 18000 to 20000 ft and could see the Master Bomber back lit by the bursting bombs almost at ground level, a number of back ups would be at our height and when, not if, the master bomber was either hit by flak, or by a fighter or as was most likely had a load of bombs dropped on him, saw a Lancaster one time when we had to land away from base that had had a load of incendiaries land on it, not a pretty sight!! Master bomber two would have his own call sign and often with an accent to prevent the Germans from giving us the wrong information, cunning devils!!

Heavy bomber Wellington made by Vickers designed by Barnes Wallis (swing wing F1111, Dam busters bomb, and even the Avro York made from parts of the Lancaster) Twin engine geodetical construction,(all little bits joined together to make a net like effect, very strong) covered with fabric, front and rear turrets, two .303 Brownings in each 4,500 lb bomb load 300mph main stay of bombing until the large 4 engined bombers came along, still going strong at the end of the war, called The Wimpey by every one. very many versions from sea search with a lifeboat slung under, to mobile radar and radio station and I remember seeing one flying very low along the coast line with a large ring the size of it's wing span detecting and blowing up magnetic sea mines.

Short Stirling the first 4 engine one, slow. low and designed by the Air Ministry with short wings so that it would go into the standard hanger, typical stupid desk riders. My log book contains some hours spent as F/E on one, a pretty useless bomber and not to be in the same class as the Halifax and Lancaster.

The Manchester was first operational about the same time as the Halifax but as we all know was plagued by engine problems and was a "dead duck" until fitted with four Merlins, the Halifax was also supposed to get RR Vultures but because a shortage was expected was designed for four RR.

Handley Page Halifax 4 engined similar to the Lancaster never gets a mention much like the Hurricane is over shadowed by the Spitfire, but many thousands of them were flying and bombing Germany, while the Manchester was falling out of the sky with failing engines. Rolls Royce produced a 24 cylinder engine really based on two Merlins joined at the sump one upside down, it was only when the Manchester was modified to take four standard Merlins that it became the great aircraft it eventually did become. Both The Halifax and Lancaster had versions with Merlins and Hercules engines, the Halifax with Hercules was much better than the version with Merlins and the Lancaster was the reverse better with Merlins, More versions of the Lancaster were developed during the war and it's construction was easier than the Halifax, but the Halifax was much tougher and took more punishment before crashing, I trained on and flew them all as an F/E, just wanted to get down in one piece so all were good for me!! 6,176 Halifax were built, their first operational flight took place March 1941.

Both Lancasters and Halifax had 4 .303 Brownings in the rear power turret, mid upper had 2 but had a full 360 rotation and up and down. Some later versions of the Lancaster had twin .5 Brownings in the rear turret, both Halifax and Lancaster had versions with mid under turrets with twin Brownings.

The Lancaster did eventually drop 22,000 lb grand Slam bombs, called by some earthquake bombs as they were made of high quality steel typical bomb shape and were used to bomb things like bridges which are very hard to destroy, need a direct hit, these bombs penetrated deep into the earth and shattered the foundations so that the bridge or viaduct collapsed. 7,377 Lancasters were built, their first operational flight took place on 3/4 March 1942.

So I started my training on four engined Lancaster Mark 2 bombers which were in every respect the same as all Lancasters except for the engines which were Bristol Hercules 14 cylinder air cooled radial, all other Lancasters had four Rolls Royce 12 cylinder water cooled twin 6 cyl. vee Merlin engines. Lancasters were the outcome of a design called the Manchester which originally had twin Rolls Royce X engines 24 cylinder X, really two Merlins coupled at the sumps making a cross of four banks of six, these engines were a complete failure and before I went to South Africa in 1941 had worked on one of the Manchesters that had crash landed in a field due to engine failure. A.V Roe (Avro) knew they had a good aircraft and as The Royal Airforce refused to allow them any engines, so scrounged 4 Merlins from Rolls Royce on the "old pals network" and re worked the 'plane from two engines to four and demonstrated to the top brass what a good all round bomber they had, and so it proved to be in service, carrying heavier bombs farther and higher than any other 'plane at that time.

I studied the Lancaster and it's systems including the Hercules engines until I knew every part, hydraulic, air, auto pilot, bomb release gear, undercarriage, you name it I knew it and passed with ease my examinations, so much of what I had been studying was what I had been working on for a couple of years, different 'planes but basically the same in principle. St Athan is a very old and well known R.A.F. Station the R 101 and R100 airships were built there and a "ring " of one of them is fitted to the wall of the huge hanger they were built in, which still stood when I was there, anyone interested in these airships should get "Slide Rule" written by Neville Shute and learn some very interesting facts about these two airships, Neville Shute was an aircraft engineer and any of his fiction books are a good read, perhaps his most well known book was the basis for the film "A Town Like Alice".

After passing out from the F/E course I was given a short leave and in March 1944 told to report to 1664 Heavy Conversion Unit at Dishforth in Yorkshire and it was there that I joined up with the rest of the crew who had until that time been flying twin engined aircraft. What aircraft did I see on the runway when I got there? Halifax Mark 2s and 5s different 'planes and different engines so I had to start all over again on systems and bits!!!

11.3.44, I had to do some initial training to see if I could handle things actually in the air, so it was circuits and landings with a senior Flight Engineer to see how I went. Well we took off OK and did a circuit and came straight into land again, with me operating the various undercarriage and flaps etc as the pilot asked and all was going well round and round until the bumpy air and round and round got to me and I felt as sick as a dog after about an hour and asked the F/E if we could pack it up. He looked at me and said if you give in now you are off the course and can go back to your unit, well funny thing I suddenly felt better and got on with the rest of the job for another hour, after that I was always too busy to feel sick.

I have a log book of my time flying, and I include here the information in it from the flights I made as a crew member, rather than as a passenger.

This began here, with the 1664 HCU, 1664 Heavy Conversion Unit, which means it was a heavy conversion unit from 2 to 4 engine aircraft.

Some of the terms on the Log Book shall require explaining. The Lat and Long at the top I have added recently when I bought MS World Atlas and was able to pin point the airfield locations. You will note the first column is the date to help you follow the sequence. This log book records all my flying both training, operational and at Transport Command. C&Ls circuits and landings very boring and mainly for the pilot and engineer to frighten them as much as possible, D.C.O. duty carried out D.N.C.O Duty Not carried out. P.O Lauzon was my first operational pilot, others mentioned on this first page and perhaps elsewhere were senior pilots who had done at least one tour of operations and were being rested before doing another tour of at least 30, all were very much more frightened of the 'sprog' pilot than of anything the Boche could throw at them!! PO is Pilot Officer and is really a rank to ensure that the person will not put up any 'blacks' and behave like an officer and a gentleman, probationary period usually 6months. FO is not Flight Officer which is a female rank in the WAAF but Flying Officer. 25th Feb 1:32 E Easy was the aircraft that we normally flew when I was with 420 Sqdn, V Victor was our designated 'plane when with 432 Sqdn , but as we were very new got what was available due to sevicability problems. Will get to each one as I go through my log book, which will be about 30 pages.

Pilot Officer Lauzon asked if I would like to join his crew. The rest were already joined as a crew, I was the last one to join being an RAF Flight Engineer, they needed me to shovel in the coal and to keep the boiler steaming!! As I knew nobody on the course happily agreed, soon realised that all crews belonged to The Royal Canadian Airforce so I had joined a bunch of people who I had no idea of their country or life style, some thing else to study, I was going to be a busy boy! The rest had trained on twin engine aircraft of some sort in Canada and were now ready for the big time.

We were all very young with different back grounds and likes and dislikes, remember I was with the Canadians who were used to a much higher living standard, more independent than us down trodden POMS (from the Australian prisoners of His Majesty, convicts) So where they had quite a lot of money we did not, all the same Yanky pay, and the food parcels poured in from their families in Canada, when we had leave they went to certain places arranged for them or hit the "big smoke" and found some one to enjoy their pay with, I went home to a shell and bombed Dover, first thing Mum wanted was my ration book so she could feed me, one of my father's sub contractors always called at our house soon after I got home and from the inside of his very dirty overalls gave me a Black Market parcel of butter, cheese and bacon. My crew always made sure I had some of their surplus food to take home, sugar and jam etc. I could not invite them to stay at my house, one reason was there was no room and another was that I had to have a special pass to even leave the railway station near home even though the local cop on duty knew me. The whole south coast was a restricted area all roads in were manned and high fences were all around so no use trying the fields, took one of my girl friends once, was only allowed to stay 12 hours and had to either send her back to London or both go somewhere else, went somewhere else!! My parents not too pleased but I was on a promise and determined to find out if it was as good as everyone was telling me, yes it was !

After being introduced to the rest of the gang, I got down to serious study learning about fuel systems, tank positions and the fuel transfer arrangements that allowed one tank to supply all engines and many complications of this, very necessary if flack makes a hole in a fuel tank, need to use that one up first and tanks have to be balanced for the same reason during operations, loose a full tank and you wont have enough fuel to get back home again!! Engine controls are important too, boost and rpm govern the fuel consumption, and which supercharger gear ratio being used is also very critical.

A very brief explanation of boost, revs and supercharger gearing. Boost is the measure of pressure, plus or minus of the air in the induction system of an engine. When a piston sucks in air it increase it's speed and therefore lowers it's pressure below atmospheric pressure at ground level (14lbs per square inch roughly) The more weight of air that can be crammed into a cylinder before it is fired the more power is produced. Hence turbo chargers and super chargers, turbo's are driven by the exhaust gases, superchargers by gearing direct from the engine, as the aircraft flies higher the air gets less dense, and the power from the engine becomes less, turbo's and supers pump more air in so that power is maintained, use at ground level increases the power from a given capacity of engine cylinders, an engine without a charger would always show a minus reading on the boost pressure gauge.

The setting of the throttle (accelerator) governs the boost pressure coupled with the turbo or super charger speed setting, the two work together and the setting is done by the pilot or engineer for the conditions at the time (climbing, cruising, etc) components that are a part of the system automatically retain this boost pressure until either a height is reached where the air is so thin that it cannot do so, or changes are made to flight conditions. Revs are the speed at which the propellers go round and relate somewhat to the gearbox of a car, selection of speed is made and automatically kept at that speed by a unit on the engine and one in the propeller itself, bit like an automatic gear box on a car, changing conditions of flight such as taking off and landing require different propeller speeds and reaction to the flight conditions, feathering which rotates the blades so that they do not "windmill" in the event of an engine failure are also incorporated. Guess it's not so simple after all and I used to teach this but had the advantage of being able to flap my arms about!!!

My first flight with P/O Lauzon was on March 16, 1944 and was Exercise 7&8 in my log book. Exercise 7&8 I have no idea but only took about one and a half hours so not very important I should say.

Our next exercise was the next day, the 17th, and was Local Bombing. This was a training exercise for the crew but mainly for the bomb aimer and pilot to get their co-ordination working together so that the target is hit. Small practice bombs used but sometimes larger ones full of concrete may be dropped.

The next night I was up with another pilot, Fry, for Circuits and Landing exercises again. More night training.

The next morning I was called to fly with yet another pilot, Vinish, for a Sea Search. VINISH is correct, think I wrote "finish" and got a sharp reminder! Sea Search was a very serious matter that was to see us spend all those hours searching a particular part of the ocean with other crews looking for a downed 'plane, a hell of a strain on the eyes, the sun shining on the moving waves makes it very hard to see anything properly so things are reported that are not there and other things missed, and no we did not see anything.

You will note that I took off at 10:15 am flew for nearly six hours and then took off again the same day with a different pilot at 20:20 being tested on night C&Ls for about 4.30 hrs and that is only the time in the air, lots goes on before and after!!

Then it was back to P/O Lauzon for two flights in one day, the 20th. Two and a half hours of Local Bombing in the morning then a six and a half hour Night Cross Country exercise.

Apart from actually flying and being checked by a senior Flight Engineer to find out if I could do my job properly, our navigator had to give me instruction on star charts, which star was where and how to use the sextant to take star shots while flying to help in navigation, the F/E position was beneath the astro-dome and it was another of his jobs to do star shots if and when the navigator needed them, the correct star had to be found and a timed shot taken to give an average reading, the wrong star could make life difficult and I can tell you with the 'plane bumping about, nasty people trying to shoot you down didn't make finding the right star in amongst the millions out there easy.

During this course we also had to take instruction in escape technic's both from the aircraft and the enemy, we went to a swimming pool and in full flying gear jumped in the water and tried to turn over an up turned dingy we managed, but could not see it being possible at night in a rough cold North Sea, we all treated it as a bit of a laugh, young and foolish in hind sight.

Our next flight, on the 24th March 1944 at 18:45, our crew did it's first night operation over France as a diversionary raid to fool the Germans into sending fighters up to intercept what appeared a bomber force approaching targets in their country. This Bullseye Mission was a number of training aircraft that were sent in a direction different than the proper bombers, hoping this would direct enemy fighters away from the real bombers. This diversionary raid turned back before any target was reached and hopefully before any of the inexperienced crews were shot down!! The 1/3 shown on the log was a third of a point awarded towards the total of thirty points needed for a complete tour of operations. "Bullseyes" only counted as one third of an operation. The mission was six long hours wandering about over enemy territory before landing back at base with eyes very sore with looking for enemy fighters that never appeared.

Another course we had to attend was escape after being shot down, this was carried out by senior NCO's of the Army at a special camp on the Yorkshire Moors, a cold and bleak place, with our instructors determined to show those "Brylcreem boys" what tough meant, we were marched and run about all day, all ranks, some quite senior officers going back on operations for their third tour, were made to wear overalls at all times with no badges of rank and shouted at as if we were new recruits in the Army. Escape training was carried out at night without any warning, doors were slammed no lights put on and we had to get into our overalls and get outside, loaded

into trucks half asleep, and driven out on to the moors, dropped off in twos with a map, not told where we were and left to find our own way back to camp, the local police, army and the courses just finishing came out looking for us and if found we were arrested and held in jail until sent back to camp. The Canadians were very much anti authority, (much like the Australians I now live with) so nothing was sacred, buses were found in back yards and driven near to camp with lots of aircrew hidden under seats, some stayed out for days being fed and "watered" by lonely wives whose husbands were in the Forces, and said they had got lost and were tired and hungry, some did look as if they had been working very hard and needed a rest. This was our last training in the Heavy Conversion Course.

The fact that this was our last flight was a coincidence. Bulls Eye was not a graduation ceremony. If one was wanted by the higher ups and you had reached a level of training able to do it you went, the needs of the service were what governed what and where you went.

I had completed training and was graded on my performance in the course. Exam result is 73.5% That was based on my flying with instructors and theory of the aircraft systems at HCU 1664, not wonderful but remember I did do a theory and practice course just prior to arriving at HCU on the Lancaster Mark II, different 'plane with entirely different engines, so apart from crewing up with a bunch of wild Canadians, I had less than two weeks to learn all about a new 'plane and its engines, not bad for yours truly. The results of my examination were signed officially by the Flight Engineer Flight Leader, a flight of men can be any number that can be controlled or over seen, a flight of aircraft also can be any number that is suitable for the type, 3 bombers being usual, more for fighters, a number of flights make a squadron, a number of squadrons make a wing, a number of wings make a Group and a number of groups make a command as in Bomber Command. Got all that ? So the Flight Leader responsible for a number of Flight Engineers under training, signed to say that I had reached a standard whereby I could be expected to do my job properly. All trades of air crew had Flight Leaders, Navigator, Gunners, Wireless operator, Bomb aimer, and lets not forget the driver Leader for the Drivers airplane!!

This all ended in due course and our crew were given a posting to 432 Sqn RCAF at Eastmoor who were equipped with Halifax Mark 3, same engines as Lancaster 2s and a much better version of the Halifax's at Dishforth, so all that study had paid off in the end!! My flying time with Squadron 432 are covered in those pages of my Log.

The RCAF was called 6 Group part of Bomber Command, most airfields had two Squadrons based on it, each was controlled by its own staff and did not always fly to the same targets nor even on the same days or nights.

Usually the same nation were located at each base, so you had two Canadian Squadrons where I was, 420 and 425 at Tholthorpe as an example with my next unit. I just can't remember which squadron was at Eastmoor with 432, the Lancaster book I mentioned before gives all the squadrons and I will just look to see which Squadron was at Eastmoor with 432 when they were with Lancasters. Doesn't help, my book shows an HCU at the same base but that was to convert 432 from Wellingtons I think on to Lancaster II, they then changed to Halifax III just before I joined, need the same sort of book for the Halifax which I don't have and maybe no one has! To continue both these squadrons, and 432 as well, were part of 6 Group. Each squadron was divided into flights the number I cannot remember nor can I recall how many 'planes in each flight. I would recommend to you that you beg borrow, steal or even in extreme circumstances purchase a book called The Lancaster Story by Peter Jacobs it is distributed in the USA by Sterling Publishing CO Inc 387 Park Avenue South, New York it's ISBN is 1 85409 288 8 it is a very fine book and gives much detail of the history and operational types of Lancasters I was given the book by one of Phyllis's brothers and treasure it greatly.

We flew out of Eastmoor airfield. The airfields were just that, fields, hangars and other buildings had been erected, but I visited some many many years later and just the concrete runway was still there most had been removed for scrap and given back to the farmers, local drag car clubs still use some of them and guess those farmer with 'planes of their own could land and take off on them. Although I do not recall the details of Eastmoor, I have read that the Standard Airfield design for heavy bombers was to have a main runway 2000yds, and two secondary runways at about 60 degrees to one another of 1400 yds.

A fence had been erected around the perimeter and RAF Police patrolled this to keep strangers out, but guess if you really wanted in it would have been easy, gun positions were manned by RAF Regiment people with mainly light guns and fixed posts with bofors. The local towns were in the main villages, been there for centuries still using the roads that the Romans built, a village hall, for all the functions so a trip to one on a dance night would see all the lonely ladies out in force and us being the local best thing since sliced bread were over whelmed with attention, take your pick and hope her husband is not near!!!

Two crews slept in each nissen hut so no need to shout for quiet more like a moan about someones socks which were "humming", don't ever remember noise being a problem, none of us played craps or other gambling games like the Americans, guess compared to them our lives were a bit like "The vicar's tea party"! There were no other 'normal working hours' type people in our huts so no problem.

Life on the Bases 432 and 420 was the usual things. We played horse shoes, pool. I even had to have lessons from the wireless operator on the morse code and key. Buses were laid on to the local villages for the dances which were not all that popular, not too many lovely ladies there!! The odd trip into York but much the same old thing into the pub a few beers and away before the usual fights started between the armies of the Allies. Only those that had not fought anywhere had to prove how wonderful they were, just idiots, bit like the rubbish on earth today. nuf said!!

We didn't have any "hours " as such when bomber crews, we were expected to be available 24 hours a day , but if "stood down" officially for a number of hours usually until next morning could go out of camp and be back in by 23.59, the usual time for late return from a night on the town.

Station Orders were posted on the various notice boards which would give times of lectures , and other places we had to be , one such was the visit to our camp by the Prime Minister of Canada , we had to line up to be inspected , not a bull parade more like a casual couple of lines of airmen of all ranks chatting away until he got near and spoke to some one , unfortunately the first three or four he spoke to and asked "Where are you from in Canada" were all RAF and not RCAF so when he got London , Yorkshire etc was a bit puzzled, one of the officers took him by the elbow and steered him in the right direction. We all wore RCAF brevets for our aircrew trade so not easy for him to know who was who, on my squadron only the Flight Engineers were RAF the rest all Canadians. The Canadians had a saying that I have just remembered, "Joe for King, home by Christmas" Joe was Stalin and King was the name of the Canadian Prime Minister.

So to recap, we were pretty free to do as we wished most of the time, and I like most others only read any notice board if we thought we were getting promoted, and left all that stuff to our pilot, who knew before we did when and where we were flying etc. That is why I got in such a muddle over my Officer's interview, mentioned elsewhere I think you will find, just never bothered to read the notice boards!!!

Our missions were at first all night operations. As such I shall have to educate you about night and day in England , Winter starts about October / November and goes on until February/ March, some visitors swear it never stops and is winter all year, but the important thing is that in these northern climes daylight ends very early and starts late so a man working a normal day starting at 8am and finishing 4-5 pm will always travel in pitch darkness to and from work . Taking off in darkness at 18.00 hours is no different from taking off even later. Darkness from say 7pm to 7am is 12 hours and we did not have bombers that could last that long and where would they have

bombed anyhow? Hope that helps, just to take a random look in the log book 6-10-44 15.45 take off to Dortmund all listed as night flying. Remember England is not too far from the Arctic Circle where 6 months of days and the 6 months of nights happens all the time!! At times we would land fairly early in the evening, but for another random look 15.9.44 22.00 to Keil 5.35 meant we got back to base about 3.30 am debriefing meal etc bed by about 5am, no early night that one.

