



RAF MEMOIRS

1932 ~ 1939

"Per Ardua ad Astra"



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Since the sad loss of my dear wife Doris, I have suddenly realised my own time must be getting short, so I have decided to put pen to paper and leave an honest account of what the pre-War Royal Air Force was really like.

One has heard varying stories of 'old string bags' tied together with bits of glue and wood. This was not the case. The great snag with the pre-War days was the shortage of cash, no matter what Government was in power.

Because of this shortage, training flights were carefully rationed, as a shortage of cash meant less petrol, replacement parts, etc. In fact, it was 'flying on a shoe-string'. You will note from extracts of my 'Flying Log Book', that some flights lasted a mere 15 to 20 minutes, these short trips being made on the Gunnery and Bombing ranges, Air Tests etc. It is not the length of trip that holds the danger; it is the Take-Off and Landing where most casualties occur. More so in the two and three seater Bombers of pre 1939 days. Harts, Andas, Hardy, Demons, etc - open cockpit aircraft where one was exposed to the frailties of the British climate. Overseas of course, was a different kettle of fish, as the cooling breezes were very welcome, more so in the three seater Vickers Vincent, Fairy Gordon.

In the open cockpit aircraft, the Wireless Operator / Gunner was anchored to the cockpit floor by a 'monkey chain' fixed to his parachute harness by a quick release metal sleeve. If you neglected to attach this, if you hit an air pocket you would soon be flying "on your own"! Without an engine!

When I left the Wireless School at Cranwell in December, 1934 it was like being released from prison. We joined in January, 1932 and were known as the '4D' entry or 25th entry at Halton in Buckinghamshire, where we first had to pass our medicals. I had opted for a Riggers Apprenticeship in my application form but on completing our medicals the senior officer said to me - "a number of your friends are colour blind and unsuitable for wireless operator training, would you like to change your choice?" I then asked,



Cpl Doris M Taylor WAAF

"Where does one go for wireless training?" He stated, RAF Cranwell in Lincolnshire. The huge barrack blocks at Halton plus the sound of trumpets and bagpipes frightened me so I opted for Cranwell, little realising I was jumping from the frying pan into the fire!

Cranwell was out in the wilds of Lincolnshire, miles from civilisation! After three years there, you were certainly good at scrubbing, polishing, laying out your kit and stomping on the parade ground like guardsmen. However, in spite of all that, we succeeded in becoming good wireless operators and the food was plain but good and we were a hungry lot after early morning PT, compulsory sports, etc.

Then came the day of 'Passing Out' from Cranwell when Oliver Bell and I were both posted to No. 12 Squadron (Howker Haets) in Andover, Hants. When the sun began to shine again! Aircraftman First Class, 30 shillings a week. A big change from 3 shillings at Cranwell out of which I saved 2 shillings to help pay my fare home on leave.

I did not wish to beg my fare from my mother as times were quite difficult in the early 1930s and on top of the 3 shillings we also had 30 shillings laid aside in our account as 'clothing allowance'. If you did not require any part of your uniform replaced, then that was extra for train fare, etc.

As I have stated previously, the food was good, we were out in 'the blue' in the wilds of Lincolnshire so life consisted of marching to the dining hall,



RAF Cranwell

marching to the classrooms and compulsory sports. Friday evenings were devoted to scrubbing around the barrack block, preparing for kit inspection, etc. Saturday morning, again more scrubbing and polishing but this time in the technical blocks and Workshops, plus a 'Best Blue' parade to West Camp with the cadets from the college.

Reveille being at the crack of dawn, every minute was accounted for. Oh how we wished we had never joined in the first place!

In our third year we were issued with rifles and bayonets just to add to our list of chores.

We had 30 boys in each barrack room and only 8 wash-hand basins so there was a scramble for each place each morning. You had to have two baths per week and sign the 'bath book' and had to write two letters home each week, at least. Being quite homesick for many months, I did not find that part difficult to obey.

The one shilling that I squandered went on stamps, a razor blade, soap and toothpaste as required. Anything left, I spent on a Friday evening in the camp YMCA canteen on a tea and a wa! Early Friday evening I deposited my two shillings in the west camp Post Office. A lot of the lads of course spent all of their three shillings on teas, wads and billiards, plus a crafty smoke. You could get a smoking pass at the age of 18!

The third year at Cranwell was the most exciting as we started on our Air Operating Training. They had a Vickers Victoria troop carrier plane divided into six cubicles complete with transmitter and receiver in each. When we were waiting our turn, we had a good view of the Lincolnshire countryside, plus a good deal of satisfaction as this is what we had joined for. Months previous to that, we used to go up to the west camp and volunteer as ballast for the cadets doing their first solo on Avro tutors. Then we had to Pass Out on Air Operating Training on two-seater Atlas aircraft, a relic of World War One.

Come December 1934, it was passing out parade complete with rifles and bayonets, boots and puttees, everything shining with a lot of parents and friends coming in for the occasion, i.e. those who could make the journey and afford it. So we say 'farewell Cranwell, the best kept prison in the U.K.'

As the boys were in the habit of singing, 'We are the Royal Air Force, No bloody good are we, The only time we fly is to breakfast, dinner and tea. But when we draw our weekly pay, we say with all our might, 'Per Andra ad Astra' bless you George, I'm alright!'

After Christmas leave 1934, it was back to Cranwell, where Oliver Bell and I set forth for No 12 (Bomber) Squadron in Andover, Hampshire. A



*Trying out lower gun position in a "Sideshow" Bomber
which landed at Cranwell on "Air Exercises" 1933*



*Photographed on first leave, 1932,
at Belhaven Park, Wiltshire.*

squadron equipped with Hawker Hart day bombers and a fine body of men who held out the hand of friendship to all. The same old mixture we had at Cranwell, English, Scots, Welsh and Irish, although I felt the Taffies were in the majority. A modern camp but the living quarters for the lads were not exactly top drawer.

We had a very cosy wireless section, with coal fired stove and the usual equipment. The NCO in charge was F/Sgt. Bissenden. As usual, his name was torn apart by the lads. 'Raining locally in places - F/Sgt. Pissendown!', but he was a fine lad, as senior NCO's go! The Sgt/Major was Taffy Davies - always swearing!!

Our wireless training section was F/Sgt Bissenden, Cpl 'Jammy' Paine, LAC Tom Cranidge LAC, (ex Cranwell) Tony Rossiter LAC, LAC Beese (Electrician), Oliver Bell and me. The Sgt/Pilot allocated to me was 'Jock' Bill Abercromby from Brechin (Angus), an ex Halton boy, but we never stuck to that routine, as you can see from my log book.



