

**Report on My Foreign Service Project
August 1941 – April 1942
By Lt. Col. Kenneth G Boyd, USAAF (Retired)**

Ken Boyd is the brother-in-law of the pilot Wilfred Comrie, who was killed when his Halifax G-George crashed shortly after take-off from Pocklington for a raid on Berlin March 29th 1943. Ken and Wilfred were both born in Fargo, North Dakota. Wilfred crossed the Canadian border to join the RCAF in May 1941, six months before Pearl Harbour. He was subsequently seconded to 102 Sqn.

Ken is an Associate Member of the 102 Sqn Association and he himself was also working in England before Pearl Harbour. In his case it was as a Lieutenant in the United States Army Air Forces. In this article Ken tells the story of his involvement in a top secret joint RAF-USAAF mission to select bases in the British Isles which would be turned over to the United States for their use, if and when they got into World War 2.

Ken did not marry Wilfred Comrie's sister until just after the War, and so they never knew each other. As you will see below, it so happened that Ken also nearly flew with the RAF on a bombing raid to Berlin before the USA officially entered the War.

December 7th 1941 – "A date which will live in infamy"(President Roosevelt)

Pearl Harbour had been attacked. The US Ambassador in London told me to put my uniform on. My mission was no longer secret. I no longer needed to wear plain clothes. We were now at War.

I had been in England for four months. Our mission was at that time known only to select Army Air Force people in the United States. Even though Americans were convinced that they had to stop the German Army, our politicians would argue that any other solution was better. This is the reason for all the secrecy in the United States.

I was to continue working in Britain for a further four months after Pearl Harbour.

How It All Started

In August 1941 I was a First Lieutenant in the USAAF, based at Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio. The USAAF had been formed in June 1941 to strengthen what had previously been the United States Army Air Corps. General H. H. 'Hap' Arnold was at its head. Hap Arnold was originally taught to fly by the Wright brothers and was the only air commander ever to attain the five-star rank.

On August 23rd secret orders were issued by Major General George Brett, Chief of the Air Corps. I was to go to the US Embassy in London as aide to Colonel E.M. Powers, Chief of Production, USAAF. Colonel Powers would be assisted by Colonel James 'Jimmy' Doolittle.

In the following April Jimmy Doolittle led the daring raid by B-25 bombers on Tokyo to avenge Pearl Harbour. He went on to command the Twelfth Air Force in North Africa, the Fifteenth Air Force in Italy, and of course, the Eighth Air Force in England. But even before 1941 he was internationally renowned as a record-breaking flier and aviation pioneer. He had become an inspiration to many young men in the early days of aviation.

Our Mission

We were to make plans for the maintenance, supply and repair of American Army Air Force equipment in the British Isles. On 27th August, 1941 Colonel Powers, Colonel Doolittle and I discussed our mission with General 'Hap' Arnold at his office in Washington, DC. We then set off from there for London.

[Orders to Colonels Powers and Doolittle and to Ken for their London assignment are shown at Appendix 1. Ken's individual orders for his London assignment are shown at Appendix 2]

Our Journey to London

The first leg of my journey was in a military B-24 Liberator from Washington to Gander, Newfoundland with a refuelling stop in Maine.

There was then a delay of six days waiting for specific weather conditions across the Atlantic Ocean. Ferry Command began operating the route from Gander to Prestwick earlier in 1941. We had two .50 calibre guns in the tail, but no gunner aboard. If we encountered enemy aircraft during the flight, our only protection was to escape into the clouds immediately above. We were only authorized to use incoming radio, since outgoing signals could be traced. Fortunately, we were to encounter no enemy aircraft during our flight from Gander to Prestwick.

After this delay, we started off for England, but three hours out our cloud bank cover suddenly was gone. We turned back to Nova Scotia for the night and returned to Gander the next day. We tried again three days later and this time all went well; we landed at the Prestwick next morning.

Our project continued to be classified secret throughout our stay in the British Isles. However, the arrival of Jimmy Doolittle, the internationally known aircraft racer, was welcomed by about 30 RAF pilots. He let it be known that the United States was behind them in their efforts.

We took up residence in the Dorchester Hotel, just a short distance from the American Embassy in London. Our special Embassy rate was \$4 per day including breakfast. [In August 2005 the lowest rate for a standard single at the Dorchester is about £320, or about \$600, per night. Rates go up to £2,500 – about \$4,725 – per night for a 2 bedroom Terrace]

Later on, when I was spending about half my time in Belfast, and in the military

camps and manufacturing facilities, I moved over to the Cumberland Hotel. I had a lot less trouble getting room accommodations there on short notice.

