

## The War... Training

Towards the end of 1941, the Air Training Corps was formed. Terry Cooke + I joined at once, and, due to my surname, my number was 10 001, the first in NSW. We trained at Ashfield in Whitehurst's garage (the showroom floor was devoid of new cars by then), and Whitehurst himself was the Squadron leader in charge - he was an ex-pilot from WWI. One of the benefits of joining the A.T.C. was that it gave you an accelerated position on the waiting list for air-crew... then about 8 months. Air-crew enlistment was very popular, I guess partly due to the Battle of Britain publicity + the realization that air power would play a big part in the war. The Japs had shown at Pearl Harbour that planes could sink battleships (putting them out-of-date forever?)

Our training in the A.T.C. consisted mainly of learning Morse Code, aircraft + ship recognition of both Allied and enemy planes + ships. Terry was already an accomplished plane modeller, + he added several to the growing collection hanging from the ceiling... we studied them, learnt their names + tried to recognise them at a distance and in subdued light.

We also did some P.E. The "old" tubby Squadron leader surprised us early in the piece. He got us all to do as many push-ups as we could. No one got beyond 30, several couldn't do 10. He then proceeded to do 50! He had a table-tennis set up + was quite adept, so we all got a go at that. In the city at that time the world doubles champions had an academy in Pitt St. He invited them to put on an exhibition for us, including a set of singles for some of us against one of them. Two of their 'stunts' stood out. Zabados (the older) would say, "it's an easy game, see" while returning shots with his back to Keelan (who was good enough to put the ball onto his bat!). Zabados then turned + Keelan returned several balls using the edge of the bat!

I had a set against Keeton, and despite him 'setting up' chances for my topspin forehand, he won 21-6.

We were promised uniforms in the spring of 1942. But, although we were then on the waiting list for call-up for aircrew, compulsory national military training had begun. In June, Terry was called up for the Army, & sent to North Sydney for Artillery training. As both our birthdays were in February, I enquired why I wasn't called up too. We both realized that 6/- a day with everything found made us rich compared with public service wage of about £3 a week ... paying board & fares.

I was surprised to learn they had me "in a reserved occupation"! After a lot of phone calls and a consultation, that was scrubbed and I was called up for the Army on 3rd July & sent to Dubbo for basic infantry training. 54<sup>th</sup> company of 5<sup>th</sup> Infantry Training Brigade, army number 252661. We did the usual rifle, bayonet, machine-gun, anti-tank gun, mortars, grenades, & gas-drills, parade ground drill (not too much), P.E., route marches ending in the "mad-mile" ... obstacle course ... a bit like we see at Karpooka on T.V. It was a solid month. Then our corporal invited any of us who could drive a truck to step forward ... for a course at Moorebank for a month, likely to have us become a driver in infantry transport. All 30 of us stepped forward! After trying us out in 3-ton Fords, about 20 of us convinced them we could double-shuffle ... (one chap never managed to change from low ... just grind, grind, grind ... so he didn't go.), & we got on the course.

At Moorebank (next to the big Army camp at Liverpool) we spent most days on practical work, especially on Bren gun carriers, including some driving. The gear linkage was a mirror-reverse of normal gear H pattern, ... a bit hard to learn. Gentle curves could be made with the steering wheel which put a bend in the tracks, but for sharper turns, we'd change down 2 gears, hit the accelerator & turn the wheel sharply, which kept one track

The carriers were quite heavy ( $\frac{1}{4}$ " armour all round) & driven by a Ford V8 Mercury engine, so there was a lot of stalling learning to do sharp turns. Some of the heavier work was repairing broken tracks. We also did a lot of learning how to take-apart carburettors, petrol pumps, mend punctures, change wheels etc. Then, each night we had lectures on all sorts of things to do with transport, including how engines worked, clutches, diffs, steering, electrical etc. I managed to skip a few of these night sessions, but still studied the manual they provided. At the end of the month we had a written exam. A couple of lads hadn't learnt to read & write very well, and I guess many of the them hadn't excelled at school. Anyway, I came top of the class & was invited to do a 6-month course at Sydney Tech. College & come out Warrant Officer instructor, age 18! Wartime promotion! I was tempted, since it was well known that the loss rate in Air Crew was high. However, I turned it down, went back to Dubbo for a few more weeks... mostly working on Bren gun carriers, until I got the call-up for air-crew... on 12<sup>th</sup> Sept to Bradfield Park, No 2 I.T.S (Initial Training School).

This is my only photo in Army uniform, taken at "Springfield" Mendocoran, about the end of August '42, probably on a short leave after completing the course at Illoorebank, on the way back to Dubbo.



At Bradfield Park we were 32 course (one a month since the <sup>Empire</sup> Air Training Scheme began early in 1940 to provide aircrew for Britain ... training done in Canada, New Zealand, South Africa & Australia.) Each course was divided into several "flights" graded according to our tested speeds at receiving Morse Code. I was one of 25 in 32D flight, ... I think there were 7 flights. We all wore "goonskins" & berets.

Photo taken on 6/10/42



Front Row: F. Morgan, J. Chiquidden, R. Roeder, C. Dowie.

Second Row: E. Cunningham, R. McCallister, R. Schneider, P. Katherford, L. Davies, J. Beattain, J. Thom

Third Row: J. O'Brien, J. Weekes, K. Burns, A. Marshall, R. Loton, P. Skerman, B. Hoda <sup>Nicholls</sup>

Back Row: M. Coleman, O. Millikan, G. Lumsdaine, G. Benson, P. Brander, D. Placell, A. Drifty.

The course at Bradfield Park lasted about 3 months. There was a lot more Morse Code training, aiming at 20 words/min for us all. There was a lot of introductory training about Theory of Flight, Meteorology, Guns, ammunition, bombs, elementary radio, principles of navigation & bomb aiming. We also got an indication of what further training would occur, & where, for the main categories: - pilots, observers (combined navigation, bomb-aiming & airgunnery), & W/O (wireless operator/gunner).

All got a dental overhaul. I think there were some 'trainee' dentists. I was supposed to get 6 fillings one day. After drilling until only a shell remained on one tooth; in trying to extract it, it broke off & so had to be a cut-job to get the root out. I had that happen 5 more times, about a week apart. No doubt my teeth were chummy. I got a new bigger plate.

Sometime during the course I got a mild case of mumps & was sent to the isolation hospital, Prince Henry, near Malabar.

When I got back I became part of 33 course, but then they decided that part of 33 course would be "rushed" to join 32 course ... more places to fill at the various training venues. Those chosen had to be reasonably fast at Morse Code; I qualified & so rejoined 32 course.

We did a lot of P.E. One of our regular tasks was a run down to Fuller's Bridge & back (uphill). The P.E. instructors gave us recruits a lot of "get a move on you soft ---s". It's true most of the recruits were soft, straight from civvy street, many from desk jobs. But a couple of us had been toughened up by infantry training & told them not to be so tough. The upshot was a challenge who could get to the top first - us or the P.E. instructors. We won, I guess partly because they could have been at the NCO's canteen after work ... we had to be tee-total.

There was a lot of emphasis on marching; we found out why ... we are the main lot to march

in Sydney in support of a War Loan Rally. We marched 12-abreast & on some corners collided with onlookers & barricades due to the tendency of marchers to push outwards on corners.