If there had been a large night force out on a target say a 1000 bomber raid not every plane was at the target at the same time, enough problems spread out, guess it would have been chaos otherwise so a raid would start soon after dark and continue until close on dawn when the day bombers took over.

April fools day found me acting as F/E to our Flight leader, Flight Lt. Cooper, doing circuits and landings at night for more than two hours to again check my skills, followed a few days later on the 4th with the whole crew doing the same thing. We passed this ok so now had to do a daylight cross-country to make sure we could go and come back!! The next day, the 8th, we did another "Bullseye", this one 3 hours 35 minutes long, but were told they didn't count towards points for a tour!

On the squadron you only got points for what you did operationally. While I am talking about a TOUR, it was not a walk in the sun eyeing up the Canadian WAAFs, all who were very pretty and carried about a ton of makeup on their faces, my Canadian crew thought it wonderful, I thought they looked like a bunch of clowns Heh Ho. A TOUR was a certain number of operations 30 being the average but based on targets and what the service wanted so some did more and some did less I did 36, wanted to do more so that my crew could finish with the same F/E, as I had done some ops before joining them, I didn't say anything to my Flight Engineer Leader but when he found out I had done more than I should have, he stopped me and sent me to get my new uniform as an officer!!! But that was yet to come of course.

On April 10th we flew our first operation, to Ghent, Belgium. The ops to Ghent was in all probability a German ammunition dump, a guess.

The raid is on so after a quick trip to the mess hall for a preflight meal it's back to the barracks to put on my flight gear which is really only to dispense with the collar and tie, pull on the very large white woollen rollneck sweater under my normal working uniform top, pull on my flying boots and zip them up (keep hoping that the latest ones will be issued to us, these are impossible to walk in, made of foam and suede with long uppers lined inside with sheep skin, they certainly keep the feet and legs warm but after a few

uses tend to lose their shape and "become down at heel" the latest ones are made from black leather as proper shoes and the leg portion can be removed by cutting the top off with the small knife hidden inside, more suitable for aircrew to walk away from the enemy after bailing out.

Down to the parachute section with the rest of the crew and draw my chest type chute and harness. On one operation we were told that ALL squadron parachutes had been repacked, a rumour had been circulating that a chute had had its rip cord pulled by mistake and all that fell out was an old blanket !! Parachute silk was much sought after during the war to make the "gift wrapping" that men looked for when their girls took their outer clothes off. We always poked a finger into the corner of the case to feel if there was silk (nylon?) inside.

Time to board the truck to take us out to the aircraft, as we called at each dispersal point calls of "race you back" and some not quite so pleasant were made to those climbing out, at last we were at our plane, tumble out and grab our bits and bobs, I had in addition to my chute and harness a tool bag with a few spanners, pliers, bits of useful wire, string etc, others had large bags with the navigation and wireless bumf, and the tail gunner probably had a brick or lump of old iron.

We all climbed aboard to put our things in a position we could grab them if needed, my chute went on the floor in my position, as did my tool box, then I fitted my chute harness on making sure it was tight and properly fastened. down to the tail to remove the elevator lock and start doing my normal checks before we started the four engines, I had an aircraft log sheet to fill in, with what fuel was in which tank, and as soon as we started engines, all their details must be entered., by this time we had all settled in and a quick call was made to check that all intercom positions answered.

Halifax crew positions were spread throughout the aircraft. The bomb aimer's position was in the nose where he map read if possible our mark of Halifax had no nose gun, it was found that fighters did not attack head on at night, various design changes took place during the war as needed so some had nose guns and some not. Then there was a blackout curtain, behind which was the navigator, then the wireless operator, all these at a lower level than the pilot, wop more or less under the pilot's feet, up a bit the Pilot and behind him the Flight Engineer, who darted about as required. Then there was the mid upper turret and then tail turret. The Halifax had bomb bays in the fuselage behind the f/e position but beneath the floor but could be got at through panels if needed in the case of a hang up, also bomb bays were situated in the wings between the inboard engines and fuselage.

In the cockpit where the pilot was were all the throttles, under carriage and flap controls, and the usual flying instruments. My position was also in the cockpit, where I would access the various controls and dials needed to keep the plane flying properly. Only on very rare occasions did I have to help my pilots and that was if we had lost an engine and then only on landing. Once when a tyre burst as we touched down did he want a bit of muscle to keep it straight other than that managed without what seemed any effort. The Halifax position for the flight engineer was right behind the pilot, with my instruments, fuel, oil, water pressures and temps etc on a rear partition, levers etc to change fuel tanks was either side just behind the main wing spar. I had no resting place, no chair, so what I was only the engineer!! If a crash landing was going to be done all the crew except the pilot could make themselves a safe spot by clinging together behind the main wing spar, so that was no worry, in a crash I would be as well off as the rest.

I was able to stand upright at my F/E position, and also when I assisted the pilot, think I could stand upright at the mid upper gunner's position but needed to bend my back as I got near the tail, The inside was not painted as such, but from memory was a dark green in colour, probably the anti corrosion coating applied to Duralumin, Alclad, and Aluminium sheets used to fabricate the 'planes. The step up to my F/E position was about 9 inches, underneath was stored the oxygen supply for the whole aircraft, but I could still stand erect with my whole 68 and bit inches of height (the bit is much more important than the preceding 68 for those of us who are in a neat and compact package) I was able to turn round with relative ease, the space being sufficient for my needs, no windows of any kind apart from the roof astro-dome, the cockpit did have sliding windows both sides as well as a windscreen which was a great help to us, to see our way!!!, Both wireless operator and navigator had windows (non opening) complete with blinds for night work, there was also a large curtain between these positions and the bomb aimers nose, which was completely made of perspex in the Mark III version I flew in on operations, as far as I can remember we could all stand upright in the nose section where the nav and wop had seats with tables for their equipment. far from being cramped we all had as much room as we would require, not enough to hold a dance or even a large party but we could all move about with relative ease and reach anything needed to do our job. The fuselage looking back from my position which was just forward of the main spar, was really empty except for the mid upper gunner's position, his lower body and feet only projected down about half way, with room to pass either side of him, we didn't have the open side gun positions used in the Forts.

During this time we had gradually crept up to the runway threshold and were now awaiting the green from the Aldis lamp, I had left my position to stand next to my pilot at the top of the steps leading down to the wop,

nav, and bomb positions, ready to hold the throttles open as we charged down the runway and to assist in any way wanted, I had already told the skipper that all engines were running Ok and so we set forth to battle.

The tail came up and we reached our "unstick speed" (whatever that was !!) the whole aircraft was shuddering with the effort of leaving the ground, a few skips off the concrete and we were airborne, time to take a breath, it had stopped completely as the trees bordering the 'drome had got closer and closer, we once arrived back with bits of branches still caught in the undergear, and a failure of only one engine at that time with a full bomb and fuel load meant the end. Up with the undercarriage reduce the flap angle and set the throttles for climbing, synchronise the propellers, fill in the log book, reduce again the flap angle, check engine temps and pressures, change gills to get the temps right, stepping in and out and up to the pilot to do as he wanted, breathing heavily into the oxygen mask, which always smelt of rubber and rust and wet with condensation. I had to keep mine on to receive instructions from the skipper but most of the other crew could leave theirs unfastened until we climbed higher and went on to oxygen.

Back into my cubby hole, standing looking up out of the astro dome to see if we were in danger of climbing into some one else, all clear, down to the top of the steps to pile up the window and pamphlets that I would start to put down the chute later on, check all the engine details again, at every change of engine revs and at a regular period (think it was 15 minutes but not sure) the log had to be filled in, a cardboard rotary calculator was used to work out what fuel had been used at certain revs and boost to check what fuel was left in each tank, the gauges were only a very rough guide!!

Not exactly a "Jack in the box" but I always took my job seriously and did all I could to ensure my side of things ran like clockwork, no guesses keep checking and worrying until home again safe and sound.

We had arrived at the altitude we were to fly at and engine revs and boost were reset, oxygen had been switched on at about the same time high speed had been selected on the supercharger for each engine, about 11,000 to 12,000 ft

The navigator would tell the skipper at what time and which compass bearing he should be on to set course not for the target but the first of the course changes, and so with the constant roar of four engines, our little world of icy cold draughts, a lethal cargo, shuddering rocking in the streams of air from those in front, with many staring eyes looking for any others who might be near us in the black sky, seven young men went about their duty as they saw it.

It was cold, it was apparently dangerous, if you worried about not getting back you probably wouldn't, those that were frightened all the time were the real heroes, most of us just did it and were glad to be doing something to save our civilisation, not that we ever knew just how bad things were or what a terrible bunch the leaders of the enemy were.

Yes I was a bit frightened on our first operation, but the ones that I always felt sorry for were the gunners. The pilot and engineer could see what was happening but were also very busy not only with flying the plane, but I had to record all the engine and fuel tank details plus other odds and sods. The navigator and wireless operator were shut up in their places with little to see from a small window and were themselves busy with their bits and bobs. The bomb aimer was in all probability stretched out full length looking at the sights below waiting to do his bit and telling us what he could see to help us avoid others and ensure we got where we were supposed to go. But the gunners isolated in their turrets had only themselves to talk to and fear can become a self promoting thing. Being busy kept me from being too frightened to do my job properly, and I can honestly say that I never really felt fear just a bit of apprehension on some operations, but more of that later.

There was no way to tell if we hit the target, not unless we were told so later. Most times, as here, we were not the first on target, it was all organised on "waves" so the thing was usually well alight or just a ploughed field by the time we got there. What we added to this was difficult to say or see from our altitude. The bomb aimer would see all the ground targets and perhaps what happened when the bombs landed. I was busy with my jobs and searching the sky above to help the gunners, didn't really see a great deal. Sorry I am not able to give you a graffic picture of bombs falling and targets blowing up, Hollywood might but they live in a dream world anyhow!!

When we returned from our first operation, we were told the mission was only worth one third of a point!

We did not fly again for a week and then only flew a cross country exercise. On the 18th we flew an op to Paris. Ah Paris !!! Do you really think it was lit up???? All we saw were the flashes of bombs going off and the crash and flash of anti aircraft shells trying to get us. Every target we went to sent up flak, the Germans seemed to really hate us I wonder why? Until we started daylight operations we only saw what was lit up by our bombs and must say we didn't hang about looking at the sights.

A five hour mission. How can it take five hours to fly to Paris you ask? The time taken to get to a target does not indicate how far it was, to confuse

the enemy bomber tracks were deliberately set out as if a certain target were that night's one when in actual fact we went elsewhere so the navigator did not have a period of nothing to do but was always calculating when and where to turn onto the next part of the course, gaining or losing time if necessary to arrive on target at the correct time, and checking on drift from winds not as per listed, and adding anything in his log that was of use to others, such as new flak sites. We never flew directly to any target nor flew home the same way, always many twists and turns to fool the enemy, those that chose the easy way home often didn't get there, we followed the plan as set out by our squadron commanders, in our case it worked !!

Again, only one third of a point for some reason. Two nights later, on the 20th, we went to Lens, Belgium on an operation for which we were given one third of a point again!! I can't seem to remember any reaction to this grudging point system, good boys did as we were told!! Funny thing is that most of us never really worried about reaching the end of a tour, the mateship of the crew was much more important, ie just look at my and others search for old mates we flew with, can't afford in most cases to get really together but nice to hold hands at a distance!!

On 22 April 1944 we went to the Ruhr Valley, known by all bomber crews as Happy Valley, solid flack from end to end.

Flak was present not just over the target of course. There were flak sites all about, and even flak ships. flak ships were in fact ships moored off the Enemy coast and were very bad medicine for anyone foolish enough to fly over them, guess being cooped up in a ship and sea sick some of the time made the crew mad as they were very accurate and fast with reloading. Flak ships were well documented and only the crews with poor navigators or 'planes in trouble ever went near them, we saw but kept well away!!

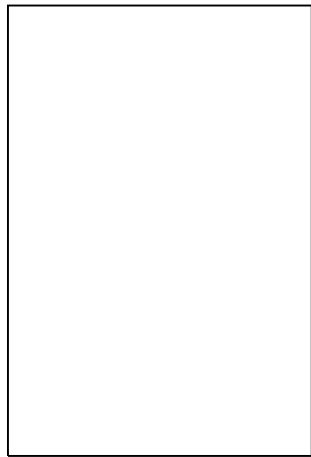
A slight shuffle off course, there were many flak towers of our own situated in the Thames estuary which were just as lethal as the ships, some years after the war and many years from now took one of my boys out to one in the first runabout I built, pretty massive things and I took a couple of photos to prove we had been there, our boating friends all turned back halfway and chickened out!!

Back to Happy Valley, the flak was heavy. Dusseldorf was a very serious affair, bits of red hot flak flew about inside the 'plane as the shells burst, our navigator got hit but fortunately right on the torch in his May West (flotation vest), made him grunt a bit but he was Ok to get us home again. I had to check all manner of bits that got damaged, seem to remember the fuel control levers, about ten of them got damaged and it was a nightmare of a lottery which bit of frayed wire controlled which tank, but guess I must have

done the right thing because we got home!! Just remember all this is being done in more or less pitch black darkness with the "driver " dodging flak bursts and weaving about for the gunners, none of it calculated to appeal to the faint hearted!! But I wanted to get home as well and could have been on a promise from my latest girl friend, what more incentive could a guy have? Over Dusseldorf we were hit by flack. We returned safely. This was a full point towards our 30 needed.

On the 24th Karlsruhe was the target, and Essen on the 26th, back to France on the 27th to Montzen one whole point for this one, but on the 30th again over France to Somain and back to 1/3 point no idea why.

My log book for April lists 40.15 hrs operational, total 56.05. It is signed by Squadron Leader (rank above Flight Lieutenant shown as F/L and S/L) Officer Commanding (OC) "B" Flight This Officer was in overall control of all LEADERS for that flight of a number of aircraft and men to fly them, The ranks when I was in the RAF were Pilot officer, Flying Officer, Flight Lieutenant, Squadron Leader, Wing Commander, Group Captain, won't bother with the rest, but the rank did not signal the position held visa vi aircraft operations as these ranks applied also to medical, religious, cook house and all other branches concerned with the RAF so a clerk could be a Squadron Leader if an officer, got it? BUT no non- flying type ever got to be incharge of operational people, want a riot do you? Unless you had pilot's wings, very few other crew members ever made it to high rank, had to be a "driver" to get to the top. and so it should be I say!! Driver a term used by non drivers to put them in their place at times of getting above themselves, like chatting up your girl or not standing their round at the bar!!



[F/E Reg Miles](#)

May started with an air to air fighter affil. A Fighter Affil was us in a Halifax or Lancaster bombers in daylight practicing avoiding a fighter and a fighter doing the same to us, or should I say trying to shoot us down (in

theory we hope) camera guns used, good fun if you like sick making dives and climbs, as Flight Engineer the only one of the crew in constant free fall, all others belted in and the pilot having a real fun time as he tries to make the slow bomber do things never designed for it!! Hope that tells you what fighter affil was, never tried it at night guess not too many would land again in one piece, with 19-20 year old boys doing wheelies in the sky with permission of the 24-25 year old bosses!! But this one we didn't finish due to the weather. Heavy cloud moved in and the exercise was D.N.C.O duty not carried out! My Log book will show by each notation D.C.O. or D.N.C.O. DCO is Duty Carried Out, DNCO has a not in it!!!

In fact May was a bad month only two ops. The first was to France at Le Clipon. I note that on the night of the 19.5.44 ops Le Clipon that there is a small red note 15x500 could be what bombs we took!! The second mission in May was to France as well, to Mont Couple for a grand total for the month of 2/3 of a point. Most of the time was spent night flying about England doing more training.

A recent TV show about drugs, reminds me of something during my service, which many people may not know happened. On at least two occasions we were drugged!! Not too sure which ones it was but, you see we weren't ever told what was being planned or cancelled, just called up to do a raid. Once we were pulled out of bed to do a raid and given pills to keep us awake, the raid was then cancelled after we had climbed aboard our 'planes, we were then given more pills to make us sleep. No idea what the pills were or even if they worked !!!

The second of June started much as May with an op to Neufchatel in France for another one third point, and on the 12th six days after D Day, Les Lauzon and I were marshalling V Victor from our dispersal to the main runway, as I unlocked the elevators by pulling out the large pin something slipped and my hand was trapped and very badly cut, I had to be taken to the hospital, sewn up, bandaged and my arm put in a sling. No possibility of my going on the op so a spare F/E was called up in my place.

Later that night after some pain killers and a rest I heard the 432 'planes returning and went down to the Ops room where all returning crews had to call in and give our statement of events, what we saw, if we could give any details of aircraft shot down, and all the details that would help to decide if the target had been hit. When the Station Adjutant saw me he had a fit, my mother had just been sent a telegram to say I was missing on operations, my crew had been shot down and would not be returning.

This was a great shock to me. It would also be a shock to my parents. and as it was now just after 8 o'clock in the morning knew that my

Dad would be at work in his office on the docks at Dover, gave the Adjutant the number and was put through in record time, told Dad I was ok and would explain the details when I saw him.

Each crew shared a nissen hut with another crew, not a happy situation when the other crew went missing, but the padre or one of his staff quickly gathered all the stuff up and it was sorted out by one of the squadron officers to send to the parents, anything not nice was removed. I was lucky my stuff was not sent before I managed to let them know I was still on camp!!

Nothing for me to do on the base so home I went on the next train from York to Dover. Trains, now that is something that you should all enjoy, no Air Raid Wardens, the guard just turned off all lights when an air raid warning was sounded, if a tunnel was near the train would go in there, but we are only talking about trains near the coastal regions, hit and run raids were the ones that tried to get trains, trucks etc but that soon stopped when the RAF squadrons became equipped with plenty of fighters to scare the low fliers away, happened to me a couple of times on my way to Dover on leave but really not a worry, worse things happen at sea we always said. Train travel was dirty, uncomfortable, long delays, overcrowded with troops and all there gear going about the country, only very rarely would a seat be available and soon given up to the lass with a baby on board or in arms, the corridors solid from end to end, tired people going back from leave and even more tired people going home for a spell away from war, but in some cases going into more war if their home was in the south, not that the north escaped bombing raids but it continued for longer in the south in fact almost to the day war ended, V1s and V2s almost to the end. After I was made an officer I travelled first class, now that was good if I had a travel warrant, not so hot if I had to pay for it, lot of rubbish I thought but must do as I am told like a good boy.

I arrived just after eight the next morning and phoned Dad from the Railway Station, he picked me up and took me home, Mum was at the local corner shop and post office, all the staff knew me and also knew about the telegram.

I did not notice a great deal about the Normandy build up, the landing happening on the 6th. We flew over the south of England on our night operations and sometimes were on our way home at dawn we would see the build up. As I usually spent time with my father in the Dover docks while on leave would have seen what was going on. But remember Dover was always very busy and some parts were off limits to every one, any double decker buses used on that part of the coast had all the top windows locked and painted on the outside black so no view of what was happening about the place.

D Day itself, however, must have come and gone without me noticing it. A bit like VDay and J Day. I was in all probability flying somewhere, or coming from somewhere by car, train, boat, or foot, just never registered, but see years later the crowds in London celebrating, guess they were lucky to be there at that time.

Being home with a wound, I thought I would have some luck with the local girls if I spun the yarn that I had swum the English Channel with one hand, didn't work out that way because a couple of days later I had a big lump behind my ear and a raging headache, high temperature and not a well boy at all. Dad took me to the closest Military Hospital which was in fact at Dover Castle (built by William the Conquer 1066), beneath which miles of tunnels had been cut and a large and modern hospital installed, I was told that I had an infected scalp, the poison was draining into a gland behind my ear and would take a while to heal, perhaps brought on by a combination of shock from my injured hand and the loss of my crew, a close bond exists when people depend on each other for their survival and air crew had a very close bond. I was taken by ambulance to an old country mansion up the valley a few miles inland from Dover, this was on or about the 10-12 June 1944, no medicine was available to treat my condition, just aspirin for the pain and high temperature, I lay in bed staring through the large windows hoping for sleep and return to health and wondering what had happened to my crew, night time was the worst, nursing staff all asleep upstairs and every one else snoring their heads off.