First Assignments

Colonel Powers's assignment was to compile a list of the United States military located in the British Isles. There were many there that were studying the tactics of the countries that were involved in the war at that time. Since they involved different divisions of our military, no one group had that information. Information was forwarded to General Arnold's office

I was running the Office for Colonel Powers.

Colonel Doolittle was visiting the British Air Bases

I Get My Technical Observer's Wings

In order to provide me access to flying in military aircraft on this assignment General Arnold took special action to award me Technical Observer's Wings for a period of three months. This was later extended to the full period of my assignment in Britain. Although I was not a pilot, I put in time flying with pilots in the Embassy to comply with the necessary flying time for this award and the compensation that went along with it.



A Consolidated PT-1 [That is not Ken Boyd flying it]

The American Embassy had a Consolidated PT-1 - an old relic. It was a primary trainer biplane of a design dating from 1925; it had fixed landing gear and open front and rear cockpits. This was the only plane available for pilots to get in their flying time. The PT-1 had a cruising speed of 78 mph and a maximum speed of 99 mph. We occasionally raced the Flying Scotsman, the first steam locomotive to achieve an authenticated 100mph speed. By putting the PT-1 into a dive, we could wave to the train passengers while they rode past. Many years after the original steam locomotive had been withdrawn from service, my wife and I were travelling on the modern Flying Scotsman train service on the way to York at a speed of 140 mph.

RAF Flights - London to Belfast

I made the journey between London and Belfast several times. Langford Lodge in County Antrim was being prepared as a maintenance base for our Air Force. This was known only to select Army Air Force people in the US.

Langford Lodge was one of about 50 sites in Britain developed in 1940/41 by the Ministry of Aircraft Production as Satellite Landing Grounds. SLGs were small, minimally equipped airfields to which new aircraft produced by the factories were flown for temporary storage and kept by RAF Maintenance Units prior to being deployed to operational units. Storage at Langford Lodge commenced on 9th May, 1941 but soft ground conditions quickly caused problems and it was decided to provide tarmac runways. Construction of the runways was well advanced by the end of July that year and RAF aircraft were stored at the site until May, 1942.

In the meantime we were having secret meetings with British representatives to build an aircraft maintenance depot at Langford Lodge for the repair of American aircraft operated by British and American forces. It was agreed that the Ministry of Aircraft Production would construct runways, buildings and mains services while the United States Army Air Force would take responsibility for operating the depot. The USAAF decided that much of the operation of the depot would be subcontracted to the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation in a series of contracts renewable every 6 months. In February 1942, construction of the air depot commenced, the work being accorded absolute priority over all other construction in Northern Ireland. Large numbers of local people were employed to assist with its construction. A new rail track was laid by the Great Northern Railway from Crumlin to a terminus at Gortnagallon, half a mile from the actual airfield.

I understand that the pilots on the transports that took us across for our meetings in Northern Ireland were RAF pilots on R & R. There were times when a fighter pilot was at the controls that the ride could be pretty rough. Fortunately, the ride across the Irish Sea to Belfast was just a short hop. Also, we frequently experienced fog at the Belfast Airport in the morning. One morning they opened the hangar doors, front and back, to extend the runway a couple of hundred feet. Needless to say, flying in the war zone, even on an airline, was frequently a risky business, for more reasons than one.

Sir Frank Whittle

Whittle was the British designer of the jet engine. He had been experimenting with the jet engine since 1937. In May 1941 The first British jet aircraft, the Gloster E28/39 'Pioneer', powered by a Whittle engine made its maiden flight at Cranwell.

In October 1941 the USA asked for details of the engine and Jimmy Doolittle visited Whittle. There was a mutual understanding between Whittle and Doolittle.

Powers and I went along for the ride. My memory of the test facility was a mass of tubes, valves and tanks and an ear-splitting noise when it was operating. Although we were about 100 yards away from the test stand and muffled our ears, the noise was still deafening. I did not realise at the time that I was observing the aircraft engine of the future.

In June 1942, Whittle was flown to Boston to help General Electric to overcome problems. They built the engine under licence in America and Bell Aircraft's experimental Airacomet flew in the autumn of 1942. In England work began on the Gloster Meteor and this became the first British operational jet aircraft in 1944, going into action against the German V1 rockets.

In 1976 Whittle migrated to the USA, where he became a research professor at the US Naval Academy at Annapolis, settling in Colombia, Maryland.