Cranwell 1934 (that's me second from right)

On joining No 12 Squadron, I allocated one guinea a week to my mother. At a pay of 30 shillings per week as Aircraftman 1st class, I knew I could exist on 9 shillings a week pocket money. With hindsight, I realise how easily I could exist on a few shillings, being a non-smoker and a low capacity drinker. The camp food was reasonable and a meal out was about 2 shillings. Bus fares and cinema were out of the question and I could not dance.

With Alie (3) Sqdn. at Andover,
Before Moving to Aden, as a Squadron.

July 1935

S. French (left)

W. G. Bennett

The Aeroplane



In Common, En Route Off

This photograph is from an edition of 'The Aeroplane'. It was taken on 31st July 1935 with No. 12(B) Squadron prior to moving to Aden in October 1935. Sailed from Liverpool at outbreak of Abyssinian War.

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'Jammy' Paine and I used to hire bikes at the weekend and cycle down to the outskirts of Southampton, stopping at village pubs for a pint of cider and a cheese roll. Lovely country. Life was easy. On 29th April, we flew up to the No 1 Armament Training Camp at Catfoss near Homssea, Yorkshire for air firing and bombing over the sea. Glorious weather! While at Catfoss, Jack Abercromby took me on his MG sports car and dropped me off at Lanark picking me up on the return journey. We returned to Andover on 8th/35. Sgt Brain was my pilot in Ki444, via Cranwell and Oxford.

On return to Andover, we recommenced our usual training duties and in addition, we had a week of 'dummy air attacks' on the City of London and then later, we had to do a bit of spit and polish to get the aircraft ready for the Royal Review of all the RAF at Mildenhall in July. I think that is why No 12 squadron became known as the 'shiny twelve'.

The first of July came and we took off as a squadron for RAF Mildenhall for the big day. Mildenhall in Suffolk had just been built as a permanent aerodrome so the place was littered with sand and builders other bits and pieces and the Bell tents were erected all ready for the squadrons.

We slept eight to a tent, feet to the pole and the heaps of sand made for a softer bed.

July 6th, 1935 - we were issued with posh white flying overalls. The aircraft were lined up, line upon line ready for King George the Fifth and his three sons. This was his silver jubilee. We stood to attention in front of our Hawker Haris as he drove slowly past in his State car, at the salute.

The next item was to be a fly-past over Newmarket racecourse and the King would again take the salute. I jumped into the back seat, all harnessed up, in K3010 (Sgt Pilot Hallett). We taxied out for take-off and the 'fronze' was invaded with civilians crowding around, when a bigshot came running out and ordered me to give up my seat to a 'Daily Express' photographer!! I was bitter but had no choice as I was the youngest in the Squadron. So it was back to Andover by train with the ground crew.



Royal Review, Mildenhall - July 6th 1935
'Jammy' Paine, me, Tony Rossiter

Thus we returned and handed in our posh flying suits and prepared for the air exercises around London and the Thames valley. This life is all go!

Back to the training routine and then in September, Oliver Bell and me were loaned to 142 Squadron, who shared Andover with us at that period. We had to assist them in the 'Centurion Trials' at Tangmere in Sussex. The Centurion was an old battleship anchored off Chichester in Sussex and used for bombing practise.

On Saturday, Oliver Bell, Jackie Pacer and I went down to Bognor to see the sights. We were just consuming our fish and chips in a newspaper when we heard of the death of Queen Astrid of the Belgians in a road accident. Later that evening we were recalled to Andover to prepare for overseas service as the 'Tye Ties' had their sights set on poor old Abyssinia. (By the way, Bognor Regis was said to be King George's favourite 'watering place'.)

We returned to utter shambles. Packing up all the gear, inoculations and issue of overseas kit and then when things had settled down they granted us a weekend off to go home and say farewell to our loved ones. We were all excited at the prospect of some action so it took the edge off the parting, as it were.

So we returned from leave, were issued with rifles, smoked bayonets and two kit bags and off we went in the evening in lorries to Andover station and entrained for an unknown port, travelling through the night, eventually reaching Liverpool and boarding T.S.S. 'Cameronia', (a Glasgow boat) which was painted black!

This boat had been hastily requisitioned from the Atlantic run, hence the black superstructure and it did not auger well for a journey through Mediterranean climes. We met a lot of our old Cranwell cronies on board, all with different Squadrons, of course and all full of high spirits. At last, we were living up to that well known advert - 'Join the RAF and see the world!' One can only hope our aspirations are not shattered!

As an afterthought, I have decided to revert to my 'daily diary' to fill in a little more detail, prior to leaving Andover -

Tuesday, 17th September 1935

Very wet this morning. Papers from home sweet home. Very busy today. Squadron 'standing to' for immediate duty overseas - if old Mussolini does not cool down a bit. At canteen in the evening.

Wednesday, 18th September 1935

Reveille at 5a.m. Down at hangars at 6a.m. Busy packing all day. Up in Hoot K1444. Welcome letter from home. Finished by 1945 hrs tonight. Down at canteen with the lads.

Thursday, 19th September 1935

Reveille at usual time. Down at the hangars packing up all day. Getting everything ship shape. M.O.'s examination!! Working till 2000 hrs tonight. Canteen later.

Friday, 20th September 1935

Still more packing. Letter from John McShane. Pay parade. Golden Eagle in action!! Canteen.

Saturday, 21st September 1935

Still packing until 2000 hrs.

Sunday, 22nd September 1935

Down to hangars again, 0900/1930 hrs.

Monday 23rd September 1935

Still packing and packing!! Issued with tropical kit. Finished 2130 hrs. Free supper in canteen!

Tuesday, 24th September 1935

Still packing. Letter and papers from home.

Wednesday, 25th September 1935

Still packing. Made out weekend passes today. Down at Andover with 'Jenny'.

At the movies - 'Ten Minute Alibi'. Good!

Thursday, 26th September 1935

Visit from Sir Cunliffe Lister. Went off on weekend this afternoon. 1529 hrs from Andover. 2125hrs. from Euston. Arrived home 0645 hrs. Nice journey.

Friday, 27th September 1935

Good old weekend.

Saturday, 28th September 1935

Ditto!

Sunday, 29th September 1935

Last day of holiday. Said toodle-oo to all my loved ones.

Left Motherwell, 1750 hrs. Arrived Easton 0445 hrs. Had a kip on way down. All in the game.

Monday 30th September 1935

Tube to Waterloo 0530 hrs. 0600 hrs train from Waterloo. Arrived Andover junction 0815 hrs. Walked back to camp. Caught in rain. Letter home. Down to Andover with 'Jammy'. At the movies. 'A Wicked Woman.' In at 'Greig's' 'Café for tea and a pie!

Tuesday, 1st October 1935

Naval muster parade in hangar, C.O.'s kit inspection. Down at Andover with 'Jammy' in the evening. At the movies, 'Morals for Marcus.' Good! In at 'Greig's' for cup of cocoa. Letter from sister Jean.