Then to make matters worse the Germans started sending over Flying Bombs on the night of the 13-14 June and every night and day after that, these pilot-less aircraft had a rocket type motor which had a pulse mechanism that gave them a strange but most recognisable noise, when the noise stopped they just fell out of the sky and the one ton of explosives made a nasty mess of anything underneath. They were programmed to fly up the valley where I was laying sick in bed and on the opposite hills from my bed were 20 and 40m/m quick firing guns, which of course fired at each and every one they saw or thought they did. I swear they were firing straight at me and thought it very unfair that after putting up with Jerry firing his guns at me now my own side were doing the same!

After the war there was a newspaper article showing the location of all Doodle Bug strikes in Kent. I still have a copy, and it is copied elsewhere on this CD.

I was in that hospital for more than a week until one afternoon the doctor seemed to think I was ripe and cut into this lump behind my ear and out popped a golf ball sized ball that looked like wound up white wool, all pain went and the wound soon healed up,.

A few days at home to get my strength up and I was told to report to 420 Sqdn RCAF at Tholthorpe in Yorkshire, where I was crewed up with Jim Tease as pilot and the usual other members of E easy, they had lost their F/E somehow can't remember now why, but they were a nice bunch and as I had done a few more trips than them, was an old hand!!

One such trip they made without me Jim has only recently told me of. On the 25th of July 44, Jim relates, we started for Stuttgart with over-load petrol tanks in the wing bomb bays, and the fuel lines were plugged so we could not get the fuel from them into the main tanks, so we had an early return. He then says " think you were the F/E but book says Naish". His Book is correct.

The new crew to which I was assigned was as follows. Jim Tease Pilot, Bridgeman Bombardier, Nicklen Navigator and best man at my wedding!, Baker Wireless Operator, Vaughan Gunner, and Yack Gunner. Our ground crew were LACs Jones, Milne, Parker, Smith and Sgt Berry. All were RCAF.

When I was stationed with 420 Snowy Owl RCAF Squadron our motto was 'pugnatus finitum' which translated means (so I'm told) 'We fight to the finish', now my long time RAF mate, (Halton, South Africa etc) arrived on the companion Squadron at Tholthorpe, good looking always got the pretty girl, 425 Alouette RCAF Squadron motto 'Je te Plumerai' "I shall pluck you" how appropriate for a French Canadian outfit, the re-write by all and sundry is painfully obvious, even more so for my mate Dacre, got through the war Ok but lost touch in 1947 and just hope he is still doing what he always did best!!

Our first op together was on the night of 28th July to Hamburg in Germany, the port inner lost all of its oil over the target, flack put a hole in a pipe so we returned on three engines and for some reason it wouldn't feather so that was added drag but we made it back in one piece, and all felt good that one was over.

On the night of the 31st we were over Deuf-en-Ternois and had a slight argument with an ME109 we both tried to get into firing position and the Jerry pilot realised that he might come off worse if he didn't go away which he suddenly did, we were happy to see him go!! We again had problems which meant we couldn't return to base but had to land at Skipton an emergency aerodrome equipped with FIDO.

Landing away from home usually would be on a FIDO drome. Once landed, our 'plane would be towed clear of the runway and dumped for us to sort out in daylight, we would get our heads down wherever we could and as it was often nearly dawn by the time we had sorted out our problems we would get some more fuel get the fans fixed and fly back to base, where we would then be de-briefed have a meal and either get some kip or get ready for the next one.

August 3rd daylight to Foret-de- Nieppe in France target an ammunition dump. Flying at night we all went our own way and took no notice of friend or foe unless forced to, by daylight the powers that be decided we should fly in, and practice formation, all very good for them that always get lost or need to hold hands, not us we know where to go and what time we should be there so get out of the way and follow us if you like!!!

Perhaps I should try to relive the first daylight raid I went on, that would have been 3:8:44 Foret-de-Nieppe. I mentioned before that as far as flak we never had a free ride, well the flak this first daylight one is well remembered.

It seemed all very strange at first to be able to see what we were doing, not having to squint with hardly any illumination to read gauges and find things by touch alone, so a bit like a holiday as we set "sail" to our target. All our friends around us, not I hasten to add in formation, but at time close enough to be able to recognise some and even give them a wave as we passed close. We of course were heading in the correct direction for the target, where some of the others were off to we did not know, kites flying off all over the place, and yet at night we all arrived where we should be, but how we missed one another in the dark is a mystery. Thinking about it, all the navigators were in their little cubicles without reference to what was happening outside and were working out their own headings taking into account the wind directions and the aircraft speed, so were doing their own plans to get to the target on time, bit like modern motorists taking different roads to get to their work places on time. Any how the skipper and I looked at the mess of planes going every which way and remarked that some of them must be mad, not us we knew where we we going. Gradually things sorted themselves out and a few of us were going in roughly the same direction, not all at the same height I might add but you can't have everything can you? As the holiday spirit continued we saw some of our 'planes cross our path and joined us, where they had been no one knew, but we had a gaggle of bombers heading towards the target. Crossed the coast of England and could see the French coast coming up, no need for the bomb aimer to tell the skipper and I but the navigator would welcome the information and the fact that we were not alone anymore!!

"Ten minutes to target" came through the inter com from the navigator and as was usual a heading for the skipper to take as soon as we had dropped our bombs, often a lot of noise over the target so best to get our escape route sorted before going in.

And there was the target the first wave had been in and were on their way home again, but it was impossible to get to the target, one solid mass of bursting flak, not enough room between the bursts for even a small 'plane let alone a bomber. The skipper and I stared through the windscreen, we did not say anything but guess he felt as I did that this was going to be one hell of a trip, the holiday was over that was for sure.!! The bomb aimer was crouched over the bomb sight giving directions, only the skipper and I could see what was in front of us but in we went and all was suddenly revealed to us what we could see were the shells that had burst, the ones to worry about were the ones that were on their way up, not quite back to the holiday spirit, but survival was now possible, the great puffs of stinking smoke were swept aside as we juddered from near misses and kept on course to our dropping point, a quick look around the sky showed our friends doing what we were doing and guess we weren't the only ones to have had a bit of a fright at our first daylight op.

Daylight operations were less stressful than night missions I would say over all, though we didn't know about stress then. We could see what we were doing as we took off and every one in the crew could do their job without trying to see with a very dim light, the wop and nav could even see outside through their windows, not having previously seen the bursting flak, and burning 'planes, the first time in daylight may have been rather a shock for them !!! For our pilot I'm sure it made life just a little easier, taking off in the dark with a full load, not able to see where you were on the runway or how close to the end and it's obstructions you were, for me it was a strain but for him trying to physically lift the beast into the air must have been a constant worry, and landing back in the light at base where he could see all the other circling 'planes, the runway not a shadow but there in all it's concrete glory was much easier than trying to figure out where everything on the ground was and where he was in relation to other unseen aircraft. I suppose both kinds of operations had their good and bad points, at night you crept into the target like a black cat in a black room, unseen you hoped but concerned with contact with both fighters and your own friends, navigation difficult because of lack of ground sightings, landing and taking off harder, even taxing to a dispersal difficult at times. In daylight everything could be seen even you over the target so no hiding in clouds, just fly in and drop the bombs and get out again, not sure which I preferred, if you survived all were good!!

We had fighters flying with us to keep the enemy ones away, so just a little of the holiday spirit came back, but on future ones we had the sight of bombers falling to the flak, my most vivid one was seeing a Flying Fortress some miles away have a wing shot off and counting the parachutes that came out as the 'plane tumbled over and over and eventually disappear through the clouds. But for this trip there was none of that, and later it was very nice to see all the other squadrons from the many 'dromes in our part of the world circling their airfields to go into land, some had a few bits hanging off them, and I suppose some had injured aboard, but home was near at hand a mug of coffee well laced with rum and one more to enter in the log book as DCO.

August 4th daylight again to France a pilot less plane storage dump at Boiss -de- Cassair. These were the V-1 Rockets, or Doodle Bugs as they were called. All we could see of the target was really only a gap in the forest with the ramp for the doodle bug to be fired up for launching, and the rest of the site was hidden in the trees,. I guess the local French Resistance would have sent the information by wireless of the location. Afterwards, not much to see when a number of bombers have dropped a few tons of bombs on a target. We used 500lb and 1000lb bombs on these sort of targets. Not too sure what our maximum bomb load for the Halibag would be but must have been at least 6 ton, but please don't quote me! The area looked like a very poorly ploughed field after we had gone.

Regarding Bomb Loads this is what Jim Tease, our pilot, has in his log book and I feel he is correct in what states. "We made many trips with 16x 500lb bombs, others were 9x 1000lb + 4x500lb. only one trip with a 2000lb + incendiaries, no record of taking a 4000lb believe the bomb doors would not fully close on a Halifax if one was loaded, bombs and petrol load would depend on the target and it's distance from base".

August the 5th daylight yet again to France this time ammunition stored in caves at St- D'Esserent. As usual there was no way for us to know if our bombs hit the target, whether we exploded the ammo dumps inside their caves or not. The explosions caused by our bombs 500, 1000, 2000, 4000, bombs going off do tend to make a lot of smoke and fireworks so unless we were on the ground hard to tell our bombs exploding from the enemy ammo or target going up, we did sometimes get a report days later from our briefing officer to say "well done target gone".

It is a bit hard for me to explain about what we saw on the ground both in England and over the enemy, you see when I was flying passengers in Avro Yorks, from UK to other parts of the world, one of the first things passengers used to say as we climbed up to 8000 ft our cruising height was " Oh look the sun is shining" they didn't seem to understand that it always is!!

The highest we ever bombed at was 24,500ft all crew members with paddles going like crazy!! But that is still well over the cloud layer. Because that part of the world is more often than not shrouded in cloud people forget that above the clouds there is always sunshine. So you see most times we were over cloud so we saw nothing on the ground, and even on a sunny day it is still patchy cloud, never saw a completely cloud free sky.

August 7th night operation to bomb Tanks and artillery in the German lines at La- Hougue. You will note that August was a very busy month, nearly every day we were out either day or night, can be a bit confusing to remember what and where we went, guess one target is much like another, lots of flak, bits of hot stuff flying about just a jumble in the memory, one thing that does stay vivid and I really can't be sure just when it happened or which target it was, only know it was at night and could have been in August. I think it was this mission to La-Hougue.

We took off on a very dark and rainy night and were told that the cloud and rain would clear just as we got to the target, we seem to have started our night flights very late at that time. Well we climbed to our cruising height and were in thick storm clouds, lightening hitting us and rain very heavy, the whole aircraft glowed with static electricity and large rain drops slid along the radio wires like illuminated ping pong balls, to burst as they hit the fins and rudders, the ride was very bumpy and the skipper and I tried going up or down to get clear of all this storm without any luck, just before the target was reached we flew into bright moonlight, bombed and returned within minutes into what looked like a solid black wall from ground to the sky and flew in this muck all the way home, I see we landed at Tilstock on Fido one night so perhaps that was the night, have a vague feeling that we were one of the very few who made it to the target that night.

August 8th Daylight to France to bomb oil storage dump at Foret-de-Chantilly. On the way home from this mission, or perhaps one of the other daylight missions, an enemy fighter came toward us. The Germans, however, seemed as cautious as my crew was. There were plenty of targets in the sky for the fighters so why risk getting shot at if you could creep up on a crew too lazy to do their job properly. So when this fighter approached us in daylight our gunners gave him a warning burst at a distance and he just turned away. However we watched as he dived straight on another 'plane about a couple of miles away and shot it down. That crew had not been alert and did not see him coming. We were all on our way home, but the time to relax was on the ground not in the sky.

August 9th night operation to Foret-de-Nieppe to bomb ammunition dumps. What does this mean, you might ask? Was it like they show in films? Like most people I often view WW2 films on the box and have

always wondered which war the makers were intending to show, certainly not the one I played a little part in. You see when a bomber is shown being attacked by fighters or anti aircraft fire there always seems a lot of shouting and the intercom is full of talk, not on any bomber I flew in, or passenger one either.

So let me go through what I and the crew did. On the ground we were the usual young, bugger about, chase the girls, have a drink etc boys, but once in the 'plane that all changed and the pilot, skipper or skip as he was known was boss, not in any heavy handed way but no task was started without his ok and all functions were reported to him.

So he and I marshalled the aircraft in a position allocated to us for that night's raid on the perimeter track leading to the runway in use, there we left it while a last meal was had, briefing concluded, and we as a complete crew were then taken by truck to our 'plane. The Canadian Salvation Army called at each 'plane as we waited to board, handing out cigarettes and chocolate, and a last fumble in the layers of clothes was made to get rid of any urine likely to cause pain, no toilets on our "kites".

A green light was shone from the small caravan parked at the end of the runway to tell us it was time to climb aboard, this caravan was painted in large black and white squares, a perspex roof blister was used to signal to the crews and need less to say it was towed away before we started to land back after our raid, with the way some of us landed it would not have lasted very long in one piece likewise the occupants!!

Each one of the crew settled into their place and checked that all was ok with their bits and bobs, the pilot would then call each position in turn (not by the persons name but what position they occupied, ie rear gunner, navigator,etc) and each crew member would reply along the lines of "OK SKIPPER" I was often left to last and was given the order to start engines when my turn came, after all were running satisfactory, I would log the start time and all pressures and temperatures etc, the navigator would no doubt make a note in his log of this time also, when our aircraft letter was flashed from the control caravan we would taxi onto the runway, I would select what angle of flaps the skipper wanted, set take off boost and hold the throttles behind his hand to ensure we stayed straight along the runway. As we climbed up I would only raise the undercarriage and flaps as he ordered, setting climbing revs and boost as he wanted, and would without any order synchronise the engine revs on each side so that the propeller blades did not rotate in respect to one another. If we were one of the first in our squadron to take off we would gradually climb to the operation height and circle the 'drome until all our aircraft were present, not that we could see much on a dark night but we had a set time to "set course for the target".

During the climb and setting course for the target one very important job was the charging and locking of the Hydraulic accumulator, this was an emergency charge of hydraulic fluid which would be enough to lower the undergear and even the flaps if we were lucky, should damage to the engine which drove the pump or the system itself be damaged. Was just a large cylinder connected to the hydraulic system filled with air (what this was pressured to I have forgotten only 56 or so years ago so sue me for having a bad memory) fluid was let into this cylinder and charged to a certain pressure (sue me) and the cock turned off so the fluid was held under pressure by the air also in the cylinder, in an emergency the undercarriage would be set to 'lower' and this cock turned on and hopefully this stored fluid would lower the gear, Got all that? Phyll just read the first part I sent and was rather surprised that I could still know what to do but not sure if the RAF would still require my services!! Back to the plot!!

As we reached about 12000ft I would change the supercharger speed to high, make sure all the crew were on oxygen, and fill in all the details in my log these included petrol consumption and which tanks I was using, I always tried to have an equal amount of fuel in each tank by the time we reached our target so that should a tank be punctured we only lost a small amount of petrol, but each time I changed tanks permission was asked from the skipper and he was informed when I had done it.

There we are drifting along trying to make sure we didn't bump into any of our own 'planes in the dark sky, all lights were at dim, mine to fill in my log was at a glimmer when wanted, all the pilot's instruments lights very low and the blackout curtain between the bomb aimer's position and the navigator and WOP very tightly fastened, both working with minimum lights. And it got cold, the gunners and bomb aimer had heated suits but even they felt it, as for the navigator his hands were too cold at times to hold a pencil and asked the Skip if I could direct hot air down to his position, The skip and I already partly frozen but to get there and back we needed to know which way so hot air it was and some of our bits that might be wanted in more pleasant times went into cold storage.

There was no chatter between crew members, and if someone left their mic on by mistake he was soon reminded of the fact, young as we all were I am reminded of how very professional we were, perhaps that is why we survived to tell our tales!

This professionalism was needed. One night we had a Halifax with a mid under turret, not a standard feature in earlier models, and a gunner was added to our crew to man it. The gunner we were landed with saw more enemy fighters in the 6 or so hours we were airborne than I think were

available to the Germans at any time during the war. This excitability was not helpful. We got rid of the mid under and that gunner.

Why we survived and others didn't was because we took notice of the experts (those pilots and crews who had done it lots of times) you don't fly straight and level thinking of nothing much, but weave and bank slightly so that the gunners get an all round view of things, there is no blind spot under the tail if you stay awake. No need for a lower turret to fill that blind spot then.

I can only speak for myself but guess all the crew were feeling as I was, and that was that our navigator would take us there and back, our gunners would spot the attacking aircraft in time and either shoot it down or scare it off, our pilot was second to none and would steer us through whatever came our way, our radio operator would get a fix, receive a message, and let us know what was happening, our bomb aimer would always hit the target, and I would keep the old girl in the air until we got home safely again. So there was no need for lots of chatter we all did our jobs and depended on the others to do theirs.

The navigator would sometimes ask the skipper if I could do a star shot for him, over my position I had an astro dome, would unload the sextant from it's case hang it from the hook, wind up the clockwork 2minute timer and after I had found whichever star was wanted tell the skipper and of course the navigator I was ready when they were, the navigator would tell me when to start and I would press the trigger and try to keep the star in the mirror., at the end of the two minutes a reading of the average of all my shots would come up on a panel which I would give to the navigator, on the ground I had been averaging 2 to 3 miles, not as good in flight but handy if other navigating items were not up to scratch.

The bomb aimer was in the nose during the flight and gave what information he could to the skipper but the navigator also heard it and it would be something like this "Coast coming up skip" "crossing the coast now". Now we were over enemy territory.

Details of flack ships and sites seen in action would be reported much the same, no panic just facts. The gunners would report fighters positions and would not fire unless ordered to. We were told that on some nights our fighters would be in the "stream" so gunners watch out for them, and they would circle the German dromes to shoot down any fighters taking off or landing, the Germans did that to our bombers early in the war but as we got air superiority it was our turn to be the nasty ones. Still, Fighters of any type all were enemy until they proved otherwise. Very few of either nation came

near us. In most cases the fighters saw we were a threat to them and went elsewhere.

Although there was sufficient ammunition for whatever may occur, our own use was very minimal and mainly used to test fire the guns soon after airborne, our job was to deliver bombs and drop them hopefully at the right place, which we seem to do most of the time.

One night standing in the astro dome doing my bit of searching the sky I looked up and saw a FW 190 almost within touching reach just above me, would not have been 10 feet away. I told the skipper and of course the gunners wanted to have a go, but as the skipper said we are supposed to be bombing and will just slide away but if we see one on the way back shoot the bastard down. The FW covered the sky, was flying quite close and not much faster than we were, no doubt we could have given it a very sore bum. But the skipper rightly said no, could have all gone wrong anyway, maybe his mate was close at hand and while we blazed away at one, another could have had us who knows?

Remember that this is flying in darkness. We had radar, but not for seeing other planes. We used radar in a thing called H2S, shows as a small bulge under the fuselage of bombers, used to show a map of the ground and useful for bombing on nights with full cloud cover. Radar, good if you are a fighter but what good would it do us, never switch any radar on even H2S unless needed, gives out a signal for the enemy to follow and get you, switch it off and use the mark I eye balls.

There were very many different anti fightersystems used, these names are all either tail warning devices (which caused more trouble than they were worth) special aircraft with German speaking radio operators who would tune into the German fighter directors and give conflicting directions, The Germans would do as we did and use people with distinct dialects to stop this, microphones were installed in the engine bays and this sound would be sent out on the fighter wave lengths to stop the information from being received. Gee was a navigation aid using three or more radio beacons and a special receiver, window you know about but many different versions of Radar were used to block fighters,G-H, Oboe, Serrate, Monica, ABC, Corona, and many names I either never knew or have forgotten were all warning devices fitted near the tail to warn rear gunners of the approach of night fighters, I suppose some lives were saved until the Germans had a crashed 'plane to work on and then it was just the reverse, switch it on and get caught! All of this electronics, if on board for this mission, would be in use or ready for use while we moved towards our target through the night sky.

The navigator would also tell the pilot that it was time to start "window" and at what rate, another of my jobs, as was the dispatch of leaflets to inform the enemy that it was time to give in, why didn't I ever keep some??? So you have a very noisy 'plane with not much chatter going on all the crew going about their jobs quietly, checking with the skipper if required and all hearing what was being done to keep us safe.

The view from the cockpit at night was minimal, the occasional flare of a bursting shell which changed to continuous bursts as we got near the target or passed near flak sites, the halfseen shapes of other bombers or fighters with muffled flames from their exhausts, from the astro-dome on a clear night, the dark blue inverted bowl of the sky pierced with a multitude of twinkling lights, but these often shaded by the dark shadows of friend and foe as they passed by.

