

## **Chapter Two**

### **Preparing for War**

With my flying training under my belt and a rank of Flight Lieutenant, I and my pals were ready for war. But first we had to get back to England.

Coming over to the USA we travelled in a beaten up old barge which induced the most revolting sea sickness I have ever experienced. By the time we docked in Canada the ship was in a disgusting condition. So much so, that the Canadian soldiers, about to embark to Europe, refused to stay on board. A mutiny of kinds but entirely justified.

This was not my experience on the return trip to Blighty. We sailed on the Queen Mary and being now an officer, were assigned first class accommodation. The meals were excellent, no one was vomiting and apart from the ship zigzagging it's way across the Atlantic, to avoid German submarines, we had a great cruise back home. The superior speed of this luxury liner was such that running clear of submarines meant it needed no escort, or so we were informed.

We docked in Scotland at Gourock and after spending the night there I was sent to RAF Millom, in Cumbria, to be kitted out and prepared for duty in India. Duty in India meant having numerous injections, which had the result of making me quite ill. In fact I was bed-ridden for three of my week's leave at home in Hampstead. I came out of the underground station at Hampstead and must have looked like death warmed up, when a passer by commented to his fellow traveller. "BOY, is this England last chance?" The irony of it all was that the India trip was completely cancelled and we were reassigned to other things.

I do not recall much of those days preparing for war but I do know we were training for the real thing and needed to form into working, effective crews. Our crew was led by Squadron Leader Packe. He had been in Canada since 1939 and had successfully trained hundreds of airmen. He was awarded an AFC for his contribution, which he richly deserved. He had not however seen action and was required to train for this before he would become our skipper.

We flew as a crew during our training, which consisted of flying over England and worked together to make a cohesive crew. I should have had my doubts back then when more than once we seemed to be in a pickle and were told to stand by to abandon ship. But, we