Wednesday, 2nd October 1935

Another letter from Jean. Packing up our kitbags today ready for 'Big trip on the Boat.' Sent civvies home. Letter home also. Very wet and cold.

Thursday, 3rd October 1935

Last day at camp. In town tonight. Some of the lads having a farewell 'Do' in the canteen. Transfer to Andover Junction at 2330 hrs. Left Andover 0130 hrs. Full kit. Arrived at Liverpool docks at 0745 hrs.

Friday, 4th October 1935

Boarded S.S. 'Cameronia'. Made out in groups for messing and sleeping. Herded below like rats! Hardly room to breathe. Porridge and kippers for breakfast. Stew and tatties and rice for dinner. Fish sole for tea. We had a tour of inspection round the cabin part of the ship. Like a palace to our hovel. Blue bloods and N.C.O.'s!! Postcard home. Sailed down the Mersey at 1500hrs.

Saturday, 5th October 1935

Reveille at 0600 hrs. Didn't sleep too well in the old hammock. Mess orderly duty. This entailed going to the Galley to collect each meal in Dixie's

for 16 bodies. Porridge and sausage for breakfast. Half the lads were seasick already - couldn't eat! Good bread, cooked in galley. Trip O.K. but lack of space. 3000 Officers and men on board. Inoculation at 1600 hrs.

Sunday, 6th October 1935

Porridge, liver and bacon for breakfast. Letter to home to catch mail uplift at Gibraltar. Sing song on deck then a church service. Passing through Bay of Biscay. Quite steady on board and weather fine.

Monday, 7th October 1935

Porridge and meat for breakfast. Weather fine. Warm with cool breeze. Too hot to sleep down below. Passed Cape St. Vincent at mid-day. First glimpse of African coast in the evening. Slung hammock on deck - much cooler. Ship due at Gibraltar tonight. Mail uplifted.

Tuesday, 8th October 1935

Boiled eggs for breakfast. Weather cool. Large Zeppelin sighted on Port side. Sing song on 'A' deck. Too wet to sleep on deck tonight.

Wednesday, 9th October 1935

Wet and hazy today. Getting mail ready for Malta. Letters to home. Ciss and Chris. Jean and Don. P.C.'s to mine, Anna, Meg and Mary. Up on deck tonight, fine and fresh.

Thursday, 10th October 1935

Very warm today. Arrived Malta 1400 hrs. Anchored in Valletta harbour. Fine looking structures. Very noisy - yells, bells and smells! 22 torpedo bomber squadron from Donibristle disembarked, also a maintenance section. Said Ta Ta to Stirling, Macintosh and Smith. (Old Cranwell mates) Steamed out at 1910hrs. Full moon. Slept up top.

Friday, 11th October 1935

Still very warm. Captain's rounds in the morning. Pay parade in afternoon. Lovely night. Good healthy sleep on deck again. Hot house down below.

Saturday, 12th October 1935

Usual Mess orderly duties. Letter home. Weather fine. Sleeping on deck. Arrived Alexandria late evening. Anchored outside harbour until dawn.

Sunday, 13th October 1935

Reveille at 0400hrs. Taken into dock by tug. More lads disembarked. Port choc a block with British fleet. Nice place – climate ideal. Steamed out again at mid-day along the coast to Port Said, arriving midnight. Sleeping on deck.

Monday, 14th October 1935

Inoculated again today. Very warm. Left Port Said at 1910hrs for passage through Suez Canal. Passed many Italian ships. Anchored in Lake Tirmah to change Pilot. Caught up by Italian Troopship, Conti Baiconconera of Genoa, blaring martial music. Our lads were spouting 'Razzies' (rasberries!) but they never replied. Followed us all the way down the canal, packed with troops in jungle green and a large banner of old Mussi's ugly clock hanging over the side!

Tuesday, 15th October 1935

Had a good sleep on deck. Still steaming along fine into the Red Sea. Letter home.

Wednesday, 16th October 1935

Weather usual hot stuff. Still giving Mess orderly duties big licks. Arrived Port Sudan 2200hrs. Not a very promising place. A lot of Cameron Highlanders came on board after a long stint abroad. Deck packed tonight. Three more squadrons prepared to disembark. Nos 3, 35 & 207.

Thursday, 17th October 1935

Allowed ashore in the evening. In at the Seamen's Mission. Reported back by 2130hrs. Sleeping on deck. Very close.

Friday, 18th October 1935

Lads disembarked and we steamed out again at 0710 for Aden. Pay parade at 1500hrs. Weather still very close, good breeze springing up. Cool evening for sleeping on deck.

Saturday, 19th October 1935

Changed Mess decks in preparation for disembarking in the morning. Nice and breezy, stuffy below decks. Passed the 'Twelve Apostles' today and

the 'Gates of Hell', better known as the Straits of Bab el Mandeb! All packed ready for the off in the morning.

Sunday, 20th October 1935

Reveille at 0500hrs. Breakfast at 0600hrs. Clean up after breakfast. Disembarked at Aden at 1000hrs. Boots, puttees, tapees, rifle and bayonet, etc. (I thought we had joined the RAF!!) Rifle no 66300. Bayonet No 11/1630. Farewell to the old 'Cameronia'. Last touch of Scotland. Transport to Khormaksar to new abode in tents. Very hot but quite a promising start. Welcome papers and letters from home. When I first saw Aden from the boat, I thought I had been there before. Due probably to having seen too many bible slides as boys at the YMCA on a 'Pleasant Sunday Evening!' So here we were with the 'Eye Ties' bombing the poor Abyssinians across the Red Sea!

Monday, 21st October 1935

Reveille 0630hrs. Breakfast 0730hrs. Started writing letter home. Post out Wednesday. Very warm and close. Getting used to it. Native beds not bad. (Chargeys) Tents good. Washing facilities – anti delirium! Our Hawker Harts had arrived – by sea in crates! Plenty of work ahead.

Tuesday, 22nd October 1935

Reveille 0545hrs. Breakfast 0630 hrs. Down at hangars assembling Harts and wiring junction boxes, etc.

Wednesday, 23rd October 1935

Reveille 0530hrs. Across to naval transmitting station, wiring T26 controls. Evening meal at 1830hrs. Walked in the evening to native town of Crater with 'Jammy', Dinga Bell and Gracey. Had good look round. Caught native bus half way, back at 2200hrs. Turn in to old 'Chargeys'. Very close in tent.

Thursday, 24th October 1935

Up at 0500hrs. Breakfast at 0700hrs. Back to naval T.S. Turning in at 2200hrs. Bed bugs beginning to appear. Blood suckers!

Friday, 25th October 1935

Up at 0500hrs. Breakfast 0700hrs. Pay parade 1215hrs. Ten rupees! Canteen in evening with lads.