Dark nights and heavy clouds were the norm, rain and lightening greeted us most times, eyes strained to see what was not there, but ready to give a warning of any contacts either friend or foe.

A master radar controlled searchlight may catch us and very soon we were "coned" no panic, every one closed one eye to retain night vision, and either the bomb aimer or the rear gunner would give the pilot instructions about the best way to get out of it, usually to dive down the master one and do very sudden sharp turns to one side, always got out before any real damage was done, and never ever thought we wouldn't!!

Now we were nearing the target and the 'plane jumped about as we flew through the wake of our bombers ahead of us, on a thousand bomber raid at night over the one target things get a bit hairy. Some of the sudden jumps are not 'plane wakes but the burst of anti aircraft shells trying to send us down, but at night you see the flash, hear the rattle of splinters, check that all is well with the crew and our 'plane and just carry on. The navigator would tell the skipper that it was say 5minutes to target, the bomb aimer would have set his bomb sight to drop the bombs in a certain pattern, we had wing and fuselage bomb bays, and with the right pattern the pilot had an easier task to control the 'plane as it lost it's load, a 2000lb 'cookie' really gave us a quick lift when let go, I can imagine that some of the Lancasters that carried and dropped 12000lb and larger "earthquake bombs" really hit the heights when relieved of their parcels!

Now all eyes were searching the sky even harder than they had been, searchlights were weaving their way across the sky, catching a plane which was lit up and looked just like a moth around a lamp, sometime they slid out of the light, some times they suddenly flashed into extinction, and some

times the flashing of guns was seen as a fighter chanced his luck amongst the bursting anti aircraft and was answered by the bomber gunners.

The flashing of bursting bombs, rattle and crash of anti aircraft shells bursting, searchlights sweeping the sky and settling on some lone 'plane to be followed by the stream of incendiary bullets, all make the hearts of the night bomber crews halt for just a fraction as they go about the job of beating the foe into submission. Hearts once young and tender soon become hardened to this show of defiance, but not to the sudden eruption of flames at their height as one of their own is hit and spirals to destruction, "bastards" comes through the intercom from all quarters and the empty bottles, bricks and old iron brought for this occasion are pushed out of gun turrets and down flare and 'window' chutes, the rage is personal you can't do this to ours is the feeling.

All in all over the target it was quite a busy place to be and we still had to reach the aiming point drop our bombs and beat a hasty retreat. Each plane that was hit was reported and logged by the navigator, new anti aircraft gun sites logged, 'window' and leaflets pouring out the chute, bomb doors opened and from the bomb aimer 'steady, left steady left steady hold it hold it and the magic BOMBS GONE, bomb doors closed, new course from the navigator and turn for home, but still aware that this was perhaps the most dangerous time, many crews relaxed and never got home. So search the sky dodge the ack ack and searchlights, perhaps put on a bit of speed by dropping a few thousand feet, and again that most welcome call from the bomb aimer still in the nose ' coast coming up, crossing the coast' and now I could eat my bit of chocolate, and just ease a little.

The wireless operator would be giving weather and other information to both the skipper and the navigator, as the navigator and wop sat next to one another many messages were passed by notes to and fro, but one that sent shivers through us was

"Intruders reported over the 'drome skip" not often but meant we could not relax even when we arrived back at base, never got caught, guess our night fighters got up and sorted things for us. So on a normal return to base we were greeted by the interlocking rings of lights from all the multitude of bomber bases in Yorkshire, and each one flashed it's own recognition red light to welcome it's pigeons home, no radio silence now as there was prior to take off, call in make our letter E EASY and given a height and position in the queue, and as we were called down and moved up in the queue sometimes had to loose our turn to one of ours with dead and wounded on board, or no fuel left or any one of the things that happen to planes that will go out searching for trouble, down we go and I stand by the pilot and do all the actions in reverse, undercarriage, flaps and so on, all the others are

strapped in but not me I just stand next to our pilot and help him as and when wanted, down we go another perfect landing and taxi to our dispersal, the crew climb out to wet the grass again while the skipper and I switch off everything, lock the brakes and controls, and make our own way to a quick piss, climb in the waiting truck and head for debriefing.

Now we would give our version of events while we are handed a large mug of coffee liberally laced with rum. Here we report the sighting of the sudden eruption of flames at our height, which we knew to be one of our own being hit and destroyed - the sighting that sent us to throwing junk down at the enemy. But at de-briefing, we are told it was only a "Scarecrow" shot up by the enemy to make us afraid. But it didn't, it made us mad and nothing the briefing officer could say convinced us that it wasn't one of ours falling to their death. So was the whole thing counter-productive by both sides, we just got mad not scared, so the enemy lost that one and we never really knew if there were such things as "Scarecrows" just kept heaving out the junk.!!

After debriefing, we hand in our parachutes, and head for a meal and bed. Our ground crew would be busy checking E Easy for faults, some I will have reported on landing to them, the camera film will be taken from the bomb sight and on it's way to processing, and a hush will settle on this and many airfields while the weary rest for the next effort, but usually woken up by the roar of engines being tested for the next one.

The next one was August 12th, a daylight run again to France. The target this time was Foret-de- Mont Richard, more ammunition dumps.

August 18th Night to France to bomb the Railway Marshalling Yards at Connatre. must again had a problem because we landed at Skellingthorpe, returning to base the next day.

August 27th daylight to France to bomb a construction site at Marquise - Minoyecques being built to launch flying bombs on London.

I must add details of my selection interview by a senior RAF officer for a commission, My Flight commander had asked me to put in for a commission and when I failed to do so, gave me a direct order, sat me down and made me fill in all the forms, I just forgot all about it and rather than play the usual games that Canadian Air Crew used to while away the hours between operations of horse shoes, billiards and pool, I managed to convince the Station Engineering Officer to supply me with a hut, tools, bench, and a worn out Hercules engine. This I proceeded to take to pieces and section so that every one who was interested could see the inside of a very complicated sleeve valve engine, and perhaps treat them with just a

little more respect! I would check with my pilot each day if we were flying and if not cycle out to my hut which was away from the main area and certainly not in range of the public address speakers. So I happily worked on my own getting my clothes well covered in oil and the aluminium dust from the sawing and filing which clung to everything this meant that I had to wear really old uniforms when working and must say that after a few hours in my hut did not look too special! A breathless Flight Sergeant burst in through the door and shouted with the little breath he had left "Your name Miles?" When I replied yes it was, told me that the public address (Tannoy) had been calling for me for some hours to report to Head Quarters for my interview with an Air Commodore. Said I would go back to my barrack room to change "No you won't, I've been looking for you all morning and you go there now" Didn't want to be an officer anyhow so who cares, arrived at Head Quarters on my cycle to be met by yet another Flight Sergeant, if anything more angry than the first, "Don't you read Daily orders Miles" I walked into the waiting room to find all other applicants polished and shining in their best uniforms, sat in rows like birds on a fence, my own mate said "Hard luck Reg" Before I could answer yet another Flight Sergeant with great glee said "Miles you're in next" So In I went to stand in front of the table behind which sat My Squadron Wing Commander, The Base Group Captain, My Flight Leader and the imposing figure of the Air Commodore. Their eyes were all focused on the notes they were making about the previous applicant as I saluted and stated my name rank and service number. Eyes were raised and a look of horror passed over the faces of each one as they looked at this dirty silver speckled scruffy airman. The Air Commodore asked why I had not appeared when called before and how had I got into this condition. It seemed to me that only the truth would do and so I related my story of the engine I was working on and said how sorry I was that I had caused so much trouble. The Air Commodore asked each of the other officers if they were aware of my efforts and no one did, "ring the Engineering Officer and check while we question Miles" he confirmed my story and said I was doing a good job and hoped it would be finished before I left the Squadron. While this was going on The Air Commodore and I were chatting away about my service history and how far I had got with the engine, finally he said "I shall be pleased to welcome you into the Officer's Mess in a few weeks time, we need more people like you who just get on and do things" So I walked out head high through the waiting room and said to all and sundry "I've got mine good luck to you"

Quite a busy month trying to help our ground troops push their way through France. I have not mentioned the training flights also carried out between operations, so that apart from the odd break we were flying most days and nights. My crew and I must have had some leave during the first week of September because my first record for that month is a training flight on the 9th and a note that I had had some more practise at flying a Halifax,

we only had one pilot on board and that was Jim Tease so if he got injured or killed who would fly us home? That left only me who did at least know how things worked but as I had no flying training on small aircraft it was very difficult to manage something so big and slow to react to the controls, alter the angle of the control column and it seemed ages before anything happened so learners always over correct and you end up with a ride like a fair ground switch back, I practised whenever I was able always in daylight and most times on the return flight from an operation, tried a few times landing on clouds, more forgiving than the ground, think I could have got back to England ok but landing without a crash I'm not so sure!!

Back to France in daylight to bomb a German strong point at Le Havre on September 10th. I seem to remember that we were one of the last on target and all that could be seen were bomb holes on top of bomb holes, The RAF and American Air Force had complete air superiority so we had only flack to contend with and that could be very accurate because the Germans use Radar tracking.

September 11th daylight to Germany, to the dreaded Ruhr Valley, to bomb a synthetic oil plant at Castro-Rauxel. Our height for this drop, based on the aiming point photo, was 16,500', and our bomb load was 16 500lb bombs. We hit it smack on and our photo showed that, still have my copy given to us, and we were given a guided tour of 6 Group Bomber Command in recognition of our skill.

The tour we had of 6 Group Bomber command was more for the Canadian guys, so they could oggle the Canadian girls, told you before I was not impressed so just saw lots of lush offices and big boards with meaning less maps and figures on them. Waste of time I thought but the rest of the crew liked it so that was OK.

September 13th again to Germany in daylight to bomb the railway marshalling yards at Osnabruck, I have a note that it went well so presume the target was destroyed, daylight targets were a bit scary after night ones but soon got used to it and at least we could see what we were aiming at and whether we had been right on target.

September 15th A night raid on the shipping port of Keil in Germany, this was a 500 bomber operation, we were coned by about six radar controlled searchlights on the approach to Keil, with German night fighters hanging about out of the cones, all had to keep at least one eye closed as the light was very bright and if we managed to get out of them the fighters would pounce as we would all be blind, Jimmy Tease handled the bomber like a fighter diving and side slipping all over the place even at one time diving down one of the lights, and got us out, we were however hit by flack

over the target and the perspex nose fell right off, Red Bridgeman the bomb aimer had to hold the black out curtains between his position and Nick Nicklen our navigator while I wired them together, Red had to stand with his feet over nothing all the way home to hold the curtains against the howling gale that came in, Nicks charts had all ended up down the fuselage mixed up with the bundles of window that I was pushing down the window chute.

These were sorted out and Nick went on with his job of guiding us home, from my notes looks as though we or some of our Squadron hit the target so a good prang was noted.

I do remember this next mission, a daylight raid on one of those massive guns built into the ground with a barrel hundreds of feet long pointed at London. This was September 17th. The target was in France at Boulogne, our height in my log is noted as 2000ft. 2000ft is very low for bombing could get damaged by the bombs in front of you going off especially in slow old things like Halis - Lancs. This was the only low level bombing I ever went on!!! Although we would bomb from 2,000 feet, we flew down from base in Yorkshire at about 8,000 feet. This was a good cruising height for our aircraft, as we passed over many cities, towns, airfields, hills, barrage balloons, tall chimneys, and other obstructions for low level craft.

When we got to the English coast lowered our undercarriage and flaps pulled back the throttles and dived down to 2,000 ft over the channel. The lowering of flaps, undergear and reducing engine revs helped us to quickly reduce our height, the channel is only a bit over 20 miles wide not a lot of distance to get a great old lumbering kite down low and level out and on course to give the bomb aimer a chance to find the target.

The dive over the channel was to get us down to 2,000ft quickly, at the low height we were certain to hit the rather small target and not the surrounding empty fields or buildings. We also had to have time to make the approach without crowding other aircraft. We had to watch out for 'planes all round us because, at this altitude, if we were too close to one in front we could get our 'plane damaged by a bursting bomb from the plane in front. So not quite the "milk run" it would appear to be.

The flight down to the target on this trip must have been a change, able to see some of the country side. Although the whole operation only lasted 4 hours, and so not a lot of time for sight seeing, no doubt the gunners and bomb aimer had a nice view. The only time I had to look was when I took a moment as we flew over the village where my parents were living, but I did not see any street or bit that I could say, "that's where I live". It is surprising how difficult it is to recognise things from the air that you haven't seen a few

times from the air. But the skipper and I as usual were busy making sure we got there OK. Sounds as if he and I were always busy doesn't it? Well we were, bomber pilots had it tough, long hours at the "office" in all weather conditions, responsible for a number of other people's lives, not forgetting their own. My job was to help him, so I did, as best as I was able. I also wanted to get home again!!!

Once we were down to 2,000 feet, we pulled all our hanging bits back on board opened the taps, then bombed this target with all we had, again being very careful not to get too close to the bomber in front. All I saw was a few acres of mud which kept leaping into the air and rearranging itself, guess another case of over kill!! After the target, we climbed again after bombing to 8,000ft for the return run over the afore mentioned obstructions to our flight path.

This target was noted in the log book as a "strong point" which we were told it was at the time, no one knew what it was so it was decided to destroy it. A ground investigation later on found the gun, much to every one's surprise at it's size and pointing straight at London, various TV programmes over the years have shown it and it's concrete barrel rising from deep underground. Checking distances with my M.S World Atlas I found much to my surprise that Boulogne is the closest point in France to London, closer than Calais by about 10KM, so an obvious place to put a gun of this range and size.

September 19th we took our old 'plane to the HCU at Dishforth she had done 56 trips and had been hard used many patches and repairs had been done so with all her proud bombing trips still painted on her nose she went to train more aircrew for the struggle still to come.

September 25th off again to France in daylight to bomb a German strong point at Calais another target gone, our new E easy going good!!

September 26th to France in daylight again to Calais bombed Gun positions and the docks in the harbour, noted as another good hit.

September 27th daylight to Germany Bottrop in the Ruhr, have note that we bombed a factory on visual which means some thing had gone u/s. My pilot, Jim Tease recently gave me some more information on this mission. "I had a friend now deceased who was a navigator on 428 Ghost Squadron. He wrote a book about Ghost Squadron & I compared his report of trips we were both on, and found we had different visions of what happened. On our 31 trip to Bottrop on Sept 27 I indicate there was 10/10 cloud for the whole trip, the Master of Ceremonies (Master Bomber) of the Path Finders lost his way and we bombed where Don (our navigator) said the target area was

located. Ron's book indicates the refinery was hit & smoke rose to 17000ft. So much for records!!"

My Log Book for that raid states "10/10 cloud Bomed Factory Visual M/C U/S" guess that all means we found a gap in the clouds and bombed the target but had solid cloud both there and back M/C U/S Master of Ceremonies out of order, unservicable.

On one of these daylight raids we saw a V2 launched on one raid, didn't know what it was just a streak in the sky. Looking out of the windscreen I saw a streak of smoke come through a layer of cloud and shoot up into the sky and disappear into the next lot of cloud, I know the skipper also saw it but who else I am not sure, lasted milli seconds. It was logged by the navigator and an estimation of where it had come from made by us. When and where seen etc was important, once a site was located it could be knocked out by bombing.

September 30th daylight again to Germany Sterkrade in the Ruhr saw one of our Sqdn go down and three of the seven get out on 'chutes, we landed at a FIDO 'drome at Carnesby, no brake pressure went off the end of a very long runway into a field of potatoes that had just been ridged up and we went across the ridges, a bit like roller skating on corrugated iron.

On the 4th of October we went to Bergen in Norway flying across the North Sea in daylight to bomb U/Boat pens and a large ammunition ship in the harbour. We flew across the sea both ways at 1000ft to be under German Radar, and climbed rapidly near the target to 12000ft, Mosquitos and Mustangs gave us fighter cover.

I still have an image in my mind of a semi-circular bay with a large ship moored more or less in the middle. As I remember it the country around Bergen is low lying, nothing at our height to give us cause for panic, but if the ship had blown up and we were down low could have caused major damage to one or more of our Halifaxs.

The large ammunition ship blew up. The ship was still all in one piece when I last saw it and if our bombs had done the damage guess we would have been told. I think it was our rear gunner who told us via the intercom that it had blown up, and that is why we were there.

Our attack made the Bergen people even more anti British than they already were, Gillian visited there some years ago as the intended bride to the son of one of Bergen's top families, the mother was a local member of parliament, they treated her most awfully which did not help when she casually mentioned that her Dad had bombed the place during the war,

needless to say that romance soon died!!! The Norwegians still didn't like us Brits, near enough to Germans and lots supported Hitler during the war, bit like the Swiss only interested in making money, the shits.

Of course, most ordinary Norwegian people really hadn't any view pro or anti regarding Germany and Britain, just wanted to get on with their lives as best they could. Those that were anti us had lots riding on our defeat, and were involved in either working for the Germans or making lots of money out of them by trading with them, those that helped us risked torture and death, and were really in more peril than we were, they were the real heroes. After the war and for many years, I never met anyone who speaking with what sounded like a German accent, was other than Swiss, even if they said their home town was in Germany!!! I still find the Swiss attitude to money and it's retention disgusting , particularly in the light of revelations of their trading with the Nazis in Gold and goods taken from innocent people. Guess ordinary people all over this world just want to eat and enjoy what little life they have, but greed gets in the way and those few who can claw their way up the 'food' chain and get much more than their fair share are the ones who I have no time for , being poor perhaps colours my out look!!!

So we come to the 6th of October and a night operation over Germany to Dortmund in the Ruhr Valley, this was a 500 bomber raid to the centre of the city, we again were hit by flack bits flying about all over the place and very red hot some hit the bomb door hydraulics which fell open and stay open and I'm sure that it was on this operation that a lump hit Nick Nicklen on his side making a very nasty bruise, fortunately it also hit the torch on his MAYWEST life jacket so didn't kill him, he was in much pain but got us back to England ok, Nick was awarded the D.F.C. later and I am sure it was for this brave effort. Because of our damage we again had to land apart from our base and this time landed at Woodbridge and after some quick repairs we flew back to base the next day, where I was told that I had finished my tour of operations, had been granted a commission, given docketts and a leave pass to get my officers uniform and told to report back in seven days. A friend and I travelled to just about every city and large town in Yorkshire before we managed to get kitted up in Harrogate.

Before departing on leave and to await our next posting we had to hand in certain flying and escape items. These were mainly items of some value French and German money hidden in our clothes together with fine silk maps of France and Germany. Our flying boots which had a hidden knife in the sheep skin lining so that the long leg warmers could be cut off leaving what looked like ordinary shoes also were handed in, other items like compasses hidden under badges or in pencils, hacksaw blades concealed in the linings of clothes, a bag of oiled silk that could be used to hold water and a few other odds and ends we kept, these like so many things at that time

had no value to us and no doubt went into the bin without much thought! Jim Tease and the rest of the crew still had a few operations to go but I was not allowed to finish with them told not to be so greedy, others wanted a go and as far as I was concerned they were welcome. So home on leave to await what the RAF had in store for me again. Cycling along the main road in Cliftonville what should I see but a bunch of very good looking WAAF's (Woman's Auxiliary Air Force, who did every job except fighting (which they sometimes had to do for their honour)from clerks to Radar operators, cooks to delivering aircraft from the factories, and with them a girl friend if but briefly from my school days, Phyllis Dike!! I made contact and started to see her and eventually proposed marriage to her, she wasn't very keen but agreed in the end.

I was recalled to service and was posted to Heavy Conversion Unit 1332, Nutts Corner in Northern Ireland where I crewed up with F/Lt Poore, a navigator and a wireless operator all of us being officers and had completed at least one tour on bombers, we were being trained to fly Avro Yorks on the main trunk routes from U.K to India and Ceylon now India, Pakistan and Shri Lanka. We started the flying part of the course on the 8th April 1945 and completed it on 17th of the same month. My flight log of my time in 1332 H.C.U. is presented later.

The Avro York interior lay out was much as the Lancaster. The pilot, F/E, Nav, Wop were together in a small group, the F/E acting as second pilot even if untrained. When spare pilots became available they took over the task of second pilot the f/e found himself a place amongst the mail bags to sleep and do his job as he could.

When a number of crews joined Transport Command after our course at Nutts Corner, we arrived at 242 Squadron in Stoney Cross. My log book details my flights with 242 Squadron.