The food at Bradfield Park was generally fairly good except for their scrambled egg... it was made from egg-powder & found to be so distasteful that garbage bins were overflowing outside the messhuts with discarded scrambled egg. Yet, later, in England we enjoyed scrambled egg made from egg powder. Better cooks maybe?

Towards the end of the course there was a coordination test... perhaps to indicate suitability for pilot training. (The bulk of us young fellows wanted to be pilots.) The test required use of a joystick & rudder pedals to cause a light spot to follow a projected light spot. When our course was briefed to do this I was at the dentist & so had to do it later on my own. I suspect I wasn't given adequate briefing; but the main drawback was because, as a youngster, I had a flivver... you steered it with your feet just the opposite way that rudder pedals work on a plane; it had a handle worked to & fro joined to a crank to the back wheels, like the old railway fettlers 'trikes'. Whatever the reason, I knew I'd performed badly on the test. So when it came to ask for Pilot, Observer or W.A.G., I said observer. The reply was... 'don't you want to be a pilot? Why observer?' So I said that I knew I'd done badly on the coordination test, but I'd done well in Maths & Science at High School, so I thought I'd make a good navigator (the main task of the observer). What I didn't say, if I asked for pilot & they'd said no, you can train as a W.A.G.. They agreed for me to train as an Observer at Air Observers School (No. 1 A.O.S.) at Cootamundra, starting on 10 Dec. '42 after a few days leave.

We arrived by train at Cootamundra in the morning. As I threw my kitbag on top of the truck-load of them, I fainted & woke up in the local hospital. A doctor wanted to operate at once for appenicitis but needed written parental permission as I was under 21. They'd phoned home, but had no way to get written permission in time so he got me to sign it. I think I was delirious for 2 or 3 days. Mum & May had arrived & stayed at a hotel for a few more days. I was treated (lucky for me) with penicillin, which was relatively new in hospitals then. A large needle was taped to a buttock & graduated doses squirted in -- so many cc's, wait a few hours, more cc's, wait, etc. ... it took 24 hours to complete. I had a rubber tube in my side which oozed out grey pus. After 2 weeks I thought I might go home. But I was kept there for 4 weeks. Then sent home still with an open hole in the centre of the scar which had to be dressed & covered ... no swimming. Just as I was leaving they said "You'll have to go and have your appendix out in about 3 months time ... all we've done has been to treat your infection - sort of gangrene." I had 2 weeks sick leave at Mendooran, & did wade in the dam a few times while Beryl & Meggs swam & dived.

This photo was probably taken during that leave in January '43 at Springfield.

The white strip on our berets signified "air crew trainee".



When I returned to Cootamundra, I was put on "Light Duties", in the Navigation Instruments section where they stored, issued, repaired & received maps, dividers, parallel rules, & C.S.C.'s (course & speed calculators). One person could easily handle it so I did almost nothing. In our spare time I helped his little money-maker—making brooches etc from moulded plastic (he got that free)—all he bought were the safety pins embedded in the back.

I actually joined 35 Course for a while and attended some of the lessons, but didn't fly with them. However I did get to attend their passing-out dinner at the Albion Hotel... the lads normally drank there or at the Globe, opposite, on Sat. afternoons. Some of them did literally pass-out due to too much beer.

On 30<sup>th</sup> March '43, I entered Forest Hill RAAF hospital where a big-name RAAF surgeon from Melbourne took out my appendix, kept me there for 2 weeks then I got 2 weeks leave.

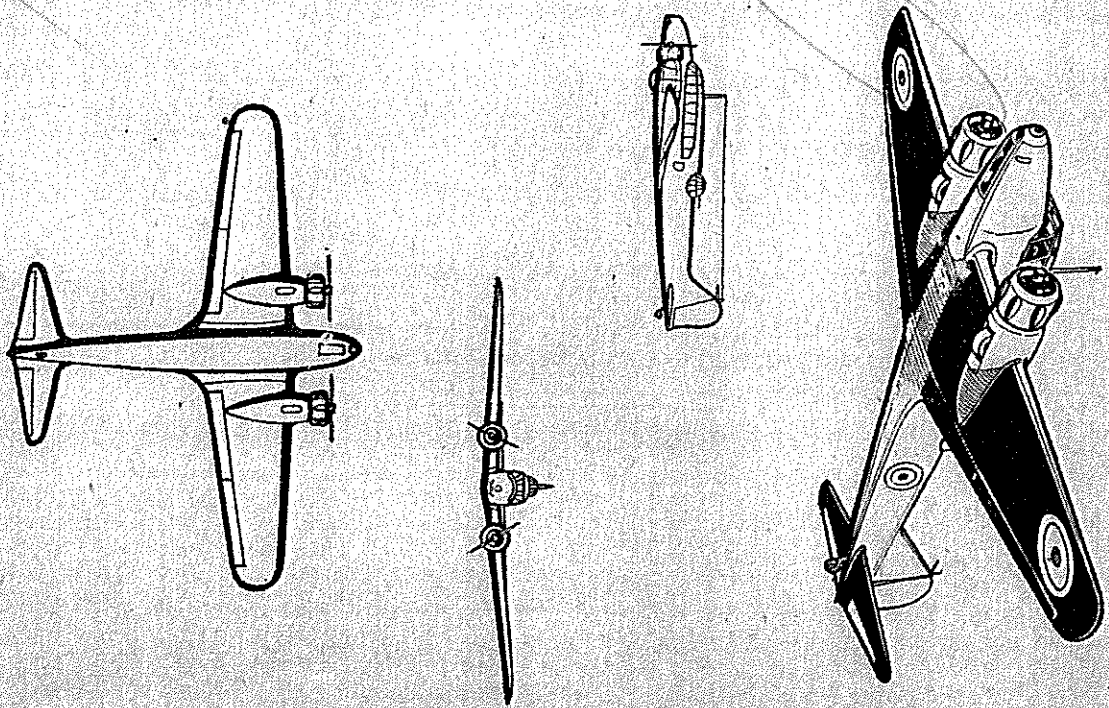
On 29<sup>th</sup> April I got back to Cootamundra and did a few weeks with 37 Course, actually doing my first plane flight over with them on 11<sup>th</sup> May... being air sick twice in 3 hours. I attended their passing-out dinner too, and finally began the Librevore's course 38A.

In the classroom we did a lot of "dry-swim" exercises of plotting air-plots, fixes, wind-finding as well as learning more meteorology, signalling, radio, ship & plane recognition, compasses & map projections, & photography. On any flight over 2 hours I got air sick, as did several others... the inside of the old Ansons actually smelt like vomit, which didn't help. I & a few others got some treatment at sick quarters for motion sickness which entailed sitting (trapped in) in a machine than combined swinging & rotating. It didn't seem to help. The Ansons were not heavy planes, but one day we taxi'd to the far corner (it was only a grass drome in those days), & got bogged as we burned to take off. The 3 trainee navs, the W.O.P. got out & pushed & we got it out.