Saturday, 26th October 1935

Up at 0500hrs. Commenced letter home. Dinner 1830hrs. More bloody bugs. Must get organised! Eight lads to a tent. Bit overcrowded. Put legs of beds in tins with paraffin – does not stop them! The buggers drop from the tent roof. When you squeeze them the blood pours out. Your blood! They're as big as thumbnails.

Sunday 27th October 1935

Reveille 0700hrs. Long lie today. Breakfast at 0715hrs. Welcome letters and papers from home. Open air movies, 1845hrs. 'I was a spy'. Tired time seeing it! Machine a bit ancient.

Monday, 28th October 1935

Up at 0500hrs. Usual grind. Over at canteen for news. Bug hunting again! Indian Charpoys (native beds) made of wooden frame with strings of fibre across. Bugs get under the strings and come out at night to feast on you! Even the iron bedsteads (MacDonalds) are polluted in the bungalows.

Tuesday, 29th October 1935

Usual routine. Gets monotonous. Dinner 1830hrs. Canteen in evening. Lemon squash and sandwich. Hunger is an awful thing for growing lads!

Wednesday, 30th October 1935

Up at 0500hrs. Tiffin 1200hrs. Letter home. Dinner 1830hrs.

Thursday, 31st October 1935

Khormakour, Aden. Reveille at 0700hrs. Whole day off. Good Queen Vic's holiday for stations East of Suez! Went with Paddy, Tabby and Gibbo to the shore. Had a good walk along the coast. Puddled back knee deep. Tiffin at 1200hrs. In the reading room all afternoon. Dinner at 1830hrs. Canteen with Tabby and lads.

Friday, 1st November 1935

Reveille at 0500hrs. Work from 0530hrs as usual. Breakfast in our own Field Cookhouse now and for all meals.

Saturday, 2nd November 1935

Quiet day.

Sunday, 3rd November 1935

Spent the Sabbath walking over the beach with Southall. Letter home and welcome letter and papers from home. This is the day the P & O mail boat calls. Also letter from Mina and wee Willie(!)

Monday, 4th November 1935

Reveille 0530hrs. Breakfast 0830hrs. Continued writing letter to home sweet home.

Tuesday, 5th November 1935

Usual daily routine. Guy Fawkes night. Plenty of fireworks! Continued letter.

Wednesday, 6th November 1935

Reveille 0530hrs. Posted mail out. Weather cooler these days. Down by steamer point by lorry in the evening. Concert in Garrison Theatre by crew of HMS Norfolk (Cruiser). Very good. Finished at 2300hrs.

Thursday, 7th November 1935

Very quiet today. Breakfast at 0800hrs.

Friday, 8th November 1935

Reveille at 0530hrs. Pay parade at 1200hrs. 10 rupees. 1 rupee = 18d.

Saturday, 9th November 1935

Usual routine. Soccer in afternoon. This is a boring war!! Bugs, fleas and flies!!

Sunday, 10th November 1935

Church parade. Letter from home. Cinema in the evening. Mae West – 'Night after Night'. Good.

Monday, 11th November 1935

Armistice Day. Big parade. Rest of day off. Continued with letter home.

Tuesday, 12th November 1935

Usual routine today. Letter to John McShane. (About time too!) Had my hair shaved off. Very cool but looks awful! Nowhere for the sand to hide.

Wednesday, 13th November 1935

After work, the hours got boring. Especially cramped up in a tent. Plenty of reading and writing.

Thursday, 14th November 1935

Nothing to report.

Friday, 15th November 1935

After work walked down to Salt Pans. Italian engineer showed us all operations. Will skip a few notes at this point!

Saturday, 16th November 1935

Quiet day.

Sunday, 17th November 1935

Letter and papers from home. Down at crater with the football team. Playing the Wogs – we lose 3:2. Good game. The wogs play in bare feet!

Forward to – Wednesday, 20th November 1935

Posted letters home. Pay parade – 13 rupees! Soccer – Squadron v Navy team. (1:0) Good game.

Forward to – Friday, 22nd November 1935

Packing up ready for move to Rabat. Out in the 'Blue' on Monday!

Forward to – Sunday, 24th November 1935

Letter and papers from home. Down at crater with soccer team. Beat Wogs 4:1. We had to run for our lives. The buggers stoned us!!

Monday, 25th November 1935

Reveille at 0500hrs. Breakfast at 0530hrs. Pulled down tents. Packed up in lorries. Steamed for Rabat in the desert. What a dump! Sand blowing all day!

Tuesday & Wednesday, 26th & 27th November 1935

Unpacked. Re-erected tents. Everyone 'cheesed off'. 'Sand gets in your eyes!'

Thursday, 28th November 1935

Down at Steamer Point in swimming lorry. No costumes but went in for a dook! Clears the sand.

Friday, 29th November 1935

Down at Khormaksar camp to play soccer. Squadron v HMS Emerald. 1:1.

Saturday, 30th November 1935

This was my first flight from Aden and nearly my last. I boarded Hart K3004 with F/Lt. Russell Stacey on a dive bombing exercise over the sea. On take off you stand up facing forward looking over the Pilot's head, slightly hunched, to dodge the slipstream as it were. On taking off along the desert sand, I felt the nose of the aircraft tip slightly forward and I was showered with sand. My face tingled but my goggles saved my eyes. I assumed it was a gathering of sand on the top plane blown back on us. We climbed over the sea and commenced diving operations. On pulling out of the first dive, a long strip of the aircraft's fabric ripped back and I had to pull it in to my cockpit as it was in danger of interfering with the aircraft control surfaces: elevators, rudder etc., and the engine was also overheating and noisy. F/Lt Stacey decided to return to base at Rabat. On arriving over the airstrip we could see the camp fire engine moving out, also the 'blood wagon' (Ambulance) and we wondered what was amiss. On landing, all was made clear. On takeoff, the aircraft's nose had sunk lower than normal; the propeller had struck the sand, tearing four inches off each tip. With reduced weight, the engine had raced, causing fabric stripping and overheating and in danger of engine seizure! The good Lord was with us! Saturday 30th November – St. Andrew's Day, 1935! Page seven of my flying log book!

Sunday, 1st December 1935

Down at steamer point by lorry for a swim. Water great stuff! The Services have a special area here fenced off with anti-shark netting! Letter and papers from home sweet home. In the evening, down to Khormaksar camp for film show. Gordon Harker and Ralph Lynn in 'Dirty Work'. A good laugh and we do need it!

Monday, 2nd December 1935

Usual work, usual times! Dinner at 1830hrs. Meals below standard. Tinned McCormack's meat and veg. At least the cooks can't spoil it!!

Tuesday, 3rd December 1935

Usual reveille at 0530hrs. Work at 0600hrs. Breakfast at 0830hrs. Still the sandstorms. No flying today. Who the heck picked this spot for an airfield! Sand gets in your eyes!