Within a day or so we were all loaded onto an Avro York, flown I know not where and without any "by your leave" injected with multiple injections in both arms and I seem to remember elsewhere, we were told this was for protection against all the terrible deceases we would encounter in foreign lands, yellow fever was mentioned as one but there was a whole list of them. I know most of us were a bit under the weather for a few days, some even very sick. What sticks in the memory was that we weren't asked or consulted just injected !!

I had already obtain permission to get married and given leave for that period, but the Wedding was on the 28th and I had to get home and do some organising, so used the "old boys" network and thumbed lifts to England and managed to get a train to get me home in time. Don Nicklen my navigator

from 420 sqdn came down from Yorkshire to be my best man, and I can't say I saw much of him before it was away on a short honeymoon, and then back to camp for both of us!!

----- Reg Miles

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Biography of Reg Miles

Ex Apprentice No 1 S.of T.T., R.A.F., Halton 39th Entry 34 - 67 M.U.s - 27 A/S
Bloemspruit South Africa - Lyme Kent, Flight Engineer 432 - 420 Squadrons RCAF,
6 Group Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Tholthorpe, Yorkshire / 242- 246 - 511
Squadrons Transport Command Lyneham, RAF

Chapter 5

242- 246 - 511 Squadrons, Transport Command, Lyneham, RAF

I started flying at 242 Sqdn on the 16th May again all training in passenger flying techniques, rather different from press on bombing! We did a few cross countries and many three engined landings and the use of radio range flying. One exercise in the log book was Over Shoots and Landings. Overshoots and landings are practice in taking off again before you actually get the wheels on the ground, some clever dickies even run the wheels along the runway and open the throttles and take off again, alright for intrepid birdmen like fighter pilots but not recommended for serious passenger flying types. There are the odd occasions when the runway suddenly does not become clear for landing , animals , cars , fire engines, even other aircraft, so practice for these times (which may never happen) is necessary, these days a no risk practise can be made in the Flight Simulator, we had to do it the hard way with an instructor beside us and no knowledge of what we would be asked to do, he could shut down one engine and then another, drop the undercarriage, put on full flap , what ever his distorted mind felt like that day!! The pilots I flew with on Transport Command had all done at least one tour on bombers, some quite a number and were used to the enemy doing much the same to the aircraft, so no panic just the correct procedure and "What would you like next" often asked , with a wry grin. So the order to "overshoot" became automatic, with me acting on my pilot's instructions about throttle, flaps and under gear, but I was always aware of what he wanted and would be "hands on" waiting, would have been a rather poor F/E if not ready when wanted!!

My crew went on leave after this training, so I was made a temporary Flight Engineer to the Squadron Leader, who took me on a test flight of my abilities to Cairo and back, left Stoney Cross on the 4th flew to Luqa in Malta.

Malta was still on a war footing. Luqa, on Malta, a dry and stony place all the airport buildings painted white but very small and certainly not like any airport you may have seen, a concrete slab to park on for refuelling, all

of which had to be done through massive filters , with chamois leather inserts to catch any water and of course the ever present dust and sand. All the ground crew well tanned and going about their jobs with efficiency , being bombed continually taught them not to delay getting the fighters airborne, we were lucky that the fighters had gone before we started to use Luqa, the enemy ones !!

Malta is an island with a long history of invaders, us being the last, independence was granted some time after the war and I am sure the locals were glad to see all the foreign military go, wonderful harbour, well used by the Royal Navy during WW2, a street (very narrow and steep) in Valletta was lined with open fronted drinking bars, just really the front room of a house with easy entry for the soldiers and sailors to get drunk, think from memory it was called by the Navy "The Gut" , but could be thinking of somewhere else, for us, just a place to "slip" crews , water always very scarce, milk , butter and cheese from goats , think I have mentioned that before, as I have about collecting all the papers and books from the mess before leaving UK to leave both with the RAF and also some Navy types who crewed a fast MTB (motor torpedo boat) made a change for both crews to chat with some one other than their working mates.

The runway ended at a quarry, no sight for the faint hearted, as it was well stocked with aircraft that had not made it, guess the passengers just thought it was some where the RAF stored unwanted 'planes. My first trip there was with a senior pilot to check me out so a quick run to Cairo and back , all 7,800 Km of it! My years in South Africa had made me used to hot weather shorts and open neck shirts so it was easy for me to climatise to the changed weather conditions. I now live in Mackay, Queensland and there is a thriving community of Maltese people, many sugar cane farmers or the descendants of cane farmers, and NO they are not called Maltesers!!!

On the 5th Malta to Cairo. Cairo, a large bustling over crowded city, full to bursting point with every shape, colour and size of humanity, and I am talking about 1945!! We had little to do with Cairo itself, as we either landed at Cairo West or at Almaza in Heliopolis, a suburb of Cairo, where we were put up in the largest hotel I have ever seen, not that I am into hotels as such, but as a young very green officer the Heliopolis Palace Hotel was mind blowing ,acres of everything , not outside but inside , entry large enough to hold a soccer match, dining rooms that vanished into the blue and rooms so large that if they had been properly furnished a guide would have been required to see us to the door. Each crew had a room on arrival with a number of beds scattered about and a couple of tables and chairs etc, guess the hotel had not been completed prior to WW2 and had been taken over by the British Forces, lots of "red tab" types swanning about, had a very hard war from the looks of things!! Food was good and served properly the same

as our mess in UK, so no complaints there. About flying times etc you must remember that as we flew East the time got later and daylight ended sooner, ie Cairo -UK 2 hour difference, same as New Zealand - Australia.

We all took a trip to Giza and along the road to the Sphinx and the Pyramids , don't know who built that lot but bet he over ran the budget, The one thing that still sticks in my mind is the overpowering smell of diesel oil on that road, not so much burnt oil but the same smell you get on a production oil field, the brown desert stretched to the horizon on either side of the road which was very black and shiny, perhaps that's where the smell came from not bitumen but oiled sand!!! Now I'll never know!!! Natural History Museum in Cairo a must if you visit , remember it as a highlight of my various times there and after these many years must be a wonder to visit now, don't go to the medical section if just before or after lunch, in fact might be a good idea to give that bit a miss!!

I wanted to buy Phyllis something special and found a market that specialised in perfumes. Channel number 5 or was it 7 ? was all the go, entered this so dark and gloomy looking shop, about the size of your average toilet, greeted with lots of bowing, and what sounded like praises for my everything, down some steep stairs to end up in yet another room the same size where there was a small table and two or three chairs, 'would the effendi like some coffee'? (no idea how you spell effendi)' well really wanted to buy some perfume' lot more praise heaped on me but coffee came regardless, the cups must have been part of a doll house at some time and the coffee bitter and black, Now I had to sniff every smell known to man, 'is this for your lovely wife'? what colour are her eyes etc and so on 'does my lord have a mistress'?

By this time I was all sniffed out , couldn't tell one heap of horse crap from another of cows, throat dry as dust from the coffee, and still I was given the full treatment until I made a purchase and bolted , can't remember what scent I did buy but it was a big bottle!!!!

On the 6th Cairo to Malta, and on the 7th , Malta to Base. My flight log records of my time in 242 Squadron are listed later.

Two quick training flights with my real crew and then I was lent to F/o Good to go as F/E on a Short Stirling (never seen one close up before) that was to deliver supplies all over the world, why me I'll never know, a very quick half hour lesson on where everything was, happily the engines were Hercules with which I had done all my operations, perhaps that's why I was picked, only one on the squadron with that engine experience.

The Short Stirling was just a bomber, not converted to anything, the fuselage was used to carry freight and we carted an exhibition of bombs etc all over the place, we also picked up and dropped off odds and sods as required, much like a "tramp steamer" at everyones beck and call!! The Stirling was the first of the four engined bombers for the RAF and suffered because of that, a bad spec. by the chairbound in the Ministry ended up with a well made but poor WW 2 bomber, they did get used for bombing, others as tugs and for training purposes, remember one at Nutts Corner left the end of the runway and landed in the mud, tipped up on it's nose, the Station doctor rushed to the crews aid(they had all left some time ago) climbed up on the wing slipped and fell off and broke his ankle, mustn't laugh!!!

The Stirling was slow had no great ceiling, noisy, draughty and I was a long way from home, my crew and a lovely Avro York , what else do you need to think a 'plane was terrible?

So off we went in a lumbering noisy old Sterling, 15th June England to Castel Benito in North Africa 7 hours 20 of misery. Castel Benito was obviously a place named for the Italian Dictator, My only recollection of this place is sand more sand and then some more sand, the tents we slept in were filled with sand and the food was full of sand and even the ever present flies were full of sand , how the troops managed to service 'planes and keep them flying is a wonder. I don't remember if there was a concrete runway but if there was bet it was covered in sand, it blew everywhere, filled every orifice, eyes got sore even just during one night there , no thank you don't want to remember that place!!

16th June Castel Benito to Lydda the airport for Tel Aviv in (Palestine) Israel 6hours 45. Lydda , was Palestine. now Israel , was the main airport of Tel Aviv, guess the name has been changed so people like me have no idea where it is now, but was a decent airport so probably just extended and has a new name. While at Lydda took the opportunity to visit Jerusalem, The Wailing Wall, Church of the Holy Sacrement, built on the site of the cross and also Bethlehem. I don't even recognise these places when shown on TV now, Wailing Wall about the same but more open when I was there, Bethlehem completely unspoilt , a crude stable as it always had been, no frills or religious artifacts, The Church of the Holy Sacrament surrounded by squalor, beggars, the maimed, and only reached by a walk through narrow alleys, now seeing them on TV , must have had a bit of a clear out, but the Church full of the usual con men selling bees wax candles to see the sights, all they did is coat the hand with evil smelling grease no bee had ever seen, and the opulence inside made a mockery of "love thy neighbour" when related to the poverty outside. HOPE THIS DOES NOT UPSET YOU but just report as I saw many years ago!!! Guess I was full of brotherly love after a tour on bombers!!!

18th June a night flight to Shaibah in Iraq 3 hours 45. Shaibah , now there is a place to bring back memories not for me but for the thousands of RAF blokes who served there, when I was an RAF Apprentice I heard more dirty poems about Shaibah and its population than anywhere else, some went on for pages and although not a collector of such memorabilia, remember one that had as it's main item a wheel of very large proportions that continued to revolve against all odds. Another place of sand , from the air very little could be seen as most accommodation was built under ground or should I say the roof of concrete was just above ground level, ventilation was by open slots at ground level, bit like sleeping in a WW2 air raid shelter, situated in Iraq at Lat 30-2349N Long 47-3628 E at 2224ft, has taken me many years to find out just where it was / is, managed it by locating a web site all about the Gulf War , nothing more to say about another sand castle .

19th June Shaibah to Karachi in what is now Pakistan 6 hours 15. After taking off from Shaibah we flew directly to the waters of the Gulf and flew all the way to Karachi as near as possible in the centre of the Gulf, many bad friends either side so instructions were to avoid problems, even did a bit of a "dog leg" at the Straits of Hormuz to stay away from any one's territory. Was quite a peaceful looking scene in those days, lots of small ships ploughing their way along and across, probably smugglers and all manner of evil goings on if we did but know it!!

And so to Karachi itself, part of India then, but now Pakistan, thriving city of many thousands or millions, place that I bought many carpets to bring back to England to help cheer up a rather dark old house Phyll and I were renting.

There were very many carpet makers in the various streets working on looms made from everything imaginable, some used by young children making wonderful patterns with the dyed wool, both hands and feet being used at a rapid pace to insert the wool and move the shuttle. I would shop about for one we wanted to do a room, passage or a hallway, and although most colours were somewhat bright and did clash with others we had, we were glad to be able to cover the floors with some thing soft and warm. Many of the carpets had long wool which made them bulky to carry especially some long ones for the stairs, but the carpet makers were only too pleased to wrap them in sacking for me. Most times the Customs at Lyneham let me through without any payment but on occasion I would be charged some small amount to keep them happy!! The chewing of beetle nut and the continual spitting out of it's bright red juice made the pavement look as if a gang battle had taken place, many were the street side workshops, silver coins hammered thin , cut into strips and soldered into intricate shapes to make the lovely fret work for jewelry, and delightful decorative items. In fact all streets in every Indian city or town I visited had it's crafts men ,

women and children, some carved ivory to make the famous balls within balls, time seemed to have no meaning to the carvers who I was told spent years on a single item, how they lived was a mystery. Apart from the clever ones there was also the cunning ones, just a few of the things they made were, cigarettes in a perfect copy of all English packets and tins which when lit popped and crackled as the dead bugs burst, Phyll was pregnant with our first son and suffered as so many woman do with terrible morning sickness, was told that Philips Milk of Magnesia would help, but none obtainable in England that we could find, bought the largest bottle I could find in India at the Officer's Mess, Dark blue bottle and all the correct labels etc, Phyll took one dose and heaved it straight up, might have been the right bottle but the contents were foul and unknown, apparently it was quite a common practise to bore a hole in the bottom of bottles of all descriptions, whisky, gin , brandy etc the favourites, pour the contents out and fill with anything that looked right and seal the hole in the bottom, I was told that at that time patent laws in India were unknown. A shoe maker told me he could copy any size , style, colour, so with a pattern of Phyll's shoe size ordered a pair of suede shoes as a surprise, was a surprise to us both, Minnie Mouse would have been proud to have worn them , not Phyll, yet without soap they could remove grease and stains from the dirtiest of shorts and shirts , return them the next day looking like new , a large country with a great deal of talent in the common man!!!

20th June Karachi to Dum-Dum Calcutta in India 7 hours 05. I have been asked what this was like, flying out of a war zone and to these peaceful areas. But it was not like that at all. Most places we went were on a war footing. Also I don't think that the local population welcomed us, our money yes, but us no thank you. India was in the throes of becoming independent after many years under the yoke of Britain, Pakistan and Ceylon were also stirring as was Egypt. We landed in Dum Dum (Calcuta) one time to be told that we could not go into town as some workers had had an argument with their foreman and had tossed him into the furnace and shut the door. Another time we received an invite to visit a local Big wig's Palace, nearly got there when a crowd on a rampage filled the streets and our taxi did a U turn and took us back to camp, war in England was never like that!! Instead of landing back at home, each time we landed in enemy territory, well on most days!!

22nd June Dum Dum to Palam in India 4 hours 25. The old city of Delhi, like so many cities in India, narrow streets, too many people and cows, but New Delhi a much cleaner place guess the name tells it all, many administrative departments built I would guess to house the government in a cleaner environment, may be just as crowded now as the old one was years ago, we used both names New Delhi and Palam as our stop off point for this place, not a major junction at that time and not on our normal route. Calcutta

in the East of India was a large city, the RAF base of Dum Dum well known throughout the service, the dum dum bullet came from there, and from the tales I was told much more that was strange and a mystery to western eyes, saw the Indian rope trick once, yes the boy did vanish but always thought there was something a bit iffy about it, if you don't believe it can't happen I suppose. Again the streets red with beetle juice and lined with small workshops in some areas, wonderful brass work made by hand, beaten out of sheets of brass, bought a beautiful rose bowl there on one trip, stolen long after by a staff member of the roadhouse we had, really heavy brass with roses carved around the circumference, these were filled with glass and fired so the glass melted into the cuts and then ground until smooth, coated with silver and fitted with a silver mesh to hold the stems, bought a few different types but all long gone now , probably found a new home years ago with the carved wooden tray, crystal glasses, and they even stole the fez I brought back from Egypt!!!

23rd June Palam to Ratamalana in Ceylon, now Shri Lanka, 8hours. Ceylon , Sri Lanka, was a nice place, called at a number of 'dromes there, Ratmalana, Negombo, a couple of them, our sleeping quarters were straw huts in amongst the coconut plantations, spoilt for me on one trip when I left my case on the bed and went for a shower, found when I returned that it had been stolen so no change of clothes until I could buy some more, found out when I asked the station police that it was quite normal for things to vanish, very light fingered some of them .

Great surf beaches there which we all found very welcome to cool off in the water, no hope of swimming as one minute the sand is dry and the next 10 feet of water, terrific undertow we were very luck we did not get swept out to sea, Africa the next stop!!

A rather nice hotel built on a promontory or maybe it was a linked island, anyhow went there one night and had a game of snooker with the attendant , played quite well but was given a lesson on how to play the game , found out later that the attendant had been the " marker" for Horace Lyndrum , one time world Champion.

24th June Ratamalana to Karachi 8 hours, 25th June Karachi to Shaibah 6hours 40, 25th June (YES THE SAME DAY). One of the things I did notice about India as we flew the length of it to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) from Karachi. That it was covered in trees and where the vast population lived I often wondered, certainly the streets of towns and cities were full , covered in the red stains of beetle juice and cows.

Shaibah to Lydda a night flight of 4hours 20. 26th June we had trouble with the electric's of the flaps and undercarriage so missed a day!!27th June

Lydda to Castel Benito 6hours 40. 28th June Castel Benito to Holmsley South 8hours , and finally on the same day Holmsley South to base at Stoney Cross 15 minutes, all in an aircraft that I had had about ten minutes of this is this and that is that !!

We were now transferred as a crew to Holmsely South, with 246 Squadron, and I started flying again with a F/O Lunn on the 10th July doing 3 engined landings, another gap which could have been ground instruction or being a "dogs body " to my F/E Leader, or even a spot of leave and started flying with F/Lt Poore again on Yorks on the 22nd and again on the 28th doing various training flights, then it was off again on the 29th of July from Holmsley South to Malta , Cairo West, Shaibah , Mauripur (India) Dum Dum and so on back to UK on the 11th of August having flown on 29th and 30th July 1st 2nd 3rd 7th 8th 9th and twice on the 11th August. The reason was that there were so few trained crews and very few York aircraft, so we all had to do a great deal in fact far too much. The logbook of my time with 246 Squadron is presented later.

A York overseas flight was very different from Bomber operations, on bombers our cargo had no opinions or physical wants, just sat and waited to be jetisoned.

We carried mail as well , but our passengers were important, not in rank but in the interest of the service they were . So a completely different style of flying had to be undertaken, "press on regardless" the bomber style was no good for people. Safe and on time was the motto, no risks with bad weather, fly round it, we could not go over because there was no oxygen installed on the 'plane.

From my point of view it was all very strange to start with, clothes for a couple of weeks was required but tropical ones were worn most of the time , so we got into a routine of flying out from UK in our normal uniforms, changed at Malta and left our "blues " there to be cleaned etc and changed back into them on our way home, leaving our tropical shorts shirts etc to be washed, ironed and ready for us next time out. Food was another problem, Malta for example was still on very tight rations and my first taste of goat milk, butter and cheese still a rank memory!! The warning to be very careful what we ate, the sudden change in temperature and humidity took their toll of us all and from memory we ate nothing at all out of our RAF Messes and very frugal in them. We were not able to drink much hard booze, mainly soft drinks and the occasional beer, the fruit was very welcome however and provided it was either skinned or peeled we could eat them, most of us took back to England some fruit each trip for our families, often when we landed back in UK , calls were out for certain fruit mainly bananas for sick children

in London hospitals, something in bananas which helped cure some illnesses, needless to say no one minded giving up whatever we had.

When you and I fly these days we board the 'plane and are quite confident we will arrive where we should, flying on operations we went and came back (hopefully) now we went and went and went and then turned round and came back but it was us doing the wenting and to places that we had never been before and had to land discharge our passengers , sort out the plane , refuel etc , find a bed and food and be ready for the next one in the following day, the first few times were difficult, strange places and people and equipment, and even a brand new crew , all who had done at least one tour but some had done a number, our navigator I remember wore " brothel creeper" suede boots in the tropics, was to my eyes ancient and seemed to disappear between flights into his room, never really got to know him!!!

I had to get out to the aircraft at least an hour before take off to check out things and run up the engines , you will note many 02, 03 04, 2359, times given as take off time so you can see I for one lost a lot of sleep, the rest of the crew were not in bed but sorting out all the charts, weather, flight plans etc , and we often flew twice in a day if needed so apart from the constant changes in climate as we flew hither and thither we were kept busy.

After take off and once we had reached about 8,000ft we could settle down to some hours of straight and level flight, passengers had to be checked, even in those days there were the terrified ones who could not look out of the window,

After a number of trips the whole thing became a boring job with very little excitement, great discomfort because of the climate, lack of food and the desire to get home to my growing family, I really loved the RAF but loved my wife more .

Among the sites seen during this flying over North Africa, ones that are stuck in the memory are the rusting tanks and other vehicles that littered the North African Desert as we flew in and out of Cairo, lots of miles of nothing then a heap of rust etc, all seen as we flew over at 8,000ft.