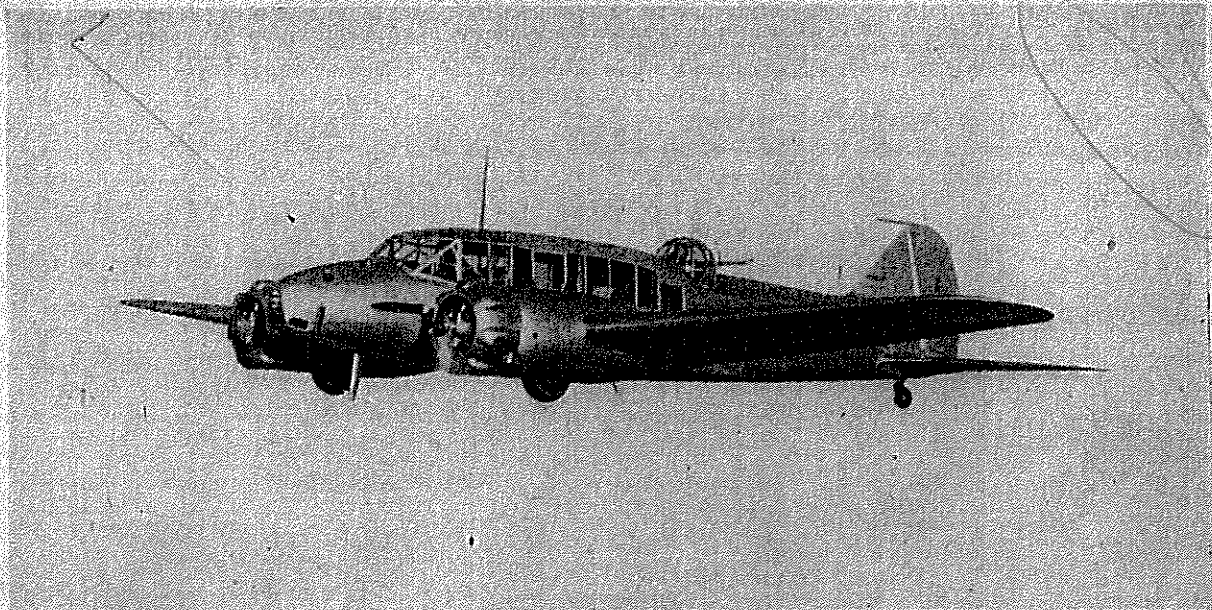


Here's a bit about the Anson from an old book we used to learn aircraft recognition.

AVRO ANSON



SEVENTY-FOUR



AVRO ANSON


Valuable operations against U-boats stand to the credit of the Avro Anson, a coastal reconnaissance machine readily distinguished by its long windowed "greenhouse" cabin. It carries a crew of three, is driven by two 350 h.p. Armstrong Siddeley Cheetah IX air-cooled radial motors and armed with fixed machine-guns in nose and turret. The wooden wings have a span of 56 ft. 6 in.; the fuselage is metal, with fabric covering. The Avro Anson is also used extensively as a training machine. Top speed, 188 m.p.h.

SEVENTY-FIVE

We, later, also flew in Ansons at Parkes doing the Astro-navigation course, and at Llandudrog (North Wales) where we did "Advanced" (not very) flying - really an introduction to navigating in Britain.

At Cootamundra we flew 17 times for a total of 51½ hrs, mostly day-time. Usually 3 trainee nav's went on each flight, doing 1/3 of the actual navigation each. The other two practised map-reading, drift-taking, bearing-taking (with hand-held compass). Our longest trip was to Parafield (S.H.) where we stayed the night. On the way over we flew above cloud nearly all the time, so no map-reading. The W.P. tried to get loop bearings on radio stations but these were often difficult to pick up & notoriously inaccurate. We got lucky - below the only break in the clouds appeared the town of Donald (surrounded by many miles of "nothing" for map reading). This gave us a chance to find the wind-velocity, readjust our course for Parafield & our ETH. We had a passing-out dinner, a weeks leave, and a posting to Evans Head.

Below is the assessment for the A.O.S. course at Cootamundra... maybe a bit faint for copying from my log-book.

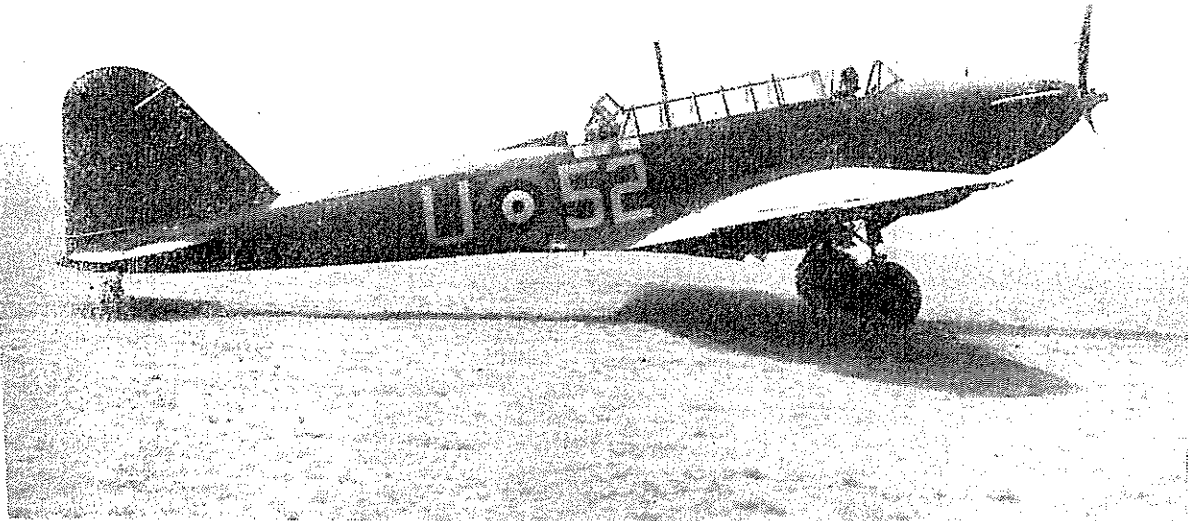
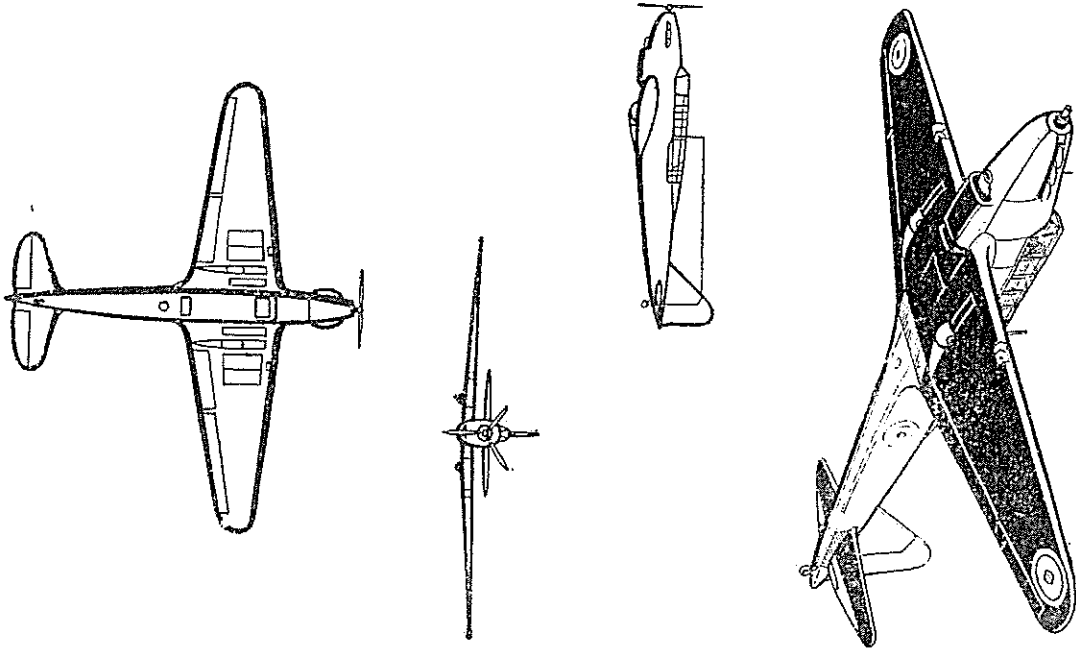
AIR OBSERVERS NAVIGATION COURSE No. 3871					
Held at No. 1 A.O.S.		From 27. 5. 43		To 19. 8. 43	
Subjects.	Marks.		Flying Times on Course.		
	Possible.	Obtained.	Type of A/Craft.	Day.	Night.
<del>D/R</del> PLOT	150	122	ANSON	42.10	9.05
D.R. Navigation	150	129			
Compasses and Instr.	150	118			
D.P. and W.T.	50	44			
Maps and Charts	100	90			
Meteorology	150	123			
Photography	100	91			
Reconnaissance	100	68			
Signals	50	40			
A/Craft. Recon.	50	50			
Shg. Recon.	50	39			
Practical Nav.	200	154			
" Photo.	100	90	1231 Total Marks Obtained % 83.1%		
" Recce.	100	73	Remarks <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Passed <input type="checkbox"/> Failed		
Date 19. 8. 43.		 Chief Instructor.			

