

Navigator

BERT ADAMS
467 Squadron

R.A.A.F.

From early September, 1944 until mid January, 1945 I was a navigator with 467 Squadron- one of two Australian squadrons based at Waddington, near Lincoln (no 463 was the other one). Our crew was typical- pilot and wireless operator from Queensland, mid upper gunner from W.A. bomb aimer and rear gunner from Sydney.... all of us aged 20 except for the mid-upper gunner, an old married man of 25. plus our scottish engineer, actually going grey, aged 44.

All 6 Aussies trained (up to the wings stage) in Australia. Our bomber, Syd (a scrubbed pilot) and I were together all the way... 3 months basic navigation at Cootamundra, flying Aero Ansons; 2 months bombing and gunnery at Evans Head, on Fairey Battles; 1 month Astro-navigation at Parkes, on Ansons again. There we became Sergeants and got our Observer's Wings- qualified for navigation, bomb-aiming and gunnery.

We travelled to America on the same ship, expecting to go on to Canada for reconnaissance training, then on to Britain for Coastal Command.... a fairly safe part of the war. However, at San Francisco, plans were changed- we were off to Britain at once into Bomber Command. I did a 5 week Advanced Flying course in North Wales, on Ansons again. Syd did a similar course (for Bomb Aimers) on the Isle of Anglesey, just across the Menai Strait. Thence we went to Lichfield for 3 months Operational training on Vickers Wellingtons. There we had the first two days (and nights in the mess) for voluntary crewing up. Syd and I found our Queensland pair (pilot and wireless operator) mutually impressed,

Then the two gunners, who'd come 1st and 2nd in their advanced course, looking for a good crew picked us!

Next we did about 6 weeks conversion (to 4-engined Short Stirlings) where we were allocated our Engineer completing the crew of 7. Then we did a 4 week Lancaster Finishing School before joining our squadron. The Empire Air Training Scheme worked well, providing a good supply of thoroughly-trained aircrew.

Seven other crews, besides ours, arrived the same day. Five of these were destined not to complete a tour of 30 operations. We were welcomed, En Masse, by the C.O. next day, and he kept our crew back for a private chat, after dismissing the others. The reason: our pilot's elder brother had been his rear gunner ^{on} his two tours! Then he went up with us, checked us out, and 2 days later sent us on our first raid, a short daylight 'trip' to Le Havre, without our pilot doing the customary 'second-dickie' trip with an experienced crew. Our pilot ^{reminded} that the next night. on Damstadt. Then we had our first night 'trip' the following night on Stuttgart.

At that time our Navigation Officer endeavoured to check each navigator's log and chart after each trip, but as he was still going on some trips himself, he co-opted some of his experienced navigators to help the new chums with the more detailed check of their log and chart and advice on the harder decisions to be faced.

Our basic System of navigation consisted of getting accurate winds from good GEE fixes until the enemy jammed our reception soon after crossing enemy territory. Then we compared our winds with those forecast, considered the overall "Met" picture. and

Predicted what winds to use from there to the target for "dead reckoning" This was the critical area for judgement. My helper's name was Scotty (I didn't know his surname). He was nearly 30, and had done about 15 trips. He helped me for a couple of weeks, by which time an assistant navigation officer was appointed and the helper system abandoned. We had by then done 6 trips successfully and were no longer regarded as new chums.

Waddington was peace-time aerodrome. Our barracks were two-storey brick, H shaped, having four dormitories on each floor. Each dormitory had 12 bunks; our crew(except the pilot who was now an officer) down one side, another crew down the other. The navigator of the other crew was Geoff Goodfellow, from Tooraweenah (his father ran the Mountain View Hotel). Geoff reckoned I was the only bloke he^d met in the Airforce who'd even heard of Tooraweenah, let alone been there, as I had. We were good friends, Often playing crib or 500, or sampling a few beers together. Unfortunately they were shot down after two months- it was our 18th trip- about the same for them.

It was customary to give bomber crews 6 days leave after 6 weeks of operations(less if those above them on the leave-list went missing). This happened and we went to London after 11 trips in 5 weeks. While in London, I looked in at the BOOMERANG CLUB just out of curiosity- I had never been inside it. One of the first fellows I saw was Kirk Beddie..... I knew he was with Coastal Command

" Hello Kirk"

" Hello Bert; what are you up to?"

" I'm on Lancs, on 467 squadron, at Waddington. This is our first leave. Done 11 trips. Where are you?"

"At ~~Pembroke Dock (S Wales)~~ ^{PLYMOUTH (No 105 Sqn)}, on Sunderlands. My first leave too, but we have to fly a lot of hours for it (500 I think it was) -takes about 6 months"

" It's a bit of a coincidence, the only two airmen from Mendooran and we both on leave together and both come in here", I said

Kirk replied,: " Yes, but we're not the only two, Vernon Gall is over here in the Airforce too."

I said,: " I don't know him."

" Oh, I forgot," said Kirk. " You may never have seen him. He was in the Bank of NSW, but you were boarding in Mudgee while at High School, then working in Sydney until you got into uniform. So you were only in Mendooran on holidays or on leave. Your family would know him. Hey, there he is now! I will go and bring him over and introduce you."

Kirk walked about 20 yards through the crowd of airmen and sailors, and came walking back with.....

Scotty!.....

Neither of us had mentioned Mendooran, when he was helping me. Some coincidence now!

Scotty was on his second leave and went on to complete his "tour". After the war, when I bought the Sports Depot in Mudgee, he turned up there as a teller at the Bank of NSW. His wife was MLC agent and sold us life insurance on each of our children.