We as a crew were transferred yet again to the top Transport Command Squadron, 511 at Lyneham who still operate from there to this day. (August 1998). The logbook of my time with 511 Squadron is presented later.

The only highlight during October was the flight the skipper and I did on our own in Lancaster Bomber P 780 (it was used as the squadron spare parts transport) was to fly by my map reading to Prestwick near Liverpool to pick up a parcel and return, clocked up 3hours 30 in a Lancaster. The York was a

nice 'plane to fly couldn't go above 8000ft because we had no oxygen for the passengers and it was not pressurised, really a Lancaster with a different body to take freight or passengers, we even had a very good galley on board but until we were given an ex airgunner to act as steward was little used, don't know what training our chap was given but on the first flight was told on the ground what and when we as the crew would like for our meal. He waited until we were well on our way before puncturing the tins and most of the contents ended in his face or on the ceiling, didn't seem to know about changes of air pressure , but he soon learned!!

There is one trip to Langar mentioned in my log book where we picked up a York for a VIP Flight. We were in York MW100, which had been the first operational York delivered to the RAF. I have read that Langar was an AVRO refurbishment factory, where repairs etc were carried out, so it looks as though MW 100 was "tarted" up there for 24 Squadron VIP flight.

One of the more pleasant jobs we had, even if a bit sad really, was to fly back to England those British troops that had survived the death camps of the Japanese in Burma and else where. We used Freighter Yorks for this with mattresses spread on the floor and female nurses in attendance, the looks of thanks we all got from these sad men was soul touching, all crews involved would have happily got our old bombers out and bombed the bastards to kingdom come, I for one will never forgive them for their cruelty. Returning from one of the later trips we were met by the Squadron C.O. and told to move all our gear into the Waaf's quarters (they had been moved out) get a decent room and then report to the main gate where transport had been laid on, the useless mob of non flying officers had crawled out from under the stones they had been hiding under, while we all risked life and limb, and were now insisting that we as crews were not allowed in the mess in flying kit, even though we had to breakfast at between 4-5am and then go straight out to fly, when we returned late at night no food would be available after 6pm . Our C.O. wouldn't stand for that, he had done at least 90 ops some with the Dam Busters, so we moved all the Squadron items from the mess to our new accomodation, which meant all the silver, billard tables most of the decent armchairs(we could never sit in one because these idle sods were always in them), all the liquor from the bar plus all the glasses and bits and bobs. We had all been paying mess bills but very rarely had been in England, so an even bigger shock was in store for them when they found that their mess bills had sky rocketed.

The day after day of flying from cold damp England to steaming hot and humid India was very wearying and when at the end of February 1946 I was offered the chance to leave the RAF I took it, our son Tony had been born in April shortly before I left, I could have stayed on in The RAF, but long hours of flying and a new wife and baby were not the way to go if life was

going to be at all normal , what I should do for a job I didn't know , but time at home was what I really wanted, it had been a long hard war and I wanted a rest.!! I have been thinking about this part of my time with The Royal Air Force and it seems as if I should explain where possible the duties of the various aircrew members. Starting with the bomber crews, the pilot is the boss whatever his rank,some crews were formed with quite senior ranking officers as non pilot members , this was often caused by the need for senior officers to really find out what happened on operations, often this was of a temporary nature, but it was known for a senior officer to complete a tour with a N.C.O pilot. The pilot made all the decisions in the air and usually on the ground as well, he had to have the respect of his crew and a happy crew always had a father figure for their pilot even though he might not be the oldest member of the crew, fighter pilots could and possibly should be of a less serious nature, most times they only had to look after themselves.

The pilot must have some understanding of all the jobs that the crew carried out, not to any great detail but sufficient to understand when things went wrong, and in an emergency could make the correct decisions if that crew member was unable to do so, his training would take much longer and would start as a pupil pilot on small aircraft , when he got his wings and started his training on twin engine 'planes he would be joined by his navigator and in some cases by the wireless operator, these two crew members would have been carrying out their training else where, and once passed as proficient would have been posted to the conversion unit to await joining a crew, it is possible at this stage that these three crew members could after completing their conversion course, be posted to a squadron flying twin engine aircraft, DC3's. or twin engine light bombers or fighters such as Mosquito's, Beaufighter's, Blenheim's there were many different RAF and USAF twin engined aircraft in service all over the world that this crew could have ended up flying, navigation and wireless equipment was all basically the same in the RAF and no doubt the same applied in the USAF.Assuming that this crew now carries on to four engine conversion, all of the previous training could have been carried out in Canada or South Africa some I understand also completed twin engine training in the USA.Crews formed of Canadian, South African and Australian nationals naturally liked to be all from the same country, I am not sure what happened in other countries but I joined a Canadian crew when they arrived in England because they had no Flight Engineers,I do know that other countries also had the same problem but just who and how much of a problem it was I do not know. So now we have the crew at a 4 engine conversion course some where in England, here the pilot must learn the tricks of flying and landing a large and most likely difficult bomber, having done some initial training with instructors he will now get his crew together and they will complete their training together, While he has been receiving instruction and doing take off's and landings with an all instructor crew,

usually only a pilot and F/E, if going on a cross country he would have both a navigator and wireless operator also from the instruction staff (all would be air crew who had completed at least one tour and told me that it was more scary instructing than doing ops!) the rest of the crew have been likewise receiving instruction. Navigators ,wireless operators and flight engineers would be all flying both day and night being taught and checked for competence in their various jobs, and subject to being passed as suitable would then continue their training as a crew, any member that didn't do their job properly was soon found out and a replacement soon found, our navigator had been passed as ok but on a cross country during our training got us hopelessly lost in the Welsh mountains and the pilot and I, map and beacon read our way home, needless to say he went! The pilot now has his crew and after arriving at a bomber squadron he and his crew are checked out again by the various section leaders, he will now go on two "second dickie " bombing trips to see just what it is all about, standing next to the pilot he will watch what happens all the way out and back, and have that little extra bit of knowledge that his crew hasn't got.

So to complete this long story about the pilot he stands at the front of his crew and leads and guides them in the tasks ahead. He never shows fear nor does his voice ever tremble when in difficult situations, he may be trembling inside but no one would ever guess, a good bomber pilot was a hero unsung, I was lucky I flew with two on operations. The navigator must have an ability with numbers and calculations often carried out under very difficult conditions, many were remustered from pilot training having failed to reach the flying standard required, they made very good navigators because they understood the problems a pilot could have, and could be very quickly given what additional training was required for a navigator. His job simply described would be to get you there and back again, on time and on target, never as simple as that because the bombing routes were always being changed to dodge known hot spots of "flack" and lead the enemy into thinking you were going to one town and then suddenly turn and bomb some where else. His view of the target or for that matter anywhere we went was limited by his position below the pilot facing a blank wall, his instruments consisted of the usual pencils rulers etc. but also fitted were a repeater compass from the gyro-compass unit in the tail, a Gee unit which had a screen and fixed radio stations in England broadcast signals that were projected as curved lines which could give him a fixed position, the gee signal did not reach far into the continent so was of limited use but did help the beginner out and home, H2S was also fitted in a belly blister underneath this was a very primitive form of radar and gave a misty picture of the earth below helpfull if bombing blind and could aid in locating a town and the trusty old sextant, much improved from the sailor's version with a two minute clockwork motor that averaged out the readings over that period so was a bit more accurate, wouldn't do on a yacht would rust up solid in no

time, piles of maps ,charts for everything. Not only did he have to keep up a proper running diary of events, such as aircraft seen to crash or explode any unusual sightings, we saw some of the early German rocket tests on one operation, we didn't know what it was and said so and we weren't told either, changes to targets would be passed to him by the w/op, wind drift had to be regularly checked and whether we had a tail or head wind could effect the time we got to the target, and when we got back home he had to hand in his charts for them to be checked just in case we hadn't been where we were supposed to have been, a very busy member of the crew, perhaps managed to look out the nose on odd occasions but always working and figuring out the next course change. The wireless operator was probable a very frustrated man , he had all this high powered gear and could only use it to receive, except in an emergency which none of us wanted anyhow. Signals were being passed from group headquarters to the squadron in code and where they effected us were passed to those concerned, almost always to the navigator, these could be very sudden and high changes of wind direction as monitored by aircraft ahead of us, changes of routes to avoid a new "flack" post, recalls due to bad conditions over the target or fog closing in on our own 'dromes.

Which meant we might not be able to land properly anywhere in England, 500 to 1000 bombers spread out all over England many crashed with crews killed was not a happy thought!So the w/op spent most of his time listening in , when we started using Master Bombers, (they flew round and round the target during the raid giving instructions to various crews where to bomb and telling those off who ignored him) the w/op got some extra work changing channels as briefed so that the German radio could not block transmissions.Our transmitted signals out were always brief until over friendly land and even then too much chatter from one 'plane could cause trouble for those in real peril, 'planes with injured on board or 'planes so badly damaged that the sooner they could land the better got priority and all crews listened to see if one of their mates was in trouble often a few words of comfort from a friend helped no end, once we started doing daylight operations and could see many miles we could also warn others of enemy action such as flack and fighters, and when we were given the job as "dive bombers" on a couple of raids warn others of bomb bursts and local guns that could be a danger. The Bomb Aimer's (or as the USAF called him The Bombardier) job was to drop the bombs we had carted about the sky and drop them where they would do the most damage, his bomb sight on RAF planes was quite good, needed to be set accurately with wind speed and direction, had a set of switches that could be set so that various bomb bays on the 'plane emptied first once all the settings were put in which also included things like height and temperature, could be others but it is a long time ago , then he directed the pilot to change course a degree or two either way until his sight was on the target and then he pressed the button and a

sudden jolt told us we were a great deal lighter and could set course for home. The Master Bomber made a big difference because he would tell us which coloured markers to bomb on and give us lots of warning as we came in towards the target. Pathfinder Force had arrived at the target with the Master Bomber before we got there, he told them where to drop their markers and which colour to use, they didn't land on the ground but floated on parachutes so the Germans couldn't put them out but they did light "spoof" ones which confused us until the Master Bomber started and then most bombs fell on the target. Some RAF and USAF bombers had a light machine gun in the front nose which the bomb aimer could use, don't think it was much use, we never had one. The only other job that the bomb aimer could do was help the navigator with map reading in daylight and he always called out when we crossed the coast both in and out of Europe and England, at night this showed up as a slightly different colour of grey. The USAF made a big fuss about how their Norden bomb sight was so good, reports I have read since the war seem to discount its accuracy, like most things, a good operator is good whatever rubbish he is given to use!!

Lets face it the Dam Buster's used a sight made from a few sticks of wood and we know what they did. We now come to the Air Gunners we had two one as "tail end charlie" in the rear turret, and another as the mid upper gunner, the rear gunner was considered the top man and he really had the worst position both for comfort and danger, both turrets were fitted with four Browning .303" aircooled machine guns, the turrets were power operated, and the rear gunner usually saw the fighters first particularly at night as they climbed up to get into position the Browning was no match for the fighters cannons so they could keep out of range and bang away until both gun positions were destroyed, then we were sitting ducks. We had two good gunners and just a couple of rounds fired at a distant fighter was enough for him to go else where and find a crew half asleep, we saw this a few times when on daylight raids and cursed them for not attending to their job of survival for the whole crew, some squadrons had much larger losses than others, we reckoned it was not luck but bad training and stupid people who once their bombs had gone thought they were home and dry. Another problem the gunners had and this also effected the bomb aimer was cold they all had electrically heated suits but it could get very cold at night and it made it just that much harder for the gunners to stay awake. On one trip they took our H2S blister out and fitted a mid-under turret, not like the USAF ball turret but more like a small bath tub with a gun mounting, didn't look very comfortable and gave us a gunner we had never met. What a disaster he never stopped seeing fighters from the time we left the ground until we got back, poor chap was probably "flack Happy" That bit of useless gear came out and never went back what they did with the poor gunner I don't know. but he should not have been given a mid-under job a midupper would have kept him in contact with the rest of the crew and perhaps settled

him down, who knows what terrible tales he had to tell, but we didn't want him!! The Flight Engineer usually came from the ground staff, had worked on engines, preferably those fitted in aircraft, many were recruited like I was having been trained by The RAF at Halton Number 1 School of Technical Training, after passing out I had served two or three years on the flight line servicing a large number of different aero-engines so my F/E training could be specific to the engines fitted in the aircraft I should fly in, the course at St Athan in Wales was quite short, and like all the ex-brats found it no problem, my duties were to control the engines at the required speed the pilot decided and adjust boost and RPM so that they were all synchronised and did not "hunt", raising and lowering undercarriage, flaps and bomb doors also were my job, on take off I had to help the pilot hold the throttles open and assist in correcting any swing which could happen with a cross wind and a full bomb load. Every other crew member was strapped in but the F/E had to stand beside the pilot to carry out his job, once off the ground U/G up and flaps retracted, climbing boost and revs set, temperatures checked and on radial engines gills opened or closed to keep the engines at the right temperature.

On water cooled the radiator flaps had to be adjusted for the same reason, a log had to be kept from the moment the engines were started so that a running total of fuel used could be calculated, every change of boost, revs, height and which gear the super charger was in affected fuel consumption. These readings were very important also which fuel tanks were in use so that all tanks could end up over the target holding the same amount of fuel, a full tank with a hole could mean no return to base. As an F/E I never really had enough time for all the jobs, the navigator called on me at times to do star shots with the sextant which I could hang on a hook in the astro-dome above my bank of engine and fuel instruments, there was always something that needed a tweak or a piece of wire to keep it going, and over the target apart from all my usual jobs I had to feed the "window" out of the special chute, some times there were large bundles of leaflets to send down, to let the Germans they had no chance or the invaded ones that things would get better. Before and after a trip I had to check things, although the ground staff never missed a thing perhaps we survived because they were as fussy as we were. My log had to be handed in and any odd things explained so that they could be fixed before we went out again. When ever I had time or if fighter activity was great I would stand in the astro-dome and do my own bit of searching, one night to my amazement within almost arms-reach was a F/W 190 night fighter, I pointed this out to all of the crew and the skipper slowly dropped us a few feet until he was out of sight, the gunners wanted to have a go at him, but the skipper said you can't be sure you will win and we are here to drop bombs!!! The different in the training for the carrying of passengers by those members of the flying crew that transferred from bombers to transport was not so very different except that the "press on

spirit" of bombers was now changed to safety and arrival at the destination on time. Pilots were trained to fly with the comfort of the passengers as of major concern, Navigators now had some visual land marks to help on long flights and with the help of the wireless operator many "fixes" obtained by cross bearings from two or more radio beacons. The war in Europe and with Japan was still on so many of the peace time facilities were still not available but most of southern Europe was conflict free so that flights were in themselves safe from enemy fire. The flight engineer's duties still contained those elements of engine, fuel, and general aircraft overseeing that were needed in bombers, in the early days he was the only member of the crew free to move about during flight no cabin crew were employed, so he was the only contact that the passengers had with the flight crew, and many times his duties required him to reassure passengers who had not flown before , although he also acted as a second pilot, on long flights, ground prepared sandwiches and thermos filled with hot or cold drinks were given to the passengers by the F/E. On freighter aircraft another new duty the F/E had to perform was the checking of the centre of gravity of the load this had to be within very strict limits, because of safety considerations, each item of the load had to have it's centre of gravity worked out and then it's position in the aircraft designated to ensure that the centre of lift and centre of gravity were within limits.

All RAF Yorks of Transport Command were also Royal Mail carriers so that large bags of mail on both freighter and passenger 'planes were carried, there was also a small compartment that could only be entered from the outside situated on the port side near the tail, this was for high security items and was usually filled and emptied by a person from the Consulate, who would also lock it.

Without checking with Phyll, or for that matter anyone else, I applied for release from the Royal Air Force, because I had been commissioned I was able to leave the RAF even though I had signed on as an apprentice for 18 years after the age of 18. Phyll was shocked when I turned up at the home she had started to make for us and told her what I had done, what was I going to do for a job?, how would I earn a living,? none of these things had really mattered to me , I just wanted to be with her and our new baby Tony. My Commanding Officer wanted me to stay in and said I could return at any time before my demobilisation leave ended, on the 27th of April 1946 (the day before our first wedding anniversary) I was given a demob suit, some food and clothing coupons and cleared from the RAF, my leave would finish on the 9th of July 1946 so I had a couple of months to decide what to do with my life and that of my family. Phyllis and I were married on the 28th April 1945, she was released from the WAAFs in November of 1945 and managed after a lot of form filling and chasing up the local council to get a requisitioned house, which she moved into in the early part of 1946. These

houses had been empty for many years were of low standard compared to today's , but ours was a solidly built three bedroom, two rooms and a kitchen down stairs but had only one cold tap in the house, gas lighting and an outside flushing toilet of the design known by young and old as the Thunderbox . I was still flying to India and Ceylon and only managed to get home for the odd night very seldom, so Phyll all on her own with no help from anyone sought out second hand furniture and managed to provide the basic things needed to make a home, Tony arrived on the 13th of April while I was on leave but I had to return to 511 Squadron as soon as all was well with Phyll and Tony, but was home again on the 27th of April for good.

----- Reg Miles

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Biography of Reg Miles

Ex Apprentice No 1 S. of T. T. , R. A. F. , Halton 39th Entry 34 - 67 M. U. s - 27 A/S Bloemspruit South Africa - Lyme Kent, Flight Engineer 432 - 420 Squadrons RCAF, 6 Group Bomber Command, Eastmoor, Tholthorpe, Yorkshire / 242- 246 - 511 Squadrons Transport Command Lyneham, RAF