On 20<sup>th</sup> Aug. '42 we arrived by train at Casino, then  
RAF transport lorry to Evans Head, site of No 1 B.A.G.S.  
(Bombing & Gunnery School). We did a lot of classroom  
work on bomb-sights, bomb construction, and, later  
on air-to-air & air-to-ground gunnery - & the deflection  
problem & operation of the Vickers Gas operated machine gun.  
Our flying was done in Fairey Battle planes, some of which  
had survived the retreat from France (many didn't, as  
they were no match for Me 109's). Although the Coxswain  
lay on the floor with his face just behind the radiator  
when bombing, getting hot glycol fumes, I was never  
sick in them. Others were who hadn't been sick in  
Ansons. For a typical bombing exercise we carried  
up to 8 practice bombs, dropped in separate runs  
on a patch of sand at the bombing range where  
our error could be gauged & recorded. Before  
bombing, we'd use the drift recorder in 3 directions  
to find the wind to set on the bomb-sight. If our  
wind was wrong we'd get a bigger error than  
otherwise. My average error for 131 bombs was 123 yards  
although this included 4s from low level where the errors  
were smaller. I did only one night exercise with 3 bombs  
averaging 74 yards - better than day-time. Total flying  
time for bomb-aiming was 60½ hours for 19 flights.

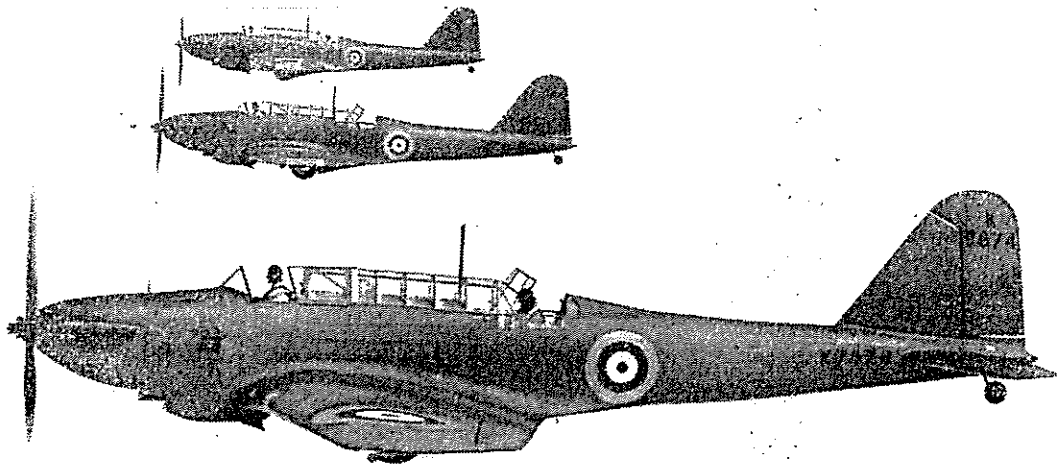
For air-gunnery we would dip the .303 bullet heads  
in paint, load them into circular drum magazines and  
shoot at drogues towed by another Battle. Four different  
gunners, using different coloured paint, could fire at the same  
drogue before it was dropped & the number of hits  
recorded for each colour. The last of the 4 would often  
be shouted a mock dog-fight with the drogue-tower after  
he'd dropped the drogue. It usually included a loop the loop.  
The worst part of gunnery was cleaning the paint out of the  
magazines. I reckon my deafness may be due to the 1156  
rounds fired with left forearm below the barrel, cheek  
alongside the breech-block of the gun mounted in the open  
rear cockpit on a spigot. My best result was 22% of 200 rounds,  
worst 0% of 86 rounds (my first try) & overall average about 4%.  
I didn't find it easy to allow the proper deflection.

*This is a bit about the Fairey Battle, from the same old aircraft-recognition book.*

FAIREY BATTLE



BATTLE



FAIREY BATTLE

This well-known medium bomber, which won an early reputation on the Western Front, has a distinctive feature in its long cockpit enclosure, terminating in the rear gunner's position. A second machine-gun is situated in the starboard wing. Fuselage is slim and oval in section and the sharply tapering wings have a span of 54 feet. Power is provided by a 1,030 h.p. Rolls-Royce Merlin II or III engine giving a top speed of 257 m.p.h. and a range of 1,000 miles.

We left Evans Head on 10<sup>th</sup> Oct, (no leave) and arrived at Parkes on the 11<sup>th</sup>, for a 1 month astro-nav. course, I.H.N.S. (AirNav. School): I think we were all promoted to L.H.C. after Cootamundra, getting (I think) an extra 6d a day. When we pass out at Parkes most of us will become Sergeants, some Officers and we'll get our big O wing (O for observer), a sergeants pay goes up to 10/- a day.

Most of our days are spent in a classroom. We only did 6 flights (4 at night) totalling 20 hrs, in Ansons again. There was a lot to learn, including the names of the brightest stars in the Southern skies. The bubble sextants we used had a manual averaging mechanism. You turned the knob until the sun (or star) filled the bubble, pulled the trigger (back to zero) & did it again & again ... I think 10 times, then read the average of your 10 sights ... and in the air took the time at start and end, to the second (for most of us the first time we'd used a watch with a second hand).

We began taking ground sights (so we knew where we were!) & ended up doing 92 of these on stars, the sun & a few on the moon. Our first "moving" sights were from the back of a truck on the smoothest, straightest part of the road Parkes to Forbes ... nice bitumen for those days. Every 4 sights took 2 pages of graph paper & calculations, & for each one a position line drawn and error calculated. To keep the bubble centred & steady there needs to be ~~no~~ no acceleration or change of direction, so the back of lorry shots were rather inaccurate ... and we had to calculate our position on the road to find our error. I still have 2 science graph books full of the working we did at Parkes as well as a Sight Log Book with all the details recorded, including those we did later in Wellingtons ... all signed for & certified correct.

