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Pete

(29)

Aircraft flown:- Tiger Moth, Oxford, Wellington III,
Manchester II; Lancaster I & III, Stirling V, York I.

Major RAF operational & training Stations:-

10 ITW, Scarborough; 9 EFTS Ansty; 31 EFTS De Winton, Calgary;
37 SPTS Calgary Airport; 14AFU Ossington; 29 OTU North Luffenham
& Woolfox Lodge; 1654 HCU Wigsley; 106 Sqn Syerston & Methwingham;
5 LFS Syerston; 227 Sqn Balderton; 242 Sqn Merryfield & Oakington.

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'RON'S ROGUES GALLERY'

F/Lt W.R.P.(Pete).Perry,DPC.

Pilot.

Having reached the ripe old age of eighteen on the 25th I volunteered for Aircrew on March 26th 1941. In April that year I was instructed to report to the Recruiting Officer in Plymouth.

(The city had been 'blitzed' the previous night.)

On arrival some six of us were told to be at the Millbay railway station next morning to catch the 0800 to London - our first step towards our Attestation & medicals at Oxford. Four of us, due to living in Cornwall, were unable to get home & back in time so were billeted in "Aggie Weston's" - the Royal Sailors Rest Home in Devonport. Armed with 'chits' for our stay & warrants for the journey we set out walking - no transport due to the previous nights activities.

En-route an unexploded bomb went off & blew one of our party through a shop window! He picked himself up - unhurt - & we went on. When he came to get some change from his hip pocket he found that he had lost the coins through a tear in his trousers caused by the plate glass window!!

We arrived at "Aggies", allocated our rooms & eventually settled in for an early night. About 2230 the sirens went & everyone was ordered to the shelter in the basement. Just as well for after half an hour "Aggies" was hit! Everybody out & along to the nearest street shelter. Ours lasted fifteen minutes before the roof was blown off! Down the road again to the next available - this one being backed by a high wall (said wall being part of Devonport dockyard) behind which was a large ack-ack gun which kept us jumping for the rest of the night.

About 0400 the all clear sounded & the four of us started walking the four miles to the Station. Fires everywhere. The stench was awful. Firemen working strenuously to get the fires under control; ARP & rescue teams amidst the debris recovering people - & bodies. We made slow progress along the blocked roads but got to the Station in time.

I decided then that I would opt for Bomber Command - & get my own back!

(Thanks to two nights bombing & all the phones being out I had been unable to let my Mother know what was happening so I wrote a note to say I was on my way to Oxford for three days. It was delivered in a charred state due to the heat of the blitz . She was worried sick for it was two days before I could contact her.)

The RAF decided that I was warm & reasonably fit so in August I reported to ACRC - Lord's (the Long Room) ; St John's Wood; marching through Regent's Park to the Zoo for meals; kitting out - we were on our way!

Next No 10 ITW at the Grand Hotel, Scarborough- north Sea swimming after PT on the beach. Aldis lamp Morse from the little lighthouse on the edge of the harbour wall.

A short stay at No9 EPTS at Ansty before a week at Heaton Park en route to Canada.

Boarding HMT 'Volendam' at Avonmouth we sailed in company with HMT 'Montcalm' plus two destroyers. I was 'volunteered' for galley duty as we left port. I've never seen so many spuds & carrots!

Day 2 - one destroyer left us .

Day 3 - first storm - very upsetting.

Day 4 - we broke down & wallowed in the strong seas - very, very upsetting! The 'Montcalm' carried on & the destroyer scurried to & fro trying to protect both of us Until it finally went off & we were left on our tod in U-boat alley!

Day 5 - the final storm abated; the fault was fixed & off we went, remaining on our own. God knows the route we took but it took us thirteen days to reach Halifax!

Pleasant memories? One evening during the storm a pianist gave a beautiful recital on a grand piano (lashed to the stage!) which included Gershwin's 'Rhapsody in Blue'.