Chapter 6

Post RAF

My parents called round to this very old, dirty, requisitioned house and found me in my battle dress trousers and very large white flying rollnecked sweater sitting on the floor smoking a "Churchill" cigar(very large and the last of my Indian purchases) cleaning and stopping up holes in the wall of what would be our dining and living room. To say that they were horrified would be putting it mildly, where was their son of whom they were proud? The Flying Officer in the RAF who had been on bombers and regularly flew to India and other foreign parts, gave all that up to do what? I couldn't tell them because I didn't know, just wanted peace and my own family and no more racing about the world. Something would come along I said, my parents were not impressed they had battled for years to get a little bit out of the working class rut, still only out a little way and here was Reg on his way up and just throwing it all away to be at home cleaning up the dirt of years of neglect. After our marriage on each trip to India I bought carpets and other items that would help to furnish a home, after the floors walls and ceilings were washed the carpets gave a nice touch of luxury to the place. In the kitchen was a brick built "copper" this was filled with water, a fire lit under and when hot this water was used for cleaning the house, washing clothes, and once a week for Phyll and I to have a bath, the babies of course got at least one a day. Friday evening was usually "bath night", Phyll had managed to buy an adult size "tin bath" which spent most of it's time hanging on a nail in the back yard, with a fire going well in the back room downstairs, the bath was placed in front and buckets of cold and hot water carried in from the kitchen. Ladies first was always the rule so Phyll could have hers in comfort, when she got out I got in and removed my dirt, now came the reverse trip with the buckets of water, each one tipped outside to run into the drain by the back door, once tried to empty the bath by lifting it up to the window sill and sliding it out, not much luck with that just a lot more water to wipe up. I did eventually install a proper full size bath in the kitchen with the drain passing through the wall and hot water fed from a gas heater and cold from the one cold tap. The whole thing was boxed in with a hinged cover which gave Phyll a decent size work surface when cooking, and fun for the boys to hide in when not in use for either of it's purposes. I

thought I might like to work as a mechanic in a garage, just shows you what an innocent I was, spoke to a garage owner who had looked after Dad's car before the war and asked if I could work there without pay for a couple of weeks to see what it was like. Started a few days later and after a day or so he wanted to pay me, worked there for a few weeks, can't say I thought much of the job or the owner, gave me some wooden boxes with parts of a lorry engine in it and told me to build it up, no instruction manuals so took me a while to sort out what went where and he was not impressed, went out on welding jobs to hotels whose heating boilers had frozen up and cracked, nothing went right and as I unloaded the gear from the truck he threw a heavy spanner at me which just missed, I threw it back and nearly hit him, so he said I was not suitable for his job, not a very good start to civilian life! Next I called in at the Labour Exchange and it was suggested that I should go on a course to become a commercial artist, couldn't draw to save my life so that was out, they had a vacancy for a Trainee Manager for a laundry would I like to try that. Why not I thought, so turned up for an interview by the boss lady and started next day, must learn all the processes she said and put me on a Hoffman Press doing fancy pillow slips, kept coming by every so often and throwing all I had done in the "do it again" bin, all females working there and most old enough to be my mother, put me on the calender, long steam heated rollers that were used to iron sheets and other large items, I was at the back on my own taking things off while two or three women fed them in, of course I got in a muddle and another job hit the dust!! So it was back home and helping Phyll with house cleaning, my father was not impressed and said I must have a job what ever it was and suggested that he could get me a job with the large building firm of which he was a very senior employee. When it came, it was as a painter's labourer (the lowest form of life in the building industry) but I just took it to save any arguments and did my turn of holding the bottom of ladders while the painter did the clever stuff, while doing this in the middle of the local shopping street two RAF officers much junior to me on my old squadron couldn't believe their eyes, told them that good jobs like this were going fast so they'd better get in quick. I had bought a new bicycle, the one that I had bought with the money from my photo job before going into the RAF had been completely destroyed when my uncle Jack was killed on it by a German shell outside Dover. I cycled about Margate going from one painting job to another, the one I most remember was the one at the local brewery, being the lowest on the totem pole I had the job of lighting a fire with wood scraps and making the tea at mid morning and afternoon breaks, got things going just waiting to see how many to make and no one turned up, went out side into the yard and there all the workers were, both brewery and building, lining up for tankards of beer. Told to come and get mine but just did not fancy cold beer for a drink, went in and had my cup of tea, we were there for some time and eventually I was persuaded to give the beer a

try, never tasted anything like it, smooth and warming and just perfect, asked where I could buy some of it, told not to be so silly, this was a special brew made by the brewer for the staff and not on sale anywhere!! I had not taken up the offer by my CO to go back into the RAF, guess time just went by and didn't give it much thought, from a salary of 20 pounds a week I was now earning about 3 (took me about 14 years to get up to that again and it wasn't worth as much when I did) we managed, or at least Phyll did, both of us took extra jobs she did cleaning for the local library and tourist department and also worked in the evenings as a cashier at a large seaside restaurant, later on Phyll worked at a couple of hospitals in the Margate area, I carried out maintenance at the same restaurant and also had a teaching job for the local technical college. My father was talking to the company manager who asked how his son the RAF officer was doing, when told that he was working for the firm as a painter's labourer suggested that there was a need for a fitter to take control of the depot used to store all the machinery used in the company and also large stocks of materials surplus from contracts would I like it? Would I just, right up my alley so after a couple of days I started work at this depot which was on ground adjacent to Manston RAF Base, and in fact my yard was next to the station bomb dump that my father had built just before the war. When I eventually found the yard it looked like a rubbish tip, met by an old man who said he was in charge and who was I. Explained what my job was and found out that he had been there for some time just to help unload and load up the odd lorries that came in from building sites, asked why things were scattered all over the place and he said that he just put things where there was a space, and certainly didn't do any clearing up or sorting out. A number of sheds had been erected and were all full of a jumble of building materials returned from sites, he didn't know what was in any of them and had no intention of finding out, bricks of every shape and colour were stacked in heaps without any order and large stacks of roofing tiles had collapsed, spreading out like the tide to cover other items, with weeds and flowers poking their heads between. Loaded lorries had driven over what looked to the driver empty areas, but were in fact filled with sheets of glass, tins of paint, sanitary fittings, and various strange items returned from sites as not required or perhaps in many cases wrongly ordered, so that a sticky mess of dried paint, broken glass, and unknown fragments covered some areas resembling the appearance of a hastily cleared bomb site. This would not do for me, dotted about amongst this bleak landscape were concrete mixers of all shapes and sizes, and many other rusting hulks that I had no idea what they were, order what was wanted and somewhere to work and store tools in safety. I found a shed that looked as if it might keep out the rain and with the old man's help cleared some space for a bench which was among the multitude of items scattered about the site. One water tap was near the front entrance, I say entrance more like the gates of hell or a test of driver's skill to weave

through the junk piled just where it fell, and without me asking a cup of tea was soon offered, that at least had received top priority. I spent the following week looking at machines, to in the first case find out what they were and to check if they could be made to work, that would be my first job, to get the plant needed on building sites in a fit condition for work. To make matters worse there was no electricity or 'phone connected to the site and very little in the way of anything to help me lift and replace things that were broken, I needed to get things sorted with the boss, calling into head office for my pay on Friday I asked to see him and told him what I needed and was given permission to book anything I wanted with their local supplier and arrange for power and telephone to be connected, the old man would return to his normal work of bricklayer's labourer and I could engage a young man to take his place. So the clean up started, I concentrating on checking and repairing machines and my new helper re-stacking fallen heaps, wheeling away to a corner all the rubbish he found during his efforts, which would eventually be used to fill in some large holes uncovered during this clear up. The first shed I had used was emptied of all the rubbish and made into a small workshop where other benches were installed, the power and telephone were connected, I purchased some items of tools including a complete oxy-acetylene welding and cutting outfit from BOC, which I then had to learn how to use!! A call came for a large number of wheel barrows for a site, most that I had found had splits and cracks in the bodies and all had narrow steel wheels, repairs by welding were hastened and a quantity of wheels with pneumatic tyres were purchased, a coat of paint given from our stocks, all of which turned out to be grey of various shades when mixed together, the site foreman phoned to send transport, who shortly after receipt of the barrows phoned to register his delight in getting what appeared to be a truck load of new equipment. Gradually sheds were emptied, their contents sorted and listed and put away in some sort of order, all stocks of bricks, tiles, screws, nails, plumbing fittings, and all the multitude of items used in the building and construction industry were sorted and listed on stock sheets, these were sent to head office for typing and all site foremen and those people in the drawing, quantity and supply departments given copies, amendments made to these when required. All materials for building work was on licences, which were hard to get and the cause of a great amount of office time and paperwork, my lists helped to overcome some of these delays and gradually most people in the organisation used them to help in planning, they became even more useful when I was able to add separate sheets which gave lists of what machines were held in stock and what their state of readiness was. I was now getting more and more calls from sites asking for my help not only to supply machines and materials but my advice was asked for on the manufacture of items for sites and in many cases I was asked to make thousands of an individual item for the massive tower blocks being built in and around London to house those who had lost their homes

due to enemy bombing. for most of this twelve years we still lived at Tivoli Road in the requisitioned house, much cleaner and more livable after Phyll's ministrations, the wall paper in our bedroom which consisted of large purple parrots on a dark blue background had like the rest of the house been removed and given coats of a more restful colour of paint, there was always plenty of part tins returned from contracts so no problem with supplies! Philip our second son had arrived on the scene about two years after Tony, which gave Phyll. more work with washing and caring for two boys who carried on a constant war with each other and would always try to outdo each other in the speed at which they turned clean clothes into dirty rags. Sheila, Phyll's sister came to stay and had the usual boy friends, mostly American service personnel from Manston, none of which seemed to understand that rationing of everything was still in place in the UK, invited to an evening meal on one occasion the incumbent boyfriend took our family's weekly ration of cheese spread it on our total stock of biscuits and swallowed the lot! Whether it was the same one who broke our settee into fragments one night in a fit of passion I don't know, the remains however did come in useful as our ration of coal for heating had largely been burnt and the settee ended up as fuel the stuffing and covers used to add humus to the starved patch of soil called garden at the back. To help with the family budget Phyll had obtained part time evening work at a large restaurant on the sea front manning the till, she also cleaned the Margate library, and at times the Margate Information centre, she wasn't afraid of hard work but it did and still does seem all wrong that people like her who had done their bit during the war got nothing for their efforts while the stay at home fortune makers still got all the benefits, I noticed this particularly when visiting an aircraft factory in the Midlands, whole families worked in the one factory each one taking home much more than the fighting men did and most seemed to have a fiddle of some sort which enabled them to get the best of every thing regarding food and clothes, some got bombed but most got rich! Susan came along after a further eight years, she was born at home as Phyll had not been happy at the treatment she received at the local maternity hospital and determined not to suffer that again, her brother Peter was performing with a band at a local venue and his wife Jean stayed with us until she had her second child, we even at times had other artists to stay all to help with the family budget. I had changed my cycle for a "Corgi", this was the war surplus parachutist motor bike, dropped with them for quick movements of men, they had a small 125cc two stroke engine, folding seat and handle bars, no instruments of any sort and very basic lights, push start, no gears, and certainly no suspension, the front tyre wore to a point after some miles so that turning on wet or icy roads was fraught with peril, many was the 360s I did on old cobble stones and slick corners. A large metal box was made and fitted and my range of operations grew to sites many miles away from base, it was a cold and slow means of transport, crawling up a

hill with the box on the back filled with heavy tools after an hour or so on the road to be passed with ease by everything on wheels and some even on hoof did not endear me to other road users, who out of pure spite drove near and informed me if I pedalled harder would get along faster. To spend over an hour on the road to get to a site that had called me that they had problems with machinery, only to find as I often did that failure to check the oil in an engine had caused it seize up, the topping up with fresh oil prior to my arrival supposed to fool me, strong words were said by me while I stripped the engine freed the pistons and rings and got it running again. Some cases were even more bizarre, once called to a site two hours away because the small bulldozer would not "go", this was in the middle of winter with ice and snow about, found that the machine had been left after it's day's work in a large puddle of liquid mud, this had frozen overnight and struggle as it may the poor thing could only slip clutches trying to get out of the clutches of the ice, a stern word to the "ganger" to get off his backside in future meant no more silly alarms from that site. On another occasion nearer home I was asked to call at a site because the 14/10 mixer would not mix (14/10 - 14cuft of dry material in and 10 cuft of wet mixed out) It was still operating when I arrived on site to be shown that as the hopper tilted to pour the dry material in it shot straight out the other side, shut it down and had a look at the blades inside the drum, these often got badly worn after months of use, not in this case the drum was full to the brim with rock hard concrete. Again poor or perhaps in this case non existent maintenance, I had issued guide lines to all foremen as I found that certain work methods damaged or caused performance problems with plant, in the case of concrete mixers at the end of a day's work a few shovels of sand or gravel should be placed in the drum and allowed to mix for a few minutes this combined with the liquid cement usually still present from the last mix and made it too weak to set hard, the following day it would be broken up during the first mix. There were a number of these information suggestions most of which I have no memory, one that still remains is the one involving flexible drives used on vibrators to consolidate concrete in shuttering, or formwork, it was common practise to hang the vibrating head over the shuttering and leave it operating while the concrete was poured, the sharp kink in the flexible drive caused the high speed inner drive to cut a hole in the outer casing, this would be fairly large on the inside but often a very small slit on the out side, if this slit became immersed in the concrete the rotary action of the inner drive sucked in liquid concrete which soon set when switched off and the next day no vibrator, more obvious to the operator was the damaged caused if the actual vibrating head was to touch the reinforcing steel bars inside the shuttering, I have had the heads returned to me cut in half after being in contact with the steel. During the 12 years I was employed by Rice and Sons many things happened that are worth repeating, I cannot begin to remember them in any proper order will just tell them as they pop up in my memory, a local garage

owner who's place of business was just up the road from the yard, I bought my petrol from him and we often helped one another out with bits and pieces, he had been the only one who had an independent supply of electricity provided by a single horizontal cylinder glow bulb diesel engine, to start it needed a long heating of the bulb part with an oversize blow lamp, then grasping the spokes of one of the very large fly wheels a heave to start the rotation and followed by more pulling until it fired and continued on it's own, the trick was to let go before you went with it, rather like prop swinging an aircraft engine, his wife helped him to serve petrol, but needed the engine running to supply electricity for the pumps, the odd times when he was too ill to get out of bed I would start the thing for her and so we became friends and swapped ideas about things, he had "come upon" some very cheap metal twist drills and wondered if I would like some they certainly looked good quality but would they cut I asked, we'll give them a go he said and put one in his bench drill stand and tried to drill a hole, no luck must need sharpening, and still no luck, a close examination showed that they were left hand drills were stamped USAAF and no doubt had originated in the USAAF Base at Manston and were made for a DeWalt machine that did a number of operations some of which required left hand drills. The local manager of Rice and Sons had a number of children one of which was a young girl who like so many of her gender rode and had horses, the garden at his house had become too small for her latest horse and as there was quite a bit of open space at the yard now it was tidy he asked if we could manage to find room for it, wasn't very keen but found a space between piles of bricks and partition blocks that could be fenced and space in a shed near by that would do as a tackle store. The young girl turned up with this, to us great hairy beast, and put him away while dad pulled up in his car and took her home. We used to let it out to feed around the yard during the day and never really had any trouble putting it away at night, not that any of us felt very comfortable with it, but it did cause trouble, one day it got it's nose and most of itself jammed in the door way of a shed while it warmed itself on a potbelly stove that was burning to drive out the moisture from stored items, one of us climbed through a window and tried to back it out but it wouldn't budge, only thing to do was push it forward and dodge the backward explosion as it's nose got burnt, it often scratched it's back on stacks of bricks or tiles, our only warning the rumble as thousands of carefully piled ones slowly slid down to cover yards of ground, when burning worm infested wood it loved to put it's hooves into the hot ashes and the long length of pipe we used to move the wood about poured out smoke from it's top end, the horse stood with this in it's mouth and seemed to enjoy the odd smoke. We had a few minor problems with this horse, it got out one day when a stupid lorry driver left the gate open and the young lad I had taken on spent most of the day chasing it over hill and dale until it leapt a fence into a paddock of other horses and charged about until this owner

caught it and insisted on knowing who the owner was. The end for us came when I arrived at the yard one Monday morning to be greeted by a very irate RAF officer, the horse had apparently got out during the weekend and right opposite was the grass runway of Manston Aerodrome, these acres of lush grass were heaven to the horse so in spite of large numbers of service personnel in jeeps and on motor bikes it just cantered madly about preventing the circling aircraft from landing. The main runway at Manston was some miles long, equipped with FIDO and a major airfield during WW2, at this time it was occupied by the USAAF flying Lockheed "Skunk Works" F80 Shooting Stars, Spifires had by legend taken off across the runway it was so wide, the grass runway was used by visiting light aircraft to leave the main runway free for ops. I noted that the officer concerned was a non flier and after he had calmed down suggested that he get a few years in before going off at the mouth to me, but felt sorry for him as no doubt he had been torn off a strip by some other prat in uniform, told him the horse was not mine and mentioned my service number which shut him up, but the horse had to go and so it did. Another morning I arrived to be called over by the next door neighbour, who had a small holding and piggery behind his house, to complain about the noise I had been making late into the previous evening, said he would come over and shut me up if it happened again, told him I wished he had which surprised him. What had happened was I crawled into the drum of a large concrete mixer to check the blades and water feed pipes, it was going out on to a site the next day and the phone call only came in as I locked up the workshop, my men had already gone, knew that most of the mixer was in good condition but wondered if the blades and water pipes had been checked, blades were OK but still a small amount of concrete on the inside of the water pipe, got a hammer and cold chisel from the toolbox and chipped out the bits and pieces, a small pebble just didn't want to move so pushed my finger in to flick it out, the pebble dropped down jamming my finger in and the harder I pulled the more it jammed. The only way I could get out was to hold up the pebble with a piece of wire while I eased my finger out, the tools I had with me were too large, that is why I was banging on the drum hoping someone would come and help me, but no luck and I was going deaf from my hammering. Perhaps the last shovel of sand put in to weaken the cement remaining in the drum had a piece of tie wire in, what a hope but after scrabbling about with my free hand for some time I found a piece, held the pebble up and quickly grabbed my tools and crawled out, the neighbour laughed and would come quick if heard banging late again. Another Monday I arrived at the yard to find the entrance blocked by a very large and dirty Steamroller, no sign of a driver, enquires with neighbours did not help, no note or message on the machine, just parked most tidily across the entrance, walking space only. None of my people knew anything about it and none of us knew how to drive, we checked the tank which had some water in it but no coal or wood,

lit a fire made sure the sight glass was full and when steam started to come out of various holes, pushed and pulled every lever in sight until it moved into the yard, rolled up and down the yard a few times to make our road smooth and put the brake on, the fire was only wood so it soon burnt down and went out. It stay there for a couple of days and then one morning when I got to work it was gone, never did solve the mystery of the vanishing steamroller. While I was having fun and games at work Phyll was doing her best to balance what budget we had, many times when the gas meter was emptied we didn't get any "rebate" only the return of the many foreign coins left over from my trips abroad that we had used to get gas because we were flat broke. Tony and Philip were a great trial being about 5 and 3 years old, she once got them all dressed up in their best white outfits, told them to be good boys and play together while she got dressed in her only decent frock, we were going to my Granny and Grand Dad Miles 50th wedding anniversary party, all the family would be there and poor as we were had to make out we were not. I was on my way home from some job or other and arrived in time to see the two boys playing together in the garden as requested, only they were playing in the heap of soot that the chimney sweep had left the previous day after sweeping our coal fire chimney's!! Poor Phyll all the hard work, no only did she make their outfits, get them clean and looking smart, rushed to get dressed herself, and now had to start all over again, and I turned up dirty as well. We got to the party and everyone said how smart the boys looked, just one more of the miracles she worked. Kids can drive you mad and at other times make you laugh, arriving home from work one day Phyll told me that Tony had put his head into the bath of bleach water while she had been hanging out the clothes, 'What a silly thing to do' I said to him, 'it could burn you and make your hair fall out' With eyes as large as saucers he looked at me and said, ' Is that what you did Daddy' I couldn't keep a straight face nor could Phyll. Returning from a trip to my brother's small pig farm Tony suddenly said 'I know eggs come from chickens Dad, do pigs lay sausages?' always expect the unexpected where children are concerned. Apart from all the house work, looking after our growing family, Phyll always managed to find yet another job to help the budget, with Susan in her pram she pushed her quite a way to clean and tidy the house of the local vet, his wife looking after Susan while she did this, funny thing neither of us complained, just glad that we could feed and clothe us all from week to week. Among the jobs I did as part time extra work, was painting a house that a nurse lived in near the Manston yard, and doing all repairs and maintenance at the same restaurant that Phyll did evening work. This later one was a real learning experience, all equipment and machines had to be checked before the place opened for the summer season and most were completely strange to me. All the kitchen machines had to be cleaned and tested, and what most of them did was a mystery to me but head down and asked a few questions and off I went, the

chipper didn't work I was told, pulled a cover or two off and found that the last one to use it had put in a rock instead of a potato (dissatisfied employee?) cleared that, straightened the blades and OK again, the spud peeler was very slow, found that the abrasive lining was no longer abrasive! new lining ordered and fitted, and so I worked my way through all the catering gear. The manager asked me to look at the revolving entrance doors, had been very stiff at the end of the last season, what did I know about revolving doors, nothing, but there must be a reason, climbed on top and found that the lock nuts that held the door up were loose and had allowed the door to drop so that it dragged on the floor, soon adjusted that and smiles from the manager, he began to think I was a miracle worker, but most of it was just the very uncommon common sense. This restaurant was situated on the land side of the road that ran along the beach, a section that was below high tide mark had a dance floor and entertainments as well as food and drinks served. The floor and walls up to high tide level had been "tanked" with a bitumen coating to prevent sea water damaging the decorations and timber block dance floor, some clever "dicky" had removed some of this timber block dance floor and "tanking" to increase the area used to cater for food and drink patrons, vinyl floor tiles had been stuck over the bare concrete floor that was exposed, at the same level and matching those already installed, but these new ones had no "tanking" underneath. The manager explained that as the tide came in and out the salt water dissolved the adhesive which expanded into a large ulcerous looking lump in the middle of the tiles, ladies with stiletto high heels punctured them when they stood on them and the resulting black goo shot up their legs damaging stockings and dresses. I had a look at the problem and sure enough a number were well and truly ready to "blow their top", dug out those that needed replacing and realised that to put new ones in with adhesive was not the answer, nails would be good but the heads would probably trip people but headless ones might be the answer but into concrete could be a problem, had an old gramophone at home that used the old steel needles, gave that a try and magic no problem the hardened needles went into the concrete easily and held the tiles OK, quick trip to the local gramophone shop got all their old used needles and a few boxes of new ones and just kept an eye on the tiles and as they started to bulge out they came and new ones in, during that summer think I changed the whole lot. I was on call during the evenings and week ends not too many problems, most had been already fixed mainly things broken by staff or customers, the 'chefs' were a funny lot always on their "high horses" about how clever they were and just threw things about if upset, more work for me, the amplifier and microphones at the dances often played up due mainly I think by drunks grabbing the mic. to bellow their inane rubbish. During the summer 'season' Phyll did other work, one of her aunties had a "Boarding house", perhaps the more modern 'bed and breakfast' might convey to readers what it was,