During our 6 air flights I took 31 star shots, 7 sun, 3 moon and 1 planet, overall averaging about 5 miles error.

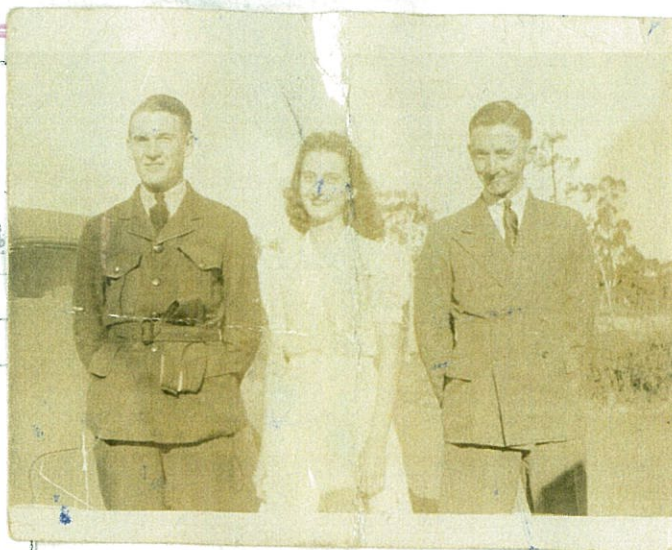
For air shots the plane needs to be kept straight & level with speed constant ... later with autopilot in Wellingtons we got better accuracy.

All those ground shots had to be done in our "spare" time, yet we were in the classroom all day  $6\frac{1}{2}$  days a week except when flying. The peacetime course of 6 months had been compressed into 1 month. We had Saturday afternoon free & our instructor said he expected none of us to be sober by sundown. There was a written exam at the end of the month & I did well. I was made sergeant. I we went straight to Bradfield Park again on 11<sup>th</sup> Nov. '43 to await embarkation. I think we had a few days leave, then sailed on the SS MT Vernon on 26<sup>th</sup>. It was an American troop ship with 600 of us RAAF & a lot of wounded/sick Yank soldiers who'd seen a hard time in the Pacific. We didn't see much of them. We were all in one hold, 4-tier banks, with only narrow aisles between, portholes covered at night & no lights allowed as well. Luckily, we had a lad who played the saxophone well, so each night we'd have a few hours of songs before sleep-time.

The Pacific Ocean was fairly calm for about 10 days, we got our sea legs I think, because we then ran into 3 days of stormy weather (there were logs from the storms floating in San Francisco harbour when we arrived), but few of us were seasick. It was 10<sup>th</sup> Dec. '43.

When we docked all our sea-kit bags were unloaded and the 60 of us observers, who'd been booked for Canada to do a Reconnaissance course there, were told they'd changed their plans for us, so we had to load our kit bags onto a truck. Then they asked for volunteers to accompany the truck & load their onto the train there... promising that the volunteers would be into town ahead of the others. We'd heard of the "Top of the Mark" Hopkins hotel & agreed we'd all meet there. We volunteers, were an hour later than the rest & when we got there they'd run out of all beer except Mexican, and it was worse apparently than American (which was sweet & fizzy). The real disappointment was missing the trip to Canada with the safe prospect of patrols in long-range Liberators over the Atlantic, but instead destined for Bomber Command.

No. ....	Air Observers Advanced Navigation Course.
Held at ...	I.A.N.S.
Period of Course	10/10/43 - 11/11/43
Type of ...	Day Night
1/ton	7.50 12.30
Remarks: ...	Passed
Date: 11/11/43	Chief Instructor
AVERAGE ERROR	AIR 6.1 GROUND 2.8
NO. WORK TAKEN	42 104
NO. COMMANDS	Astro NAVIGATOR
	Chief Instructor No. 1 AIR ...



October, '43.

Bert, Beryl & Meggs, just after completion of course at I.B.A.G.S.

Evans Head ... on leave before going to I.A.N.S. at Parkes.

In San Francisco we spent the night in a Transit Camp called Fort McDowell. The next day I bought a new watch with sweep second-hand, as we were told (before we sailed) that there was not enough issue watches in England for all Navigators. We didn't have much time for sightseeing, saw the Golden Gate, Alcatraz & crossed the Oakland bridge to board the Southern Pacific train at Oakland on 11<sup>th</sup> Dec. It was a troop train, but with pullman cars like we'd seen in movies ... aisle in the middle & little compartments to seat 4, but only 3 occupants, because at night a Negro porter pulled down an upper bunk for 1, & converted the lower seats & table to a double bed ... he put on the sheets & blankets too. We all chipped in at New York & gave him a decent tip. There were steam pipes below the seats which worked well, except for the top bunk where I slept ... on most mornings there were icicles hanging from the roof from my condensed breath.



Our train rarely stopped for us to get off - it was often shunted on to a side track to allow passenger &/or freight trains to pass.

This is one such diesel Streamliner express at Denver, about to leave for Chicago.

We were allowed off at Denver for 2 hours. I stopped

at a chemist shop which also sold watches and asked if they could fix my new watch which had stopped after 1 day! The man fixed it in a few minutes with a dab of oil I think. He didn't want any payment, but said he'd like an Australia kangaroo penny. I gave him the best I had. He thought that too generous! & came forth with a gift of a leather wallet ... generous American.

As a group of us were walking back to the train a civilian noticed our little AUSTRALIA strips on our shoulders and said to us. "Say, boys, I didn't know AUSTRALIA was on our side in the war." He was keen then to ask us all where in Australia we were from, a bit about our training & the boat trip.

Americans cooked our meals, which were then brought through the carriages by rotating teams of volunteers. For each meal we got a big stainless steel "tray" of 5 compartments; if it was lunch we'd likely get a ladle of meat in one, a ladle of vegetables in each of 3 spaces, a ladle of sweets in the last & then a ladle of what we reckoned was plum jam spread over the whole lot! But it was nice food.

At Chicago we stopped for about an hour in a huge marshalling yard several tracks away from a platform. As there was snow on the ground most of us got out to have a snow-fight (I'd never seen snow). We soon got back in the train ... it was  $-30^{\circ}$  outside, & a chilly wind!



On the train, as on the boat, we spent a lot of the daylight time playing cards, mostly pontoon for money but sometimes 500 for fun. Pontoon is a bit like Blackjack, but fairer to the non-banker players, and I think allows a bit more judgement & maybe skill. On the train we put the limit bet up to 25c (from 2/-), which meant the maximum win possible after double & redouble, getting 5 under 21, which pays double, for \$8 win... although that rarely happened.

At New York we went to a Transit Camp, Fort Slocum on 19<sup>th</sup> Dec. We had 2 days free in the city. I can't remember much that I did besides going to the top of the Empire State building, going to an ice hockey match at Madison Square Garden, (I hadn't realized what a rough game it was) sitting so high & far from the rink that I couldn't see where the puck flew to when a shot missed the net, and having a leisurely drinking session - their beer seemed light & fizzy - at Jack Dempsey's Spagetti Bar. We tried the spaghetti... I'd only ever had it from tins with tomato sauce, but there, it was just a big plateful of boiled spaghetti with hard dry, grated cheese in a shaker... no ketchup either.