Major now completed his assignment, a review of the British airdromes. Secret reports were filed with General Arnold. He returned to the USA on October 13th. Col. Powers and I remained in British Isles.

My Planned Bombing Run to Berlin

The United States was just getting started in the production of power operated turrets. The British had been in the production of POTs for several years, but theirs were .303 calibre rather than the .50 calibre guns in the United States.

When I had completed the tour of the British turret factories, I moved to an air base where I could fire a British turret on a test flight. Following the test, the pilot invited me to make a bomb run over Berlin that night. I accepted the invitation, but the pilot (who was the commander of the plane) decided to cancel me out just before flight time. As he explained, the United States was not even officially in the war, I could be classified as a spy on a British plane.

As it turned out, this was just the beginning of my problems. The American Embassy had received news of my contemplated flight over Berlin. Needless to say, the Military attaché was more than agitated. I could be classified as a spy on a British warplane; my diplomatic exemption would not apply. They would have to disown me.

I forgot about my secret RAF papers that I carried with me at all times would have had a difficult time trying to explain those papers giving me Northern Ireland Security Clearance. [Shown at Appendix 4]

Langford Lodge Project Meetings

One afternoon in London, I received a call from Northern Ireland. There was a Lease Lend meeting in Belfast the next morning. Could I make it? A Lieutenant does not say "No" to British Generals or Marshals, and so I agreed that I would attend the meeting the next morning.

I had a problem the next morning; the car was late picking me up at the hotel. When

I arrived at the airport, they were waiting. I loaded on and we immediately took off for Belfast. I heard later that a Canadian Army Colonel had been bumped off the plane when I arrived. Needless to say, he was more than a little irritated at the delay. I later found out that we were headed for the same meeting in Belfast. He did not make it. This turned out to be the last meeting that I attended in Northern Ireland on the Langford Lodge Project.

When in Northern Ireland, I frequently visited the RAF Officers clubs, a good place to find out what was going on. Since liquor, other than scotch, was only a dollar a bottle at the Embassy, I frequently donated a bottle at the bar. As a result, I did not have any trouble getting information as to what was going on in the War.

Back on the London to Belfast RAF Airline, on my last trip to Belfast the air attendant notified me that my travel bag was leaking. A broken bottle of rum soaked all of my clothes. Luckily, I had an aide assigned to me in Belfast. He took care of the problem. As it turned out, that was my last trip to Belfast.

This maintenance facility was transferred over to the Lockheed Corporation in Los Angeles when I returned to the States.

Tours of British Manufacturing Facilities

Following completion of the first London assignment, Colonel Powers issued orders for me to visit several British manufacturing facilities. This required that I travel to installations in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Having no knowledge of the area, I had to rely on the RAF Motor Pool to get me to my destination. For security reasons, most of the signs (highway, building, city and street) had been removed. If the Motor Pool Driver needed directions, she had to ask one of the local residents. If I asked questions, being in civilian clothes, it sent up a red flag to the people. "Notify the authorities immediately, unknown person in the area asking for information."

On my first trip on this assignment, I made several visits to manufacturing facilities. All went well, or so I thought. The following Monday representatives from Scotland Yard were at the American Embassy asking for information on an unknown American Officer travelling in England. Somewhere along the line the system had failed. No one had notified Scotland Yard that I would be travelling outside of London. They had received a report on my travels the second day out. They followed me the entire week, but were just far enough behind that they did not make contact. As it turned out, only the top British personnel were advised of my mission. Fortunately, I was not held responsible for the failure to notify Scotland Yard. I was cleared and went on to the next assignment.

French Restaurant - London

I had a special contact at a French Restaurant in London.

While the menu of lamb, ram and mutton was usually available, beef steak was never on the list. Once a month I could get a ham through the embassy delivered from the States. This I traded for the steak, when available. The owner of the restaurant would let me know when the steak was in.

This was the night - the steak was in. I arrived at the restaurant about 6:00 pm. We were all doing fine until the air raid alarm went off about 7:30 pm. As usual, we were locked in awaiting the all-clear signal. We still didn't have the all clear at 12:00 midnight. I was in the owner's apartment shortly thereafter when he disclosed to me his special secret. We both had several drinks by that time. It seems that our beef steaks were actually horsemeat. I tried to eat the horsemeat later, but just could not do it. Fortunately, I returned to the States about a week later so I never tried it again.

January 26th, 1942 - American Troops Arrive in Northern Ireland

On January 9th, 1942 I received orders to report to the RAF Maintenance Base, Belfast. On January 10th, 1942 a USAAF office was opened there and I was assigned a permanent office in it. My duties were to act as the USAAF Representative to the Lease Lend Committee. Lieutenant Arthur Rank was assigned to assist me.

On 26th January 1942, after a day of meetings at the RAF Maintenance Base in Northern Ireland, I dropped into the local pub. I was talking to the bartender when a large group of officers dropped in. They looked like US officers, but I was the only US officer stationed in Northern Ireland. Shortly thereafter, more officers arrived. Since I was on a secret assignment, I decided to return to the base. When I returned to London the next day, I was informed first group of American soldiers had arrived in Belfast by boat. It was just as well that I was not around to try to explain my classified status to other officers.

The US office in Northern Ireland for the Langford Lodge project remained secret and then closed. The Langford Lodge plans were then transferred to Colonel Powell's office in the London Embassy. I was then to act as special courier, taking them on to General Arnold's office on my return to Washington. General Arnold reviewed the plans, and I then took them on to Lockheed in Los Angeles. The plans carried their special classification all this time. After a two week review of these plans, Lockheed took over the operation of the base.

Meeting in Colonel Powers London Office, April 1942

Colonel Powers said to me,

"Lieutenant we have a problem. The US Commanding General that has just arrived in Northern Ireland with the first American troops has cancelled all US Military assignments in England and ordered all officers to report to his office for new assignments. Until you report to Northern Ireland for further orders I can still have you returned to the States on your present assignment.

If you go, I want you to take a secret letter direct to 'Hap' Arnold. He is the only one who can get me back to the States".

[Ken's orders to deliver the documents are at Appendix 3]

Having been in the British Isles for over seven months, I was ready to return. Two days later, I had my orders and was on my way to Northern Ireland.

They say the Irish Sea is rough. I agree! It was the roughest boat ride that I was ever on. We landed somewhere in Northern Ireland while it was still dark. To my surprise, my British aide was there to get me to the West Side of Northern Ireland. It was only then that I was returning to the States on one of the ships that had brought the American troops to Belfast. The ships were returning to New York with an escort of British destroyers.

Back Across the Atlantic

Shortly before departure, the passengers met with the ship's Captain. He gave us brief information and instructions, as follows:

1. The Captain was taking all precautions to prevent an attack by a German U-boat
2. All lights that could be seen from outside the ship would be extinguished at night (exception, 5 below)
3. The two passenger ships would travel in a line with about one mile between ships.
4. British Destroyers, protecting the passenger ships maintained contact and travelled front, rear and to the sides of the convoy line.
5. At night, each ship in the convoy had a shrouded light mounted on the rear that could only be seen from directly behind. Each ship followed the shrouded light ahead.

There were about a hundred children that had been orphaned by the war that were passengers being sent to the United States. They were accompanied by several young nurses. The children were located on another deck.

There were a few additional passengers returning to the States. It was rumoured that Lady Astor was on board. If so, she remained in her cabin for the entire eleven-day trip.

On the first night out, with lights out, passengers asleep, all was quiet. Suddenly there was a loud crash; the first thought was that we had collided with a German Sub. All

the lights came on and the convoy stopped. Out in the passageway, one of the young nurses in a brief negligee was running down the passageway screaming, "Save the children, save the children". Remember that this was back in April 1942. The display of a young lady in a brief negligee brought everything to a halt,

As it turned out, we had hit an Irish potato boat. Fortunately, our boat had very little damage, but the potato boat sank in a very short time. The British destroyers moved in immediately and were able to save all of the passengers and crew. A short time later, we resumed our trip. On the third day out the British destroyers left us and returned to Belfast. There were no further incidents on the eleven-day cruise to New York harbour

Back to Wright Field, Dayton, Ohio - May 1942

While I was waiting for orders from General Arnold to take the Langford Lodge papers to Lockheed in California, I received a telephone call from Colonel Powers in Washington. He thanked me for delivering his Secret letter to General Arnold. The General immediately ordered him back to Washington.

At his Washington DC office Colonel Powers asked General Arnold, "How did Lieutenant Boyd deliver my secret letter direct to you through this maze in Washington?" General Arnold replied, "I asked Lieutenant Boyd the same question".

3,819 words (or nearly 6 pages of 102 Sqn Association Newsletter)

Appendix I:
Orders to Colonels Powers and Doolittle and to Ken for their London Assignment

ADDRESS ONLY TO
CHIEF OF THE AIR CORPS
WAR DEPARTMENT
WASHINGTON, D. C.

WAR DEPARTMENT
OFFICE OF THE CHIEF OF THE AIR CORPS
WASHINGTON

August 25, 1941.

MEMORANDUM FOR: COLONEL E. M. POWERS

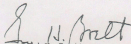
1. In compliance with a directive received by the undersigned, you will upon your arrival in England take immediate steps to lay plans for the coordination of the maintenance, supply and repair of American Equipment. Assisted by Colonel Doolittle and Lieutenant Boyd, you will secure all possible information as to the military personnel, that is Army Air Corps officers now on duty in England. Check their location, find out exactly what their duties are, and under whose authority they are operating at the present time. This Air Corps personnel should be available to assist in laying plans for a suitable maintenance establishment.

2. In addition thereto, you will immediately secure the same data pertaining to all industrial men now on duty in England.

3. You will likewise then hold conversations on the possible location of facilities available and equipment available for the establishment of such maintenance and repair shops as are now being requested by the British.

4. Should conversations be held dealing with the possible release of American equipment, you will not under any circumstances commit yourself, or express an opinion as to whether such equipment is available. This restriction also applies to Colonel Doolittle and Lieutenant Boyd.

- OPERATION
MAINTENANCE
REPAIR
OVERHAUL
1. Service
 2. Training
 3. Allocation
 4. Equipment


Geo. H. Brett,
Major General, Air Corps,
Chief of the Air Corps.

Appendix 2:
Ken's Individual Orders for His London Assignment

8-722

CONFIDENTIAL
WAR DEPARTMENT
-45-1088

THE ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE

WASHINGTON

ADJUTANT GENERAL'S OFFICE (8-22-11)0.

August 27, 1941.

SUBJECT: Orders.

THRU: Chief of Air Corps,
76%
3, Washington, D. C.

TO: First Lieutenant Kenneth G. Boyd (O-337531), Air Corps.

1. The Secretary of War directs as necessary in the military service that First Lieutenant Kenneth G. Boyd (O-337531), Air Corps, proceed at the proper time from Washington, D. C., via the most expeditious manner to the United Kingdom, reporting upon arrival to the American Ambassador, for temporary duty as Military Observer in connection with aviation training and the production, maintenance and supply of aviation materiel, and upon completion of this temporary duty, he will return to his proper station. He is authorized to proceed to any additional countries, including belligerent countries, that may be deemed necessary in connection with the performance of his duties.

2. Travel by military or commercial aircraft (under the provisions of Section II, War Department Circular 128, dated November 4, 1940), by belligerent vessel or aircraft, commercial steamship and rail is authorized.

3. In lieu of subsistence a flat per diem of \$6.00 is authorized for travel by military or commercial aircraft and for the period of temporary duty outside the continental limits of the United States in accordance with existing law and regulations. An additional per diem not to exceed \$4.00 is authorized under the same conditions, as this additional per diem is now prescribed for observers outside the continental limits of the United States. PD 1402 P 5-06 A 0410-2.


Adjutant General.

CONFIDENTIAL

Appendix 3:
Ken's Orders to Deliver Reports to Washington

AMERICAN EMBASSY
OFFICE OF THE MILITARY ATTACHE
1, GROSVENOR SQUARE, W. 1.
LONDON, ENGLAND

12 March, 1942.

MEMORANDUM FOR: 1st Lieut. Kenneth G. Boyd, A.C.

In connection with your appointment and duty as Special Courier for the purpose of conveying official documents from London, England, to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, War Department, Washington, D.C., the following instructions are given for your information and guidance:

1. You are fully responsible for the safety of the bag of official documents from the time you receive it until it is delivered to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, War Department, Washington, D.C.
2. Upon arrival in Washington, D.C., it will be personally taken to the Office of the Assistant Chief of Staff for receipt and opening.
3. During the travel period between London and Washington, D.C., every means will be taken to safeguard the documents in question.

H. G. Leonard Jr.

H. G. LEONARD, JR.
Major, A.C.D.
Executive Officer

12 March, 1942.

Receipt is acknowledged of one (1) sealed pouch addressed to the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, War Department, Washington, D.C., to be delivered as per instructions above.

Kenneth G. Boyd

KENNETH G. BOYD
1st Lt., Air Corps

*Not Fm R
Washington
3/25/42
Received on pouch from Lt. K.G. Boyd.
H. G. Leonard Jr.*

Appendix 4:
Authority for Ken to Possess Secret RAF Maps and Documents