Wednesday, 4th December 1935

Posted letter for home. Down to steamer point for a swim. Missed lorry back! Caught a wog bus to Khormaksar and four of us caught up with lorry there.

Thursday, 5th December 1935

All quiet on the Desert front!

Friday, 6th December 1935

Usual routine. Pay Parade. 14 rupees! (i.e. every fortnight!) Of course, I allocate 21 shillings per week to my dear mother. You are advised thus. If you become a casualty your next of kin is always guaranteed a pension.

Saturday, 7th December 1935

Down Steamer Point on swimming lorry. Watching soccer match. Navy v RAF Command. Navy won 3:1.

Sunday, 8th December 1935

Church parade. Letters from home – John McShane and birthday card from Greta.

Monday, 9th December 1935

All quiet.

Tuesday, 10th December 1935

Up in K2427. (RVO Denison) From gun – air firing over sea. Down at Steamer Point with the squadron soccer team. Squadron v S & SD. Squadron won 3:1. Finished letter home and one to John McShane. It is quite difficult letter writing in a tent with six bodies and six beds. Of course we had the Indian style of tent, roomier than Bell tents and they had two tops to keep the heat from the sun at bay. The beds were native 'charpays' – a wooden frame with legs and straw fibre strung across the frame to make up the bed. Where the straw crossed, the frame soon became a nest for blood-

sucking bugs. That was always our big battle. Being fair, they just seem to love my Scots blood!

Wednesday, 11th December 1935

The Air Officer Commanding Aden came and said goodbye to us all in the morning. Posted mail for home. Went down to Khormaksar camp to stay for a week or so. Bomb gear wiring. Just Oliver Bell and I. We had to strip to the waist while lying under the cockpit seats doing the re-wiring of the Harts – they had been parked out in the sun all day!

Thursday, 12th December 1935

Holiday today again. Over in the reading rooms looking over the periodicals. Then over at the open air cinema listening to gramophone record.

Friday, 13th December 1935

Usual work in the morning. Down at Steamer Point in the swimming lorry. Watching the soccer match.

Saturday, 14th December 1935

Usual work in the morning.

Sunday, 15th December 1935

Over watching the cricket in the afternoon. Cinema in the evening. Gordon Harker in 'Road House'. Quite good.

Monday, 16th December 1935

Usual stuff in the morning. In the reading room in the afternoon. Welcome letters and papers from home sweet home. Parcel with cards from Mother, Father and Mary. Parcel and card from Mima. Letter from twin brother Donald. Letter and card from Ciss. Letter and card from Jean. Letter from 'Sarge' Sweeting.

Tuesday, 17th December 1935

Continued with letter home. They have all remembered my approaching birthday. (30th Dec) Letter to brother Don.



Rabat, Aden 1935 - "C" Flight 12 Squadron (one arrowed, 8th from right, standing)

Wednesday, 18th December 1935

Usual stuff in the hangars. Posted mail for home.

Thursday, 19th December 1935

Holiday. Had a kick about in the afternoon. Cinema in the evening.

Friday, 20th December 1935

Usual work in the morning. Pay Parade today! Golden Eagle in action!!

Saturday, 21st December 1935

Usual stuff in the morning.

Sunday, 22nd December 1935

Went down in "Commer" to Steamer Point. Came back in Rabat lorry. Waited at Rabat for mail. Went down to Khormaksar in Levins (native) lorry. Letter from home. Cinema in the evening. Cicely Courtneidge in "Things are Looking Up!" Not bad.

Monday, 23rd December 1935

Usual work in morning. Welcome papers from home and a nice parcel from Cissie. Letter home in the afternoon.

Tuesday, 24th December 1935

Usual work in the morning. Packed up wee odds and ends and went up to Rabat for Xmas.

Wednesday, 25th December 1935

Posted letter for home. Donkey polo in the morning! Had Christmas dinner at 1800hrs after listening to King George V's Empire Broadcast. Real good dinner. Sing song after. Finished at 1am.

Thursday, 26th December 1935

Six a side soccer in the morning. Lost 9-7. Had a junk goal! Soccer semi-finals in the afternoon. Sing song in the evening again.

Friday, 27th December 1935

Finals of six a side. Sergeants Mess won. Down at Sheikh Othman with soccer team. Drew 4-4. Down at Crater in the afternoon with soccer team.

Playing the natives. Won 3:2. We had to run fast for our lorry. Stoned us again. Poor losers!

Saturday, 28th December 1935

Working in and around the main wireless station. Very quiet today.

Sunday, 29th December 1935

Long lie in the morning. Had a nice Xmas card and Birthday card from twin Donald. Rest of mail at Khormaksar.

Monday, 30th December 1935

Birthday. (20) Welcome letter and papers from home. Commenced writing letter home. Birthday card for Dad.

Tuesday, 31st December 1935

Usual stuff in the morning. Very quiet New Year's Eve. What a change from home! Roll on that boy!

Wednesday, 1st January 1936

I have ceased keeping my diary now. It was monotonous repetition. I'll have to rely on my Flying Log Book. We arrived here in October '35 and we are still trying to get all the aircraft airworthy. They arrived in crates by sea and they seemed to arrive in dribs and drabs. It is a good thing we are not at war with the 'eye-ties' yet! Of course No 8 Squadron has been here for years, always on a war footing. No 41 Squadron and No 12 Squadron were sent here to reinforce the garrison!

The only thing of note that has happened this month is the death of good King George at Sandringham in Norfolk on January 20th, 1936.

He was a quiet old boy and never seemed to enjoy good health. Mary appeared to be the gaffer! He passed away at 1155hrs Sandringham time.

We did not have time to draw our breath when Air Commodore Portal got cracking with the "ball". He had us marching with boots and puttees in the soft sand up to your backside. He was going to have his day, come what may! Of course there was no hand so that made it difficult to march in time. Who cares anyway, so long as Portal has his day out! It is a sad end to the festive season but life must go on.

Life became rather ham-drained in the New Year. We simply had to follow what the parent Squadron did (No 8). Demonstrations over villages that were stepping out of line, gunnery and bombing over the sea. Maintenance of W/T stations up country which were normally manned by native operators and were indeed quite reliable at the job.

Flying became quite scarce during the new year of 1936, I don't know whether they were saving on fuel or what. The war in Abyssinia must be petering out. The 'eye-ties' must be getting the upper hand with their modern weapons and fly use of gas, so the rumours go.

My last trip with 12 Squadron was on 1/8/36 with Sgt. Chinnery. The Squadron had to return to the U.K. but we young bucks volunteered to stay on and finish our overseas tour, otherwise our time would be lost.