From Fort Slocum we were taken to the harbour & loaded aboard the Ile de France on 22<sup>nd</sup> Dec. It wasn't a very big troopship, but was stacked with American Army men going to U.K. ready for the invasion in June. Our lot was crammed into a cramped hold (?) below water-level, near the stern... the sides were quite sloped; the only access to the showers & toilets on the deck above us was up 2 vertical ladders & through round waterproof doors (if closed) in the roof.

And they had a plumbing problem with that bathroom, the toilets had overflowed onto the floor... we had to paddle through a couple of inches of watery muck to up more stairs to another bathroom. We were not happy, especially when they did a Boat Drill next day & it took our lot 2 hours to get up on deck.

Still we sailed on the morning of Xmas Eve, got as far as the Statue of Liberty, where the ship broke down - engine trouble, - and was towed back. Eventually, we were fed sandwiches about 9 p.m. The next morning they said we could wait on board for a meal (sometime) and get paid, or go off to the city without either, where there would, maybe, be American civilians willing to take us home for Xmas Dinner. We did that and a nice man Mr. Richie took 3 of us to his home in Mt Vernon.

We got there about 1 p.m., found the lounge room beautifully decorated for Xmas, a tree lit up, and drinks offered round.

We were hungry & wondered when the dinner would begin.

But the talking and sipping continued until about 7 p.m. when we sat down to a sumptuous meal, he carved the turkey, we had second helpings & they remarked that we had good appetites. He took us back to Fort Glocum & arranged to meet us at his factory on the 27<sup>th</sup>.



Mr. Richies home

in Mt Vernon, N.Y.

His factory, among other things, made good quality handkerchiefs. He presented each of us with  $\frac{1}{2}$  dozen very nice ones, then took us to a businessmen's club where we had a few drinks ... we weren't allowed to buy ... it was all paid by the member himself signing a chit ... no cash appeared. He took us back to Fort Stocum for the night and we had 3 more days to wander about New York, spend what little money we had left; I think I went to a cinema or two, but can't remember the films I saw.

On New Year's Eve we were loaded aboard the Queen Elizabeth which had been converted to a troop ship earlier in the war ... some of the cabins had been finished, other parts not ... which allowed for even more bunks for troops. We got a double cabin with bathroom ... each 6' of wall had 3-tier bunks so 18 of us fitted in the cabin. We found that on the 3 (I think) open decks where there was a walkway about 10' wide all round between the rail & cabins walls that they had 3-tier bunks bolted to the cabin walls and U.S. Army men used them to sleep in 12 hour double shifts. I heard that they put over 20000 troops aboard. We went to big dining rooms for a meal twice a day. It took 4 hours for the first meal, a clean up, then 4 hours for the second meal. When it came to Boat Drill all the decks were crammed, all the big wide staircases & still many in corridors. Big fast ships like the Queens travelled alone relying on their speed for safety, cargo ships went in convoys at the speed of the slowest ship, escorted by the Navy & shepherded by long-range aircraft. A couple of days out we were told

that they thought there was a U-boat pack waiting in mid-Atlantic, so this ship was going to divert well North - up towards Iceland, at maximum speed. They told us to put on warm clothes as they would turn off the cabin heating to get more heat for the engines! One of the crew told us at Greenock, later, that they got to about 40 knots.

The Atlantic was fairly rough & all the rails seemed to be occupied by seasick Americans, but our 2 weeks on the Pacific apparently cured us. We spent most of the time playing cards - the pontoon games were now lowered to a 2c limit. Anyone who'd managed to retain a few dollars could get into crap games (dice) which the Americans played a lot of.

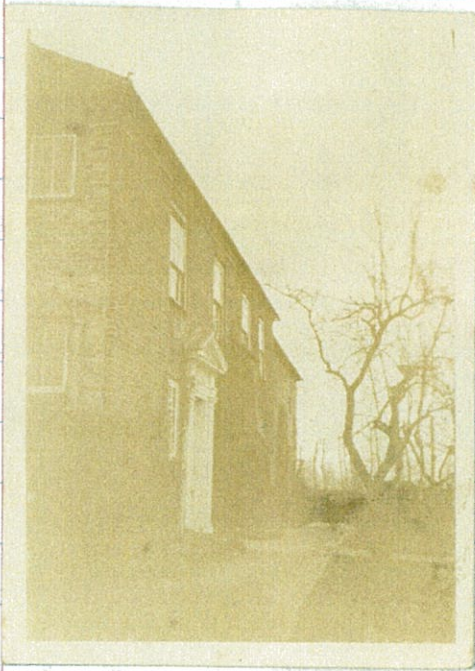
We actually sailed from New York on the morning of New Years Day, and arrived at Greenock, Scotland, near Glasgow, on 7<sup>th</sup> Jan. Several of the crew were Australians, and one of them took a few of us for a tour of parts of the ship not normally open to passengers. We climbed up inside the mast on narrow steps to, I guess, the crow's-nest... it was so high as to be scary even though it only swayed a little, being anchored. He showed us a big gun near the bow... about 6" I think, and maybe 40' above the water. He said that on a previous crossing ploughing through big waves that the previous gun had been torn from its mountings (bolts about 2" thick). We saw the kitchens & engines... it was great.

By nightfall we'd been loaded onto a train which arrived next morning at Brighton where the RNAF had taken over 2 of the big hotels on the waterfront - the Grand & the Metropole, both about 8 floors high.

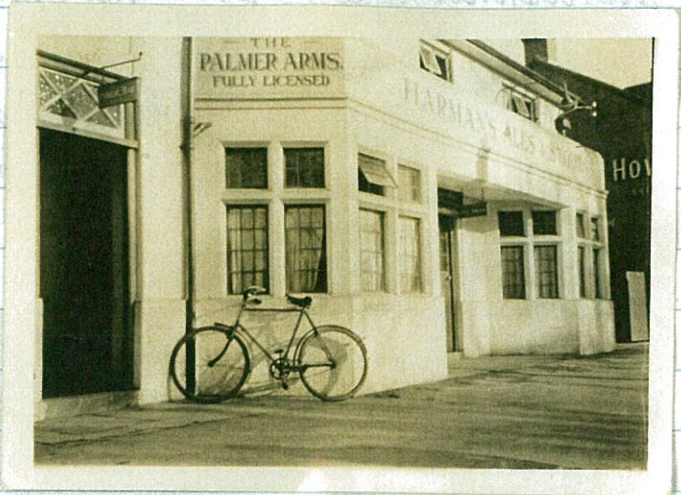
We stayed at Brighton, No. 11 P.D.R.C, until 21<sup>st</sup> Jan. There were some lessons, a chance to begin learning the main stars in the Northern Hemisphere - even on cloudy nights we could make use of a planisphere to learn the names & relative positions of those stars. I guess they consulted our records & maybe our log-books, but here they decided who would be navigator, who bomb-aimer, which pilots would go to Bomber Command & which to Fighter or other smaller planes. Sid Payne who'd trained at Cootamundra with me after earlier doing EFTS at Narromine and being 'scrubbed' during SFTS at Urquinty, became a bomb-aimer & I a navigator.

However, the first thing that happened after we got to Brighton was to be sent on leave for a few days. They had an arrangement called the Lady Ryder Scheme, where new arrivals could go to a private home as a guest for a week. My hostess was Mrs Adams, who had a nice house (modernised internally), called Huntercombe Farmhouse, Huntercombe Lane, Taplow, Buckinghamshire, not very far from Windsor. She made me feel at home but had to be absent almost the whole week - she gave the doorkey & said to help myself & recommended I visit Margaret Vynes, an Australian actress, who lived at Dorney Village, between Taplow & Windsor, & who was reputed to like having an Australian visitor. I did that & also met her husband Hugh Marlowe, a handsome English actor (he played *The Saint* in a film). They took me to the nearby Pub for a drink & yarn. While there, David Niven turned up in uniform (Army Captain) just back from North Africa on leave, with a case of brandy.