Disembarking it was straight on to the train for the three day & night journey to Calgary, Alberta. Stopping at Winnipeg we were surprised & delighted to be welcomed by the RFC & RAF Veterans Association to a reception in the enormous main hall of the Station. Refreshments, drinks (soft), girls (heavily chaperoned), Sweet Caporals, music & dancing. A most enjoyable welcome to Canada.

(For some years after the war the 'Vets' organised a Quadrennial re-union in Winnipeg. We were there in '84 & I know that others have been - some more than once.).

39 EPTS at De Winton-Tiger Moths flying from compacted snow with the odd 'Chinook' roaring down from the Rockies bringing the customary "40 below" . (Well that's what the locals said!'

De Winton also witnessed the result of practical 'hangar flying as the picture shows! Quick medical & then airborne again.

Course completed then a spot of leave in Banff plus a few days in Drumheller before going to 37 SPTS at Calgary Airport.

I enjoyed flying 'twins' & also the privilege our our Flight was given - to lead the Calgary Stampede through the city

Canada

in July. (It. also gave us free entry to the Stadium. Spectacular!)

Wings Parade in August then straight back to UK. Boarding the HMT 'Awaten' in Halifax we joined an enormous convoy heavily escorted; calm seas & only eight days to Greenock. That's more like it!

A fortnight in Bournemouth before a short AFU course at Ossington to discover the joys of night flying in Britain. Somewhat different to Canada.

39 OTU at North Luffeham & Woolfox Lodge on Wimpy IIIs then the dreaded 'fitness course' at Morton Hall.

Our AOC in 5 Group, AVM the Honourable Sir Ralph Cochrane, KCB, etc., decided that aircrew were a flabby, unfit bunch & needed toughening up before going to a Squadron. A week at Morton Hall on an assault course should do the trick. We may not have been 100% fit before the course but we sure as hell were not after it! Broken limbs, sprains, strains, crews being broken up. It was discontinued after a couple of months!

To Wigsley for HCU - Manchesters (lovely to fly - empty) then Lancasters.

Finally in June '43 to Syerston & 106 Sqdn. I was first allocated ZN-Z which had been modified to carry the 8000lb cookie. It didn't half give a 'leap' when the bomb was released.

A week or two later a new arrival was sent to do his familiarisation flying in ZN-Z. He announced his return with a somewhat spectacular heavy landing which sent the undercarriage up through the engine nacelle, distorted the fuselage & endamage to such an extent that it was a write-off. His F/E was to collect a VC in six months time!

'Twas an ill wind because I collected the brand new replacement. Very acceptable!

One evening, aircraft parked on the grass due to hardstandings being repaired, we had started up & just about to taxi when the aircraft next to us started three of its engines but instead of the starboard outer the F/E pressed the H type jettison switch!! All the bombs fell off on to the grass. You've seen cartoons of men running in mid-air - I've seen it for real - Ian & his crew didn't wait for the ladder - they were out of that aircraft so fast!! I hastily taxied off as fast as I could. Fortunately the bombs did not go off.

A variety of targets - many in 'Happy Valley' then Italy. Milan a couple of times & Turin. The weather on the latter was the most atrocious that I ever experienced - cu-nims galore (couldn't see them nor get over them; St Elmo's Fire all over the plane; ice being flung all over the place. 'Twas clear over the target. Then routed back over

France & the Bay of Biscay(in daylight!)we were shot up over La Rochelle (we were over 10/10 cloud & the "av'wasm't sure of his position'!) lost our port outer & therefore the rear turret so we flew back at a ^{Low} very level over the Bay!

Autumn - rumours have it that we are to move to RAF Metheringham (RAF where?) still being built in the hinterland of Lincolnshire. So we had a party to say farewell to Syerston BUT instead of the short hop next day we're back on ops - to Modane.

