

BASIL (HARRY) HARRINGTON 1920 - 2014

Basil was born in 1920 in Southampton. His family had been living in South Africa, where his father made a considerable fortune in the diamond mining business. His father George was also a 100 yards sprint champion. They returned to England in 1914 and lived in Southampton until 1929, when the family moved to Jersey. Here Basil spent his childhood. He was educated at the prestigious Victoria College, graduating in 1937. He had a spell on the groundstaff of the Hampshire Cricket Club back in Southampton but he had always wanted to join the Royal Air Force, so in 1938 he joined up.

At the start of the war Harry was posted to Bomber Command HQ, initially at Uxbridge and then to the underground bunkers at High Wycombe. Here his main duty was to send out the daily list of targets for each raid to the various bomber stations. He volunteered for flying duties but was not released for training until 1941. He started operational flying in September 1943 with 226 Squadron, part of the 2nd Tactical Air Force, as a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner flying in B-25 Mitchell aircraft, based at Swanton Morley in Norfolk. He completed 43 operations over enemy territory, bombing construction and rocket sites, transport hubs and rail junctions in Northern France and Belgium. On 5.2.1944 his aircraft returned to base with the undercarriage damaged and crash-landed on the airfield. He finished his operational tour in May 1944 just before D-Day.

Later in 1944 he became a radio instructor based at Kidlington near Oxford. When the war in Europe ended he volunteered for further flying training in the Far East theatre and was sent to Canada. He was in Vancouver when the war against Japan ended. He had a wonderful trip home, crossing Canada by train to Montreal and embarking in Halifax with only about 50 other servicemen for a luxurious voyage back to England on the New Amsterdam, then flagship of the Holland-America line which was used as a troopship during the war. Unfortunately Basil spent 3 days of the crossing in the sick bay!

Back in England in September 1945 he was sent to a dispersal centre in Yorkshire. He was able to meet his fiancée Hazael who had been under German occupation in Jersey for 5 years. They had been limited to a 10-word Red Cross telegram every six months during the war. Two of the original telegrams have survived. Harry and Hazael were married in a chapel at Methodist Central Hall, Westminster, in October 1945.

Basil left the RAF in late 1945 but his love of the RAF life was too strong, and in 1949 he re-joined the service. He was assigned to recruiting duties based in Southampton and toured the large towns with a mobile cinema and recruiting team throughout South West England 1951-54, including two weeks in his home patch of the Channel Islands in 1952. Part of the team was the large family dog, a six stone St Bernard called 'Raff', who always had a collecting box on his back raising money for charities in the towns the recruiting team were visiting.

Now known to most people as Harry rather than Basil, in 1955 he was posted to Amman, Jordan, as adjutant of 249 Squadron, which flew Vampire and Venom aircraft. The Squadron was commanded by Sqdn. Leader 'Jock' Maitland, who later helped to found the Biggin Hill Air Fair. After the revolution in Iraq in 1956 the squadron was sent to Akrotiri in Cyprus, just as the Suez crisis began. Harry flew over the Suez area as a reconnaissance officer lying in the nose of a Canberra aircraft. It was also the time of the EOKA uprising in Cyprus. After Cyprus Harry served at RAF North Coates in Lincolnshire, RAF Kenley, back to Cyprus at RAF Episkopi (HQ NEAF), then RAF Northolt, Upavon in Wiltshire and a tour in Gibraltar. Harry's last RAF posting was to Innsworth, outside Gloucester. He finally retired in 1975, having served in the RAF for 33 years.

In 2001 Harry was contacted by the Airzoo Museum in Kalamazoo, Michigan, USA, because he had flown operational missions in FV-937, the aircraft known as 'The Gal from Kalamazoo'. This B-25 was paid for with funds raised by employees of the Sutherland Paper Company in Kalamazoo 1942-43 and sent to England under the LendLease programme. The 'Gal' flew 54 sorties with 226 Squadron and also flew with 98 Squadron. Harry was able to provide the Air Zoo with crew photographs and some details of what happened to the aircraft for their display in the museum.

Harry attended the Dunsfold 'Wings and Wheels' Airshow in 2007 and 2008, and was reunited with a Mitchell B-25 operated by the Dutch Air Force, called 'Sarinah'. Now 87 he amazed his family and the Dutch aircrew by scrambling nimbly up the central access stepladder and into the aircraft to remember some old times. He attended the 2nd. Tactical Air Force re-union at Bedford in September 2009 and the dedication of the Bomber Command Memorial in Green Park by H.M. the Queen in June 2012.

Harry's funeral took place on 13th June 2014 in the appropriate setting of the RAF Memorial Chapel at Biggin Hill.