I guess I was pretty much ignored as they'd been friends for years, & once they started on the brandy I took my leave. While staying at Mrs Adams' place I visited Eton College and Windsor Castle.



Mrs Adams' house,  
Huntercombe Farmhouse,  
Taplow, Bucks.



The Pub next door to  
where Margaret Vynner  
& Hugh Williams lived  
in Dorney Village, between  
Taplow & Windsor.



Eton College



The Chapel

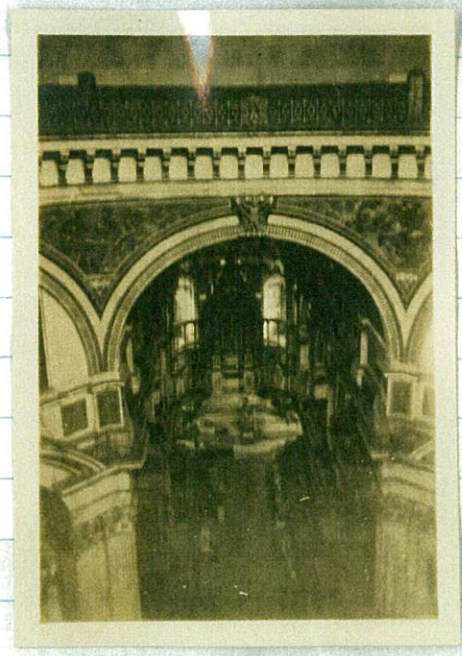
During my first visit to London, Jan '44.



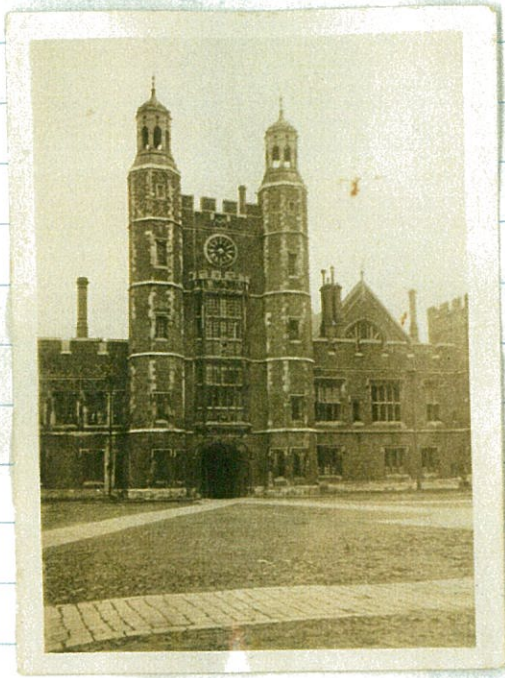
Houses of Parliament, and  
Big Ben



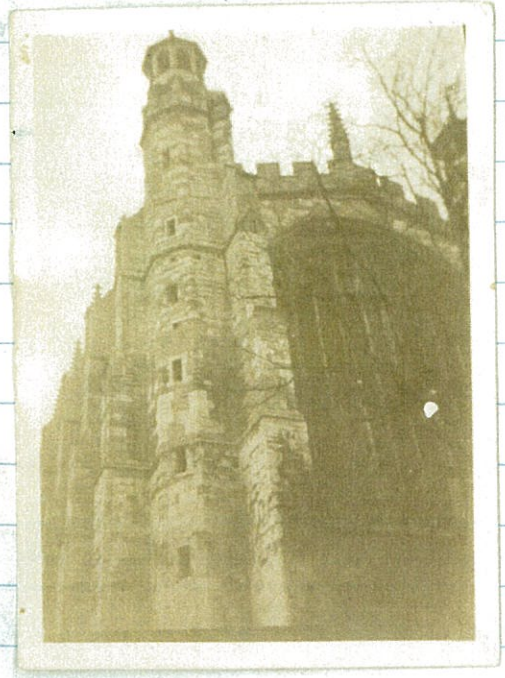
St Paul's Cathedral



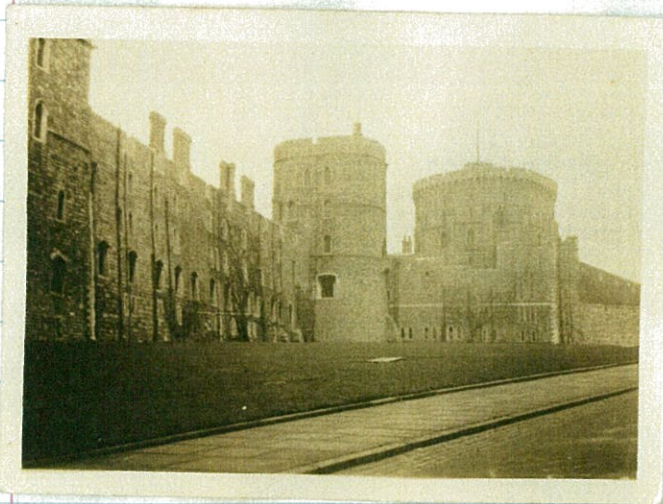
Buckingham Palace



Eton College



The Chapel



Windsor Castle



from the Railway  
Station



From the Soccer Fields.



On the short rail trip back to London from Taplow, David Niven was in the same compartment, with 6 other people. We merely said good-day; I think he had a hangover.

Back at Brighton, towards the end of our time there, a few of us navigators were interviewed by Group-Captain (later Air-Vice Marshall) Bennett, in charge of Pathfinders. He told us that when he first formed Pathfinders and asked the squadrons for proficient crews to volunteer, a lot of them got rid of crews who were troublemakers and their navigators not often their best. He offered us the opportunity of skipping the other training we'd normally do, to go direct to Pathfinders where they'd train us their way; but of course, we'd have to do a second tour straight after the first tour. The end of the war seemed still a way off, and Pathfinders had to spend extra time at each target, so he got few takers, certainly not I.

I've saved a few postcards of Brighton, printed pre-war. In wartime they dismantled a section of the 2 piers to prevent enemy landings.





While at Brighton we had a few hit & run air raids at night... it wasn't far across to France. At first we went down to the basement, but stayed in our rooms for the others. Late on 21st Feb. we got on a train, which after a change or two and a truck ride we arrived at Llandwrog, North Wales, No 9 (O) A.F.U. on the 22<sup>nd</sup>. It was a war-time dispersed camp, several miles south on the coast from the narrow <sup>Mona</sup> strait next to Anglesea, where Sid Payne was to do his Bomb-Aimers A.F.U. (Mona <sup>airfield</sup>)

The sleeping quarters were in Nissen huts below sea-level separated from the beach by a sea-wall. Therefore, there was no running water or sewerage. We had garbage tins between each hut to use as urinals at night... sometimes they ran over.

There were hundreds of RAAF bicycles... you could take any you saw and leave it where you liked. To our east were the runways, then the hangars, the messes & toilets, showers, laundry facilities, about 1½ mile side.