So it is farewell time. There were a lot of different postings with those of us who were left and sadly they were taken in alphabetical order which put me near the end of the line and so I was posted to Steamer Point H.Q., the vacancies in No 8 Squadron being already taken up but I knew within my heart that my former boss at No 12 would strive to get me to No 8 Squadron.

However, I did enjoy my spell at H.Q. Wireless for it certainly improved my Morse code, as one tends to get sloppy in the Squadrons. Here it was top of the form in inter-command signalling. On watch duties there could be no slip ups, as you were handling messages from the U.K., Iraq, Palestine, etc.

To cut things short, a vacancy did arise at No 8 Squadron. I arrived there on 10/1/36. Happy days!

When flying on patrol abroad, every aircraft has to carry a wireless operator and one has to keep in touch with home base at all times. If three or more are in the formation, one operator can sometimes be sufficient but always remembering that you are flying over hostile territory.

At this period, Squadron Leader Walmsley was the C.O. of No 8 (B) Squadron. A very strict man, he was more or less a good match for the Air Officer commanding Aden - Air Commodore Portal. He of the long nose!

On the 7th December, 1936 I did my first trip to Kamaran. I shared with the mail. It was along the Red Sea coast and en route you passed the Yemen towns of Mocha and Hodeida. Mocha was at one time famous for its coffee. Of course, we dropped mail off at Perim Island as it was a prominent spot at the entrance to the Red Sea. Better known as the Straits of Bab El Mandeb. The 'Gates of Hell'. I loved the trips to Kamaran Island as the wireless operator stationed there supplied us with Beano tins of cold beer and you



Fawa, Hadramaut, Arabia 1937

know, I cannot remember his name! Kamaran was the stopping off place for Moslem pilgrims going to Mecca. It was here they had to pass a medical before going on pilgrimage to the Holy Land.

The other region outwith our boundary was known as the Hadramaut and was ruled by the Sultan of Mukalla. When the Sultan had trouble with his dissident tribesmen, he asked the RAF up to bomb them! Such was the occasion on 30/1/1937. We flew to a landing ground at Fawa, (3 hours 45 minutes flying time from Aden). Tents erected ready for a short stay. We returned on 9/2/1937. (See page 18 of log book)

The next event which caused me great elation was when I was picked to be the Air Officer Commanding Aden's wireless operators on a trip to British Somaliland. (Page 20 of log book)

Air Commodore McClaghrey was the new Air Officer Commanding Aden and he was entirely different from Portal! A real flying type. Small, wiry and matted with hair.

He was the same man who brought the first Squadron to Aden from Hinaidi in Iraq in 1927. Strangely enough, we had a new C.O. in the Squadron at the same time, also a real flying type - Squadron Leader 'Ginger' Barnett and sad to say, both he and the Air Commodore were killed



Aircraft Vickers 'Vic' 1937

1936 - 1937

"C" Flight, No 8 Squadron, RAF Khormaksar, Aden, 5 April 1937
Maj, second front row, fifth from left

during the forthcoming War, (1939-45) Why do the good lads always have to go?

We had to cross the Red Sea to get to Somaliland but the old 'Vincent' is a very reliable aircraft. Touched down at Sheikh and then on to Berao. Just over four hours.

My next trip with the Air Commodore was to a conference concerning Air operations at Bir-Uzia. (Page 22 of log book)

It was all go since I came to No 8 Squadron at Khormaksar, thank goodness. That's what we joined for. This is what happens when you get an Air Commodore like McClaughrey. He is all go and wants to get to the root of all the problems.

My next trip, or rather trips, with the Air Commodore began at 0830hrs on 13/10/37.

We took off with five aircraft, again bound for Fuwa in the Hadramaut region, again at the request of the Sultan of Muckalla. On this occasion we did not have to bomb dissident tribesmen but we had to photograph vast areas of the region, what is known as 'Line Overlaps'. The pilot sets his course and then we switch on the camera and let it run until the distance is traversed, right up to the borders of the Raib al Kali desert. (Page 24 of log book)

On this occasion we had to cover areas around Shibam, Seiwun, Fuwa and the Raib al Kali desert. (Translates as 'The Empty Quarter')

The one thing that stood out on these trips was when the Sultan of Seiwun offered us accommodation in his palace for one night only. He had a posh palace complete with swimming pool but of course, no electricity!

We carried mantle lamps on detachment, for night use. The only snag was, when we lit up the lamps we were invaded by 'stink ants'. That is the only name we knew them by. We had them in Somaliland. The 'stink ants' mode of defence was to 'blow off' at you - hence the posh name!

We returned to Aden on 16/10/37 leaving Fuwa at 0630hrs. My time with the Air Commodore on this occasion was 13hrs 50mins.

My next detachment was to Dhala, with a short wave pack set to act as Wireless Operator for a political officer known as Captain Hamilton. He was actually Lord Belhaven's son from my home town of Wishaw. Yet I had been in Aden for two years and only knew him as Captain Hamilton. This turned out a disastrous affair in the end. He made a right ass of himself and yet he had won the Sword of Honour at Sandhurst!

I flew up to Dhala with my short wave pack set just three days later (19/10/37) after returning with the Air Commodore from the Hadramaut region.



Two photographs with best mate, Arthur Charles Powell
at Khormaksar, Aden, 1936. Plane in lower picture is a Hawker Hart



"Dressed to kill" - Dhule 1897



The gang at a local cafe in Aden (that's me standing at the back second from the right)

It's all go! It was just about one hour flying time to Dhala and Captain Hamilton had his men and a small lorry awaiting my arrival. He introduced himself with the remark that 'two Wishaw men would see this war through together'.

Hamilton had a small tent allocated to me, while he had a large one for himself and his equipment. We then set off to our appointed place in the Wadi, prior to meeting the troublesome Al Quatichi tribe who were creating dissension in the area. (A Wadi is a dried up river bed and usually the fastest way to travel in hilly country).

Although I had a short wave set up, I fixed a long wave aerial, inverted 'L', for my work, as it had proved the better way to reach Aden when in hilly country. I had a 6 volt accumulator to feed the filaments of my transmitter and receiver plus HT dry battery for the receiver. High tension for transmitter was a hand driven generator of 1100 volts. Turning the handle was provided by the Arab/Somali squad! Every time I transmitted, they moaned and groaned as it put an extra load on their turning efforts. However, it gave a distinctive note to my transmissions which my Aden mates found helpful in picking up my signals.



Me with the local Arab/Somali squad groaning under the extra load from hand cranking the generator needed to heat the valves on the radio.

Captain Hamilton made out his signals in Arabic or four letter codes. Some of the Arabic I could follow but not all of the plot!

After three days we moved up the Wadi to meet the 'baddies', as it were. We had not gone far when there was erratic gunfire. He assumed it was an ambush so we returned to base.