whole families came to Margate and other seaside resorts to spend their summer holidays, the cheapest accommodation for a family being the Boarding House, must be out of the house by about nine thirty and not let back in to the afternoon, these regulations varied, some miserable people stuck to them, but people never went back to them. Phyll's job was to clean and tidy all the bedrooms, change over days, usually Saturday was very hard, most of the houses were big old places with perhaps only one lavatory and bathroom on each floor, some not even that, so chamber pots or 'gusunders' were provided under all beds, hence the commonly used expression used in those days for all things running late "here it is (time) and not a po emptied". How Phyll managed to keep house, look after me and the kids and still go out to work I don't know, no such thing as child minding in those days, we couldn't have afforded it if there had been, must ask her some time how she managed it all!!! The house in Tivoli Road had no electricity, lighting by gas may be romantic but fraught with problems, too much gas pressure or touched when being lit and mantles break, a small hole will send a jet of flame against the glass cover and in winter when the whole house is cold, the glass shatters and people get cut, candles were used to move from room to room, and checking a sleeping baby without dripping candle grease on everything was an art soon learnt. We decorated this old house from top to bottom, never thought to ask for money to pay for things just got on and did it, remember Phyll standing on a chair wallpapering our bedroom just hours before she asked me to go out and phone the midwife as Susan was on the way, we had made up a bed for her in the dining room so no stairs to climb, I was pushed out and told to boil lots of water and get piles of newspaper, think the water boiling job was to shut me up, brave things women, glad it was Phyll and not me going through child birth, I need medical attention if I break a finger nail, guess all men are cowards. Because the house was one of a long row of terrace houses, now known as town houses, houses all joined together, being old and some had been empty all during the war, mice had invaded one or two, we had used traps and got rid of ours but roofs and coal cellars joined, so that migration to the best food source was common. All food was kept in mice proof containers, the only source of food not covered being the layers of fat on the inside of the ancient gas cooker, efforts to get it clean only disturbed the recent deposits. Leaving Phyll sitting beside the fire in the room we used most of the time, I went out to the cold kitchen to make our nightly drink of cocoa, as I lit the gas light I could hear a scrabbling coming from the oven, a mouse was having supper also, blocking the rear vent up with some clothes waiting to be washed I turned on the oven gas, waited for the scrabbling to end and picked up a dead mouse and in triumph took it in to show Phyll threw it on the fire and returned to make our cocoa. The next night a repeat performance was in sight as the next mouse awaited it's fate, on went the gas, open came the door and Reg ended on his back against the wall as the

cooker exploded, with eye brows, eye lashes and moustache singed I staggered into Phyll, no longer the hero just a poor wounded soldier. The previous night the gas for our cocoa had not been lit, tonight it had, when I opened the oven door the gas escaped and was lit by the gas alight on top. Phyll covered my sores with vaseline and I hurried out to get the mouse only to see it disappear behind the vegetable boxes in the larder, using all my force I crushed the box against the wall and another dead one, but of course the milk boiled over so I guess you could say, Reg one, the mice one, a draw. A friend of both Phyll and I when we were at school was Laurie Foat he worked with his father who had a Greengrocer's shop in Eaton Rd, I had been interested in bees when at school and found that Laurie also had an interest and had in fact a number of bee hives. We got together and started to expand the number of hives by breeding and bought quality Queen bees which we introduced after removing the old queens, we had bees in all sorts of places, orchardists welcomed us as pollination of their fruit trees was ensured, growers of many crops wanted our bees on site, this sometimes was a very painful as during transit the hives often moved and many times we travelled with swarms of bees round our heads, hoping that we would arrive on site still with enough to carry out the job in hand.

We experimented with new ideas, the only hive that had been used in England apart from the straw skip was the WBC, this had inner boxes in which the frames fitted, usually two types, honey and brood, and outer sloping ones that gave insulation in the cold months when the bees were in hibernation, we tried out the new style National hives, these were single wall and larger than the WBC (how I remember all this after 50 years, I do not know) The National hive was a copy of hives used in warmer countries such as Australia and South Africa, where the honey flow continued most of the year and hibernation was not needed, our extractor could not handle the bigger National frames and filling by the bees took much longer and in fact frames were often found to be only half full even if the honey flow had been good, they were easier to handle but really not for the small bee keeper who enjoyed the hobby more than the honey.

We also tried out a new floor board which had a fine mesh panel in it, a cover over it was controlled by a thermostat which opened and closed it depending on the temperature, this in theory helped the bees to drive off the moisture from the honey before it was capped. An old wives tale says that your bees know you and you must tell them all about your family particularly births and deaths, whether this is true I don't know but sitting by the entrance to a hive as the sun goes down with crowds of bees at the entrance to the hive all facing inwards fanning their wings madly to drive off the moisture from that day's honey crop is a rather magic experience, the bees ignore you and with your face close to them the sweet smell of clover,

apple or other flowers they have been visiting beats any of man's bottled perfumes.

As winter approached one year, it was obvious that two of our hives were not big enough to survive over the long months ahead, one had been used as a breeding hive for new queens, the other the remnants of one that had swarmed in an orchard miles away and the orchardist had not told us until it was too late to get most of them back. We would need to combine them and as bees are very territorial they couldn't just be put together (one of the two queens must be removed), most of both hives would be killed, there were two normal ways to do this, cover each lot of bees with flour then combine them and by the time they had cleaned all the flour off themselves they would all smell the same, another way was to block up the entrances put many layers of newspaper between the two and wait until the two lots of bees had chewed their way through and hope they would be friends.

Laurie lived over his father's shop which had a flat roof which could be reached from one of Laurie's windows, the combining needed to be watched to see if it was going according to plan, and the bulk of our hives were on land some miles away, the flat roof above the shop was an ideal place, we thought, the hives were set up near one another and a search through Laurie's wife's food cupboard failed to find any flour but a number of half packets of different coloured blanc-mange powder seemed just as good, the lid was removed from one hive and well dusted with powder, the floor taken off the other placed on top and it's roof removed and the remainder of the powder sprinkled in.

Some of the bees took offence at this and gave us both our usual injection of anti- rheumatic treatment (after the number of stings I took should never get any joint problems, perhaps another old wives tale!) we retreated behind the closed windows of Laurie's flat to watch events, all seemed to be going well until Laurie's father suddenly appeared in the room, not a very happy Daddy, bees, all colours of the rainbow were driving his customers away, no one had been stung, but they were landing on everyone and everything and bright orange, red, blue, and even multi coloured bees were not the normal thing seen in shops. After about an hour the panic was over and all the bees had settled down to do what bees do best, hum, and make honey.

Bees like the rest of living things get sick and we sent any suspect ones to Rothamstead Research Institute for analysis. I had been working the bees one weekend and on the Monday morning woke up feeling not too good, turning to Phyll in bed asked if my face was swollen, the look on her face and a sudden withdrawal of breath told me the tale, got out of bed and looked in the mirror, two slits that must have been eyes once, two nose holes

that belonged more to a member of the pig family, the whole lot buried in a red blotched landscape of no sharp edges just fat curves, felt even sicker after seeing that sight. Phyll rang the doctor, (doctors actually came to see the sick in those days) who knew of our family history and at once remarked that it looked like a bee sting, told him we had a hive that we suspected had paralysis and were awaiting the results of tests, sat on my bed for about half an hour finding out all the symptoms of various bee diseases, gave me pills to take, come and see me in ten days, these blue pills got rid of the swelling but seemed to deposit glass chips in my joints, Phyll had to help me move and the pain was worse than the sting, managed to walk with great pain to his surgery after ten days, when I told him of my joints problem, said he should have given me these other pills to dissolve the crystals that would form in my joints.

Went to him once with a very swollen elbow, tennis elbow he said, don't play it I said, showed me his elbow which was just as swollen as mine, got mine playing golf he said, what shall I do I said, don't play golf or tennis for a bit was the answer!! Good doctor always came when asked and never gave you any bull, just one of the old school, straight answers to straight questions and don't go to him if you just wanted a note to stay away from work, I never did, in fact had to argue with him at times when he wanted me to rest, but mutual respect was our way.

At work load was getting greater most self inflicted see a job do it is still my way, and the firm found that if they wanted some thing done and it was possible for me to do it, it got done. The "Corgi" motor bike was just too small for all the tasks expected of me, tried to get a van from the firm, but even old ones were very hard to get after the War, saw an advertisement for a 1928 Austin 7 only 20 quid, borrowed the money from my Dad and went to pick it up, one of the firm's lorries dropped me off at this farm many miles away from home, it was in the back of a barn and sounded a bit rough when started up, farmer said it had been used to carry a full milk churn down to the front gate each day, drove it out to the yard at Manston, the engine rattle getting worse as time went on. Left it there to begin work on it the next day, stripped it right down, found the front seat was a bale of straw, no back seat, when pulled to pieces the small parts just filled a cardboard box, the chassis was two slender bits of channel joined at one end and that had a number of cracks in it, engine and body was all aluminium so very light, Phyll not very impressed when she first saw it, a box of greasy bits and some other bits of tin hanging on the workshop wall. I rebuilt the thing from scratch, crankshaft reground, cylinders rebored, valves and seats refaced, king pins and bushes renewed, any cracks in the chassis or body welded up, new seats, and tyres and tubes, it was a "tourer" open body and need less to say the canopy was missing, I had a new one made by a coach builder, when finished I spray painted it dark blue, and we now had our own motor car to

go about and I had arranged payment by the firm for so much a mile when I used it on the firms business, which in fact covered all our costs of the car and a bit over, the overhaul had been done in the firms time and at their cost, not that they were made aware of it, and wouldn't have minded if they had, for me to be mobile anywhere anytime was what they wanted and now had it.

I could take a decent size tool kit out on repair jobs and even the odd spare part, if they wanted me to do oxy cutting or welding a van or truck had to be available to carry the cylinders and other gear, and the oxy cutting began to become a major part of my work, I had taken on a fitter who stayed at the yard and together with the young bloke I had engaged kept on top of the repairs to machinery while I was out on jobs. A list of all of the metal work jobs I did on site would take pages and strain the old memory but some can never be forgotten for various reasons.

There are three which stick in the memory, Dreamland a very well known and large entertainment park, side shows, scenic railway, ghost house, roller coaster, you name it, Klingers a stocking and tights factory built by Rice and Sons, and The new Margate and district Telephone Exchange also built by Rice's.

I'll start with the last, the telephone exchange, this was a multi storey building with imposing stairs and entrance halls, Italian workers had been brought from Italy to do all the Terraza work to floors and stairs, my first contact with the site was when one of their machines would not start and the local garages couldn't or wouldn't repair it for them, not a very big job to fix it as I remember, but with typical Italian gusto I was treated as if I had saved them from a fate worse than death itself, showed me all their secrets for treating Terraza floors before people were allowed to walk on it, dozens of bottles of milk poured on after it was ground and washed, the fat from the milk sealed the pores in the cement and polish was applied over this.

The interior hand rail supports up the stairs had been concreted in before the Italians started their work, before they applied the final grinding and polishing they wanted the steel core rail for the wooden hand rail fitted, from their previous experience metal filings often landed on their Terraza and caused stains which were hard to remove, all the interior and exterior steel fences and railings had been contracted for by a London based company some 75 miles away by road. Their workmen arrived on site to fit the core rail and spent a couple of weeks drilling and fitting this top rail and returned to London, the manufacturers of the wooden rail itself came to the site to check that this work had been carried out properly, most people don't look at wooden hand rails in multi storey buildings, next time you are in one have a look at the complicated solid wood shapes made to change direction

round corners or up to the next flight, all made from plans and joins that are hard to see. The steel core rail was a mess and phone calls to the London manufactures went un-answered, there was also the question of some hundreds of yards of exterior fancy railings which had to be fitted into holes cut in the Portland Stone capping that was the topping for a wall that curved round and sloped and ended at various entrances on three sides of the building.

The call came in one morning to visit this site and see the site manager, who just happened to be my Father! He showed me the stair problem, the core rail in some cases had been cut short and in others it was too long making the legs fixed into the concrete look like a row of trees, some of the end rolls were all twisted, in fact it was a mess, went back to the yard got oxy gear and other tools told my staff expect me when you see me and ring if you can't cope, the only way was to remove completely the core rail, straighten and check for plumb the supports, and start one end and rectify as I went, finished that part in a week or so, it was OK'd by the handrail people and the Italians who still made a fuss of me and I started to pack up my gear to return to base, that was not on my father's plans, the steel railing manufacturers had been 'sacked', would get no further payments, I would complete the work! 'Thanks Dad I had other jobs to do, ' 'but you don't leave here until the railings are complete', see what happens when you do a good job ? you get more!!

I found that not only had I to get the railings to fit, but had to concrete the legs into the wall leaving the cement a good half inch below the top of the Portland Stone, I then had to come back when the concrete was set and pour melted lead into this space leaving it slightly proud, which I then had to hammer flat using a caulking chisel so that the lead prevented any water from getting at the steel in the wall and causing it to rust. All this was said as if I had been doing this all my life and my own father standing there and saying it, there's family for you.

I started on a long straight section and when concreted in it was straight as a gun barrel, a good start, now for this curved and sloping section, each day was yet another battle with wedging posts upright, cutting and welding, all joins in the rails had to be half lapped, welded and smooth, at last this very long section was finished, ready for the lead. Back to the yard for a coke fired furnace, pouring pots, melting pots, scrap lead, coke and other tools, I needed help with this lead pouring so told my fitter to report to the site the next day and we would make a start, did the straight run first, each hole had to be done in one pour, lead soon gets a skin on it and if stopped half way would not seal properly, things went well until we did a hole that was damp and all hell broke loose, the hot lead turned the dampness to steam the lead sealed the hole, but the steam won and lead shot out covering

both of us with lead spots on face and clothes, none in our eyes thank god, a lesson learnt, back to the yard to make two face masks with thick glass and a frame much like an arc welding mask.

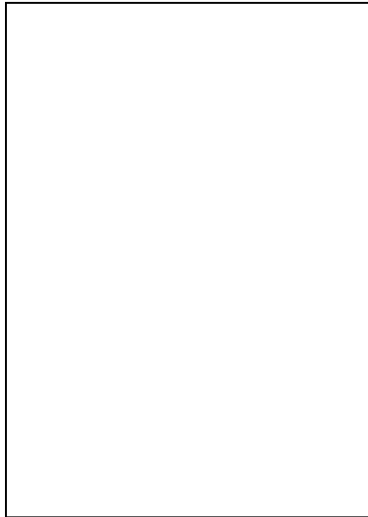
Each hole after that had to be heated with the oxy torch to ensure no moisture was present, winter in England there is always moisture present, and so we poured and heated and caulked our way round to the last post outside the main entrance, heated, checked for moisture, poured, and bang the whole of the dark brick work at the main entrance covered in very pretty sparkling lead spots, who should walk out before we could hide, yes dad, "now you've got a long job picking every bit of lead out", some we removed but like I said earlier it soon gets a skin and goes dark and it was winter with no light so we only spent one day doing the easy seen ones and then back to the yard for a rest!!

Dreamland was a very different job, it was the height of the holiday season and the crowds filled every place of entertainment, Margate was a sea side place and families came from all over southern England for their week or two of fun in the sun. Those businesses that depended on the holiday makers for their lively hood had just three months to make enough to last all year, rain didn't really matter the people came anyhow just spent their money in different places and Dreamland was humming. A very large building had been erected just inside one of the entrances it was about 40 feet high and about a hundred yards square, really only consisted of a corrugated cement and asbestos sheeting clad roof on massive steel supports, the interior filled with side shows and games of chance (very little chance in most cases) and it was always very well patronised, if the sun was out it was a place to get cool and if raining a good shelter, most of the people who ran the side shows paid rent for the site and many managed to find a space in their stall to get their head down when Dreamland was closed for the night. I received a call at home before I even left for the yard to get my Oxy gear and come down to Dreamland to do some cutting, I always had plenty of gas bottles on hand and had purchased very long hoses because of the difficult jobs I was always getting. Arriving at Dreamland I could see this skeleton of a building still smoking from the fire, the foreman met me to say that the owners wanted it cleared away as soon as possible so that trading could start again, but if I made a start a professional in building removal was on his way and he would take over from me. Looking at the structure it was basically a cross with massive compound girder columns at each corner, with again compound steel trusses spanning from column to column, the roofing material had collapsed into the rubbish beneath, but the heavy purlins were all twisted about and had been put under great stress by the heat of the fire. The safest way was to get on top of the building and using boards climb up to the ridges from both sides cutting and dropping the purlins as you went, this would leave the massive truss supported only at

each end, cut through this at one end with great care, and hang on when it dropped, climb up the other side and drop the remaining end of the truss, this could then be cut up into manageable size lumps and carted away, the two columns could then be cut close to ground level and chopped up and after the whole building had been removed a final cutting of the column stumps would make the site use able again. Explained my thoughts to the site foreman and the boss from Dreamland who both agreed that it seemed OK, barriers were put in place and men stationed to prevent anyone entering the area where I was working, ladders erected for me to get up top, but my hoses though long would not reach far enough, so with a bit of a strain got the two heavy cylinders up to the top of the columns and lashed them there, I would leave them in that position until the time came to fell the columns. Up I went, ladders removed and I started cutting away the purlins, each one acted in a different way depending on what the stress was, just had to be careful and not get too close at the final cut, but things went OK and soon the clatter of falling steel and the showers of sparks from the Oxy torch had a crowd of sight see'ers, got the first truss free of purlins and ready to drop one end, when an almighty bang nearly tossed me off the roof, looked round to where the noise had come from and there was the "professional", with his long ladder leaning on the truss, he had cut through one end of the truss and had not cut any of the purlins, dangling by a rope tied to the ladder his torch burning the ladder and the truss hanging by the already under stress purlins. The site foreman rushed to help him down and put out the ladder fire.

I cut my truss end and went round to start on the other end when another loud crash rang through the site, the idiot had cut the same end of another truss and now two were hanging and swinging, told the foreman I was off, let the idiot kill himself but not me, don't worry he said he has scared himself half to death and is going home the job is all yours, I often wonder if I should have thanked the foreman. For a number of days I started at sun up and worked long into the night, balancing on boards and cutting steel, usually woke up in the middle of the night shaking at all the near misses I'd had during the day but just went back to the job in the morning, Phyll was going to the cinema one night with her friend up the road and took a short cut through Dreamland to get to the cinema, saw me up on the roof sparks flying everywhere and just couldn't go any further, got the job finished in the end but nobody ever thanked me and not even a whisper of some extra money, should have asked for some before I started I suppose, just too thick for my own good. Reading this could make people think that I am boasting about how clever I was, I'm afraid the reverse is the case, all of my children have more sense than I, if extra work is undertaken, extra pay is demanded, and received, promotion is given with extra perks for an employee of value. I just did everything asked and in most cases took on extra responsibilities without being asked and it seems never thanked, managers used my work to enhance their own images and gained increases

of salary and position by getting work done under cost and dead lines because they could depend on me, and I the mug just kept on delivering. I obviously didn't realise any of this at the time, probably would have carried on just the same if I had, but I had something that none of them had, satisfaction of doing a good job and over coming difficulties that would have had many asking for help, none of my jobs could ever cause me any embarrassment about my skill as a fitter, my training in the RAF taught me that near enough is not good enough, only one way, the right way, think before you start, it might be too late if you start to think after you have started!! The next job I will describe was again something quite different, a site had been cleared on the industrial area between Margate and Ramsgate for a factory being built to manufacture stockings and tights and owned by Klingers. This factory was a very special construction in reinforced concrete, a triple barrel vault roof with north facing double sealed windows, parking and storage beneath, no columns or supports of any kind on the factory floor. The drawings of the reinforcing steel bars to go into the roof were a maze of interlocking rods, the roof changing in thickness from massive beams running the full length, to just three inches in thickness in the centre of the curves and again getting thicker to support the large double glazed window units. I was given various lists of machinery required and the dates when they should be on site, apart from the usual concrete mixers and scaffolding, steel bar bending tools were wanted to make all the complicated shapes of reinforcing needed, the men on site would start working to the drawings provided many weeks before the actual construction work started. Benches, various benders and cutting gear was delivered to the site but the foreman had trouble actually bending some of the shapes with the machines provided, investigations of machines on the market indicated that there was none that could do the tight and difficult shapes wanted. The architect would not change his design, so the foreman, workers and I put our heads together and worked out a simple device to bend the difficult pieces, made one of the machines and once we were all happy with it made a couple more. Further tales of our working life can be found in the FAMILY CD. Reg



[Wedding photo April 28 1945](#)

----- Reg Miles

<http://www.geocities.com/jkjustin/Milesbio6.html>