The objective was to close the Mont Genis tunnel which the Germans were using to re-inforce their troops in Italy. Once we'd found the valley (Gin clear; a full moon; a doddle) it was a piece of cake. One major gun plus a few light weapons. We bombed fourth & I only saw three flak bursts. The result announced next day said " Successful raid, tunnel completely blocked. Aircraft missing - nil; casualties - nil; aircraft damaged - one ZN-X (flown by an Aussie pal of mine) hit in the elsan by one of the bursts which caused a redistribution of the contents around the fuselage.

We finally got to Metheringham, R/T call sign 'Coffeestall'. Two friends of mine formed on me & we did a gentle beat-up to announce the Squadrons arrival simultaneously singing the 'Java Jive' over the R/T.

The Station Commander (a newly promoted G/C) was in the Control Tower & did not appreciate our efforts - & said so!!

Metheringham mud - everywhere. If a wheel went off the perimeter track you were stuck. If you slipped off the duck board around your hut you lost a shoe. The dreaded coke stoves were always going out so drying out was difficult. Hot water in the ablutions? Ha! Security? Lots of workmen around, many of them Irish. One rare sunny afternoon we went to briefing - the windows were open, sunlight on the wall map of Europe & the red ribbons showing our route in & out of Berlin that night. Our Squadron Commander broke off his briefing as three heads appeared at the window & in rich accented voices said "Just look at all dem pretty ribbons on dat map"! I don't know for what reason but that trip was cancelled half-an-hour before take-off.

The 'Battle of Berlin' continued with several moments of interest. A ~~plane~~ flew as well on three (Bit slower) & the Gravener fire extinguishers worked well each time. The 'Queen of the Skies' also flew quite well on two (bit lower & slower though). (For demonstration purposes it would fly on one-not loaded though!)

I was awarded the DFC in January & finished my tour in February. Instructing next., but where? Many pilots went to Wimpy OTU's. Whose luck held out? I went back to Syerston instructing on Lancs!

Had my 21st birthday there.

It was interesting at first but I became bored by the autumn & the quickest way back on ops was to do a spell as a Squadron Instructor. I was posted to 227 Sqdn, Balderton for six months & did my stint there. I then collected an all Commissioned all second tour crew (including my first tour F/E, WOP/AG & RG) & then back to 106 Sqdn - still at Metheringham.

It had changed - no mud; the sun shone - & we didn't need the coke stoves so much in April.

Only got three in (including one daylight - I needed some 'green' in my log book!) before VE was upon us. I applied for Yorks in Transport Command but was denied since we were on 'Tiger Force' for the Far East!

Training ^{time} lectures went apace but fortunately WJ came before we went out.

Another try for Yorks & this ^{time} successful - 242 Sqdn (Famous originally for being Douglas ~~Rader~~'s RAF/Canadian Hurricane Sqdn). At least we still had Merlins even if they were tropicalised, & the York was a nice aircraft.

I spent a happy nine months with them at Oakington, flying the UK-Calcutta -Singapore schedule service route. I was introduced to the Monsoon (no worse than my Turin trip!) & extra large spiders & snakes that sought shelter in our huts! Succulent prawns in Karachi - source? the Indus & you know what went in to the many mouths of that river!

Finally to Pull Sutton nr York awaiting de-mob. Lovely city - lovely girls - & the loveliest one became my wife in '48 & in due course we had a son & a daughter.

To 'civvy street'. One of my eyes had gone wonky so flying was out. Too much competition from fully fit chaps who had equal experience.

I joined civil Air Traffic Control starting at Liverpool Airport, then Belfast (Nutts Corner & Sydenham airports) Preston Air Traffic Control Centre; Joint Air Traffic Control Radar unit at RAF Lindholme; back to Preston as Deputy Centre Superintendent & finally to Manchester finishing my career as CAA Chief Officer there.

So the good fortune that was with me in Plymouth back in 1941 had 'hung around' all my life.

I should be so lucky.