We were to spend just over a month there; the flying in Ansons again. We found map-reading difficult; whereas in the Riverina there was lots of open spaces devoid of railway lines, towns etc, in the U.K. there seemed to be too many roads, rivers, towns... difficult to tell one from another, especially since there was mostly a lot of cloud about.

Our aerodrome was only a few miles from Mt. Snowdon, the highest mountain south of Scotland. We were told that 13 Ansons had crashed on it during training flights (not all from Llandwrog). So beware... Our staff pilots, when returning to where the navigator said was (below the clouds) our 'drome, they'd fly west for 10 minutes to descend over the Irish Sea, ... just in case.

On each flight, 2 trainee-navigators were on board, one to do the exercise and be assessed on it, the other to do practice map reading, astro shots, drift reading etc. We did just under 36 hours of flying in 13 flights. In Australia, none of the Ansons had heating for the crew, but here it seemed after 5 flights, that they all did. Until the night of 5<sup>th</sup> of March, We took off at 1910 & flew for almost 3 hours, & the plane was nice & warm, as usual, so we just wore our battle-dress uniform. After de-briefing, we were sent on another similar flight at 0250 (early morning), for 2 $\frac{3}{4}$  hr flying. But the plane wasn't heated and it was about  $-30^{\circ}$  at 4000'. I was supposed to take sextant shots which required tracking a star, eye to the eyepiece for 2 minutes while the clockwork mechanism averaged a lot of readings (maybe 60). It was hopeless. The tears in my eyes began to freeze and I saw circular rainbows before the 2 min. elapsed. We just had to suffer the cold. The heating worked on our remaining 5 flights. My assessments ranged from 65% to 81%, with a mean of about 71%, and a remark (written in log book): "average navigator, works hard and is keen."

One funny thing happened there. Between the hangars & the mess was a wide expanse of bitumen. We saw two airmen on bicycles riding towards each other (not very quickly, luckily) ... both tried turning away on the same side, then both back, until their front tyres met squarely head on catapulting both to fall on the tangled bikes.

We had a day off at weekends and visited Caernarvon & Conway castles.



With Col McLaughlin  
beside the instructional  
hut at Llandwrog.



Beside our  
Nissen hut, below sea-koll  
at Llandwrog, N. Wales.



At one of the entrances  
to Caernarvon Castle.

When Val + I revisited  
in 1994, Val took  
a photo of me in the  
same spot.

## THE TAIL DRIFT SIGHT, MK. IVA

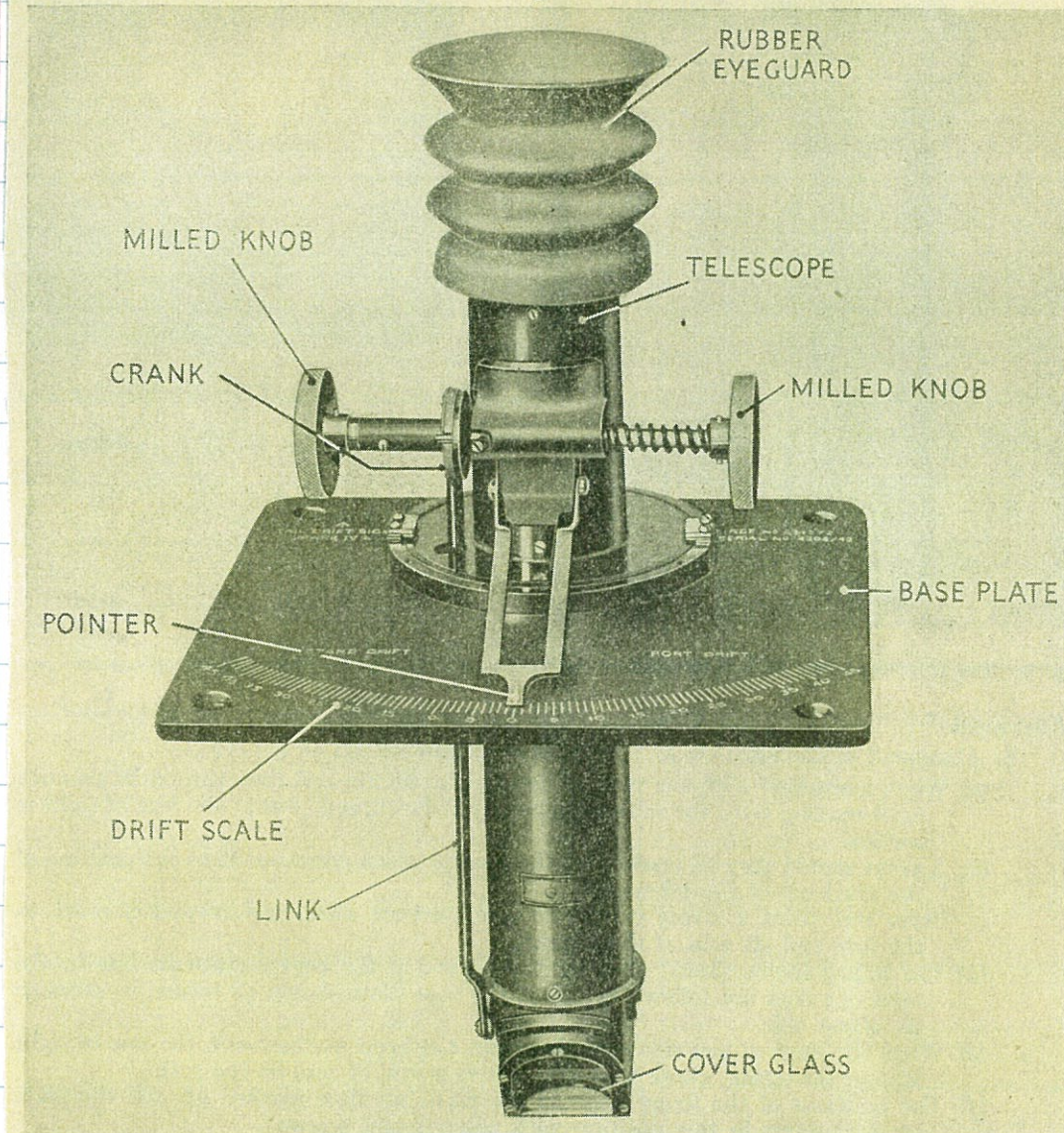
### Purpose

1. The Tail Drift Sight, Mk. IVA, provides a means of drift taking by back bearings on objects over which the aircraft has passed, or on navigation floats dropped by the aircraft. Drifts may be taken in daylight with the sighting line fixed in the vertical position.

### Description

2. The Tail Drift Sight (Stores Ref. 6B/272) is illustrated in fig. 1. It consists of a telescope mounted on a base plate enabling it to be rotated in azimuth. The telescope is provided with a graticule of two parallel lines, while at its lower end is a prism, capable of rotation about a horizontal axis, which enables an object to be sighted and followed as it passes astern. This prism is rotatable by two milled knobs situated near the top of the telescope. The telescope tube carries a pointer which travels over an engraved drift scale on the base plate.

3. For night use a 24-volt jack type filament lamp is fitted in the side of the telescope to provide graticule illumination. Installed in a convenient position near the sight is a dimmer switch which controls the intensity of the light.



We seldom used the tail drift sight, preferring to use the bombsight fitted to the Ansons, (not all), but the Fairley Battle had one something like this (simpler). Once we got on to Wellingtons (& later) we had GEE and no longer bothered to find drifts.