After another day or two, we set off again. I had his rifle which the citizens of Wishaw had gifted him on his 'coming of age'.

He had his revolver in a holster which proved to be tattered and torn. This was to be his downfall.

We had only gone a few hundred yards when there was a loud explosion and Hamilton collapsed in a heap. We thought he had been shot at but the truth soon dawned. His revolver was lying beside his foot and he had a huge burn hole in his shoe with blood and flesh seeping out. The answer was obvious. He had been walking along a stoney Wadi - his revolver cocked in a worn out holster - and no lanyard. The revolver fell through the holster and being cocked, it went off on impact with his right foot. I gently removed the shoe and sock and what a mess it revealed. Being so close, the bullet had spread and the poor soul must have been in great pain but he had time for a joke saying, 'When I was at Sandhurst they said if ever I got shot it would be one of my stick-out ears!'

After a quick shot of first aid I signalled to Aden for an aircraft and a Doctor. He was a good patient and the 'plane arrived about an hour later. In the meantime, I had hidden his shoe in my kit as a souvenir but that was the first thing they asked for on arrival, apart from checking over his wound.

They took Hamilton off and left me with a Greek Political officer whom I couldn't stand the sight of. He kept ridiculing the Jews so I assumed he was a Greek/Arab mixture. He disappeared and then came back with two horses for our use and for the next few days we travelled around on horseback, visiting and being introduced to the local Sheikhs. I had never sat on a horse before. Camels, yes!

Eventually, I was recalled to Khormaksar on 18/10/57. I had to pack my kit ready for the next move to Egypt. Before that, I visited Hamilton in Aden hospital to say Ta Ta! He seemed in good fettle but still in pain. On this occasion, I had the company of my two RAF pals, Arthur Powell and Dixie Dean so as Captain Hamilton was really a Captain of the Royal Scots Fusiliers, we had to give him his rank and we were dressed in our best khaki drill and shorts and sang him a smart salute on entering his hospital ward. He sat up in bed, beaming and apparently enjoying the adulation. Under his bed he had a large box containing 1000 'coffin nails' and he puffed away in

our presence. The meeting of course, had to be very brief as he was still on the serious list and his wound had to be drained very often. We wished him all the best and took our departure. That was November, 1938. We were not to meet again till the summer of 1946! He was married again and living in the ancestral home - 'Wishaw House' - I was demobbed and living with my parents in Gateside Road. Poor Doris was with her folks and two boys in Suffolk. Time is marching on!

(I was demobbed in November, 1945, spent a fortnight in Suffolk with Doris, the boys and her parents and then came the search to find work. When I found employment, I had to start at once as work was too scarce to refuse. This is interfering with my story, this interlude!)

We three returned to Khormaksar after our visit to Belhaven in the Aden hospital.

Soon it was time to catch the boat for Egypt. I was sad to leave the 'Barren Rocks' behind. It had been the most exciting time of my service to date, just what we had joined for but I was anxious to find out what lay around Egypt and the Canal Zone.

We steamed off from Aden in November 1938 and while we were approaching the Straits of Bab El Mandeb, ready right into the Red Sea, behold a large formation of No8 Squadron aircraft dived over our troopship in a farewell salute. What a nice gesture and very thoughtful of Squadron Leader 'Ginger' Barnett.

The voyage up the Red Sea was quite uneventful. The water was so clear you could see a great depth below the surface and at nightfall the fish seem to glisten in their hundreds. I bet you cannot see far now, with the end of coal burning ships and diesel oil everywhere, polluting the World. Man will destroy himself!

The first step was Port Suez and then into the canal for the slow journey through and then onto Port Said, all ready to disembark for our various postings to the wide range of camps in the Middle East.

Arthur Powell was heading for Ismailia on the Canal Zone, Godfrey MacDonald and I were down for Heliopolis, with a lot of shocks in store. No 208 (AC) Squadron at Heliopolis was our destination. The letters AC stand for 'Army Co-operation'. I think that was a misnomer! It should be 'Army Take-over'!

All the pilots were 'Blue Bloods' and one 'khaki wallah' called 'Tailyour!' and as ignorant as s***! In Aden we had NCO pilots and blue bloods who mucked in well but this was a different kettle of fish. The Army wallah stumped about in tartan trews and he was a hen-toed Cameron



*No 208 Squadron - Heliopolis, Egypt
Me, second from right at the back.*

Highlander! I think he went to bed in his trews! Heliopolis means 'San City'. This was no san camp! The station commander was a Canadian First War hero - allegedly! Group Captain Collishaw! All he wanted was parades, kit inspections and billet inspections. What was left was devoted to flying. We had to take our turn on guard duties as the 'Gyppos' were notorious thieves.

All in all though, Egypt was a very interesting land. The tram cars were the fastest in the world and dangerous! The German beer bars were lovely. Good, cold beer and spotless with plates of rats and crisps laid out. Obviously to make you thirsty.

We wore 'civvies' going out of camp but they still recognised our haircuts!

The town of Heliopolis was right beside our camp, with modern flats, bungalows, etc., all quite suburban and up to date. Some of our married lads lived out in the town but the majority were in the Barrack Blocks and quite a few in the Married Quarters provided. That is why the real camp life was non-existent - too near the big city!

When brother Donald and I were lads in Traquair Place, we had a next door neighbour named John Morrison who was an old Black Watch veteran of the Egyptian campaign. He would open up his kist and show Don and I

all his medals from that war, more so the medal awarded at the 'Battle of Tel el Kebir.' Translated, that means 'Battle of the Big Hill' in Arabic, the adjective seems to come after the noun. Funny language! After two years in Aden, we had a smattering of Arabic. The boys called it 'cook-house Arabic' but it came in handy at times. Mr and Mrs Morrison lost a son George at the Battle of Loos; (Sept. 1915) aged 20 years. Don and I were born three months later on December 30th, 1915. He had joined the Highland Light Infantry, as the summer camps were attractive! Our big brother Jack, joined the 'Argyll's' later (1916) when he came of age and served in France and Ireland. When he returned home (1918/19) the Glasgow Iron and Steelworks had closed near Netherton, his Stockholders job gone, he had to take a job labouring in Colvilles, Motherwell. By dint of hard work he progressed up the ladder but still a lot of manual labour was involved. Today the youngsters think 'manual labour' is the name of a Spanish disease and steer well clear of it!

I was determined to find 'Tel el Kebir'. By map, train and railway, I got there and found the big hill had almost vanished. The British losses were light but the 'Gypo' losses were heavy.

Sports were all the go in British Camps in Egypt. I was quite good at hockey and represented the Squadron on occasion. One day we played the 'Irish Guards' at the Kasr el Nil barracks in Cairo. I can't remember the result but they greatly entertained us and showed us around their barracks after the game. The bridge of the same name is nearby. 'Kasr el Nil' means 'King of the Nile'.

The Cameron Highlanders were stationed at the 'Citadel' in Cairo. We had a hospital there also. I visited the Camerons often as I went there for Piping lessons and had a meal in the Corporals' Mess as that was my rank, although I was in civvies. As I said before, you could not wander about in uniform. They were said to hate us but they loved our money! Most of them seemed to hang on to the trams and travel free. A bunch of nutters!

A lot were employed by the RAF and proved quite trustworthy and we had an Egyptian Army unit close to our camp at Heliopolis but they seemed to fill in their day signalling to one another by 'Morse Flag'. To the uninitiated it consisted of holding a large flag upright in front of your body. For a 'dot' you turned the flag down to your right to 90 degree angle. For a 'dash' you turned it down 180 degrees. What a tiresome way to pass messages. I must confess though, the 'Gypos' were fast. So they should be after all their daily caper. However, we in the RAF were just as anti-devilian with our ancient signalling system. In formation, we signalled to

other aircraft by 'zoggings'. You placed your right hand down over the cockpit side, a short drop for 'dot' and a long drop for 'dash'. It took a War to change things!

Another neighbour was the 'Queen's Hussians', now fully mechanised, ex-cavalry. They seem to spend all day racing up and down tank tracks. Out of courtesy, they invited us aboard. What an experience. Being ex-cavalry, their doted C.O. insisted they still wear their Spurs!! In the tank they jumped in and out, fully Spurred and we were scared we would lose an eye!

All in all, it was not a happy Squadron 208 AC (Army Co-operation). All the pilots were Blue Bloods snobs! In Aden we had NCO Pilots and Officers, a good crowd. To mark up your log book you had to go to the operations room and they glared at you as if you were trespassing. That is why I never bothered half the time. It got so bad, I wrote to Belhaven in Aden and asked him to get me re-called. But I learned later his wound was troublesome. He had his own worries - gangrene! But I still thought Egypt and the Canal Zone very interesting and I spent quite a time down the 'Munkie' in Cairo with my pal Cpl. Binnie Hales. The 'Munkie' was Cairo's version of the 'Barnes'. You did not travel on your own and yet I went to Tel el Kebir on my own that day, to view the scene of 'battle'.

The old Black Watch veteran pronounced it 'Telley-Caber' but it should have been, 'Tel el Kebir' - Hill, the Big (literally). Always adjectives after the noun! In Arabic, it sounds like Tel el Kebeer!

Until this period of time, my letters from home had been written by my dear Mother, when suddenly there was a change of handwriting. It was written by my sister Chriss and contained frightening news. It said Mother had been ailing for days and could not keep her food down. Our Dr. Gray said it was 'the bile' and poor Mother was getting weaker. They called for his partner, Dr. Reid who diagnosed a 'bowel stoppage' and wheeled Mother off to the Victoria Infirmary, in Glasgow. In the meantime, Dr. Gray had sent me an official letter begging me to apply for leave as it would boost Mother's hopes. Getting leave from abroad was unheard of in those days for common Rankers but I never the less asked to see the Station Commander - Grep Captain Colleshaw. He poo-pooed the idea and said, 'what good could you do your Mother?' I flared up and retaliated with, 'did you never have a Mother, sir?' It was a private interview and no tape recorders in those days. He ignored my outburst. A day or so later I was told to go to Cairo to the British Embassy and obtain a passport for home leave.

A troopship was leaving Alexandria for the U.K. I could take that and just pay for my food. So I boarded that ship with some of the old sweats

from 'Helio' whose time was up.

Six weeks leave, two weeks to get home, two weeks at home and two weeks to return by private boat – the P.O. 'Strathnaver'. Cost £17!

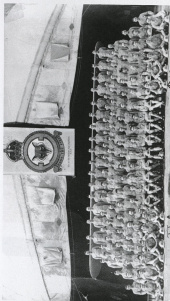
When I got home, Mother was still bed-ridden after the operation in Glasgow but went from strength to strength after that. So I ended up having a good leave. Brother Jack treated us to the Empire Exhibition in Glasgow. Visited all my friends. Mother improved.

Caught the 'Strathnaver' from London docks in my civvies – two kit bags, full packs, etc., were collected from RAF Uxbridge where I had to leave them for 'safe custody' during my leave. I should add that during my leave I obtained an interview with 'Lord Belhaven & Stenton' at Wishaw Estate. I asked him for a letter recommending that I should remain in a U.K. station during my Mother's parlous health. He was quite jovial, having just returned at 70 years of age, so he gladly obliged. However, it proved quite futile as I returned to Egypt. The trip was more interesting than on the usual Troopship. We stopped at Gibraltar, Tangiers, Marseilles, and the Straits of Messina and on to Port Said where I disembarked for Cairo and Heliopolis. Lived like a Lord on board ship. It must be awful to be poor!

I had hardly got back in the routine when we flew up to Mersah Matrük on the Libyan border, as the Prime Minister had gone off to see Hitler to talk peace. The lads were in a panic as we had 'Hawker Andax' biplanes and the Egyptians had up to date monoplanes across the border. Peace broke out and everything returned to normal but the Gypsies still hated us and they showed it!

The end of the year drew nigh and sure as fate, the RAF kept their promise and I was told to pack my kit bags and head for Alexandria for the next troopship home. I can't remember the name of the Troopship. They all looked the same. Painted white with a thick blue band round the body. The 'Somersetshire', the 'Dorsetshire', the 'Lancashire' and the 'Dilwara.' All made famous by the filthy songs concocted about them!

The bit I hated was to answer the call of nature. You all sat in a row with the sea water gushing by underneath! I thought up the idea that in order to get privacy, I would sneak down in the middle of the night, only to find about a dozen lads with the same plan! I often thought in later years that this was the cause of bowel trouble in years to come, as a lot of lads, 'baked it' as we called it. My dear Mother used to say when we were laddies, 'Keep your bowels open and your mind clear and you'll go through the world flying!'



1st BATTAL
1205-1836
No 1200 Squadron, Robert Aden, South Arabia, 1935-1936
Aircraft 'Hawker Hawk'

I am sitting, front row, sixth from left.



By the KING'S Order the name of
Flight Sergeant J Taylor,
Royal Air Force,
was published in the London Gazette on
1 January, 1942,
as mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service.
I am charged to record
His Majesty's high appreciation.

Archibald Sinclair
Secretary of State for Air



By the KING'S Order the name of
Wing Officer J Taylor,
Royal Air Force,
was published in the London Gazette on
8 June, 1944,
as mentioned in a Despatch for distinguished service.
I am charged to record
His Majesty's high appreciation.

Archibald Sinclair
Secretary of State for Air



Jim Taylor



"Per Ardua ad Astra"

RAF MEMOIRS

1932 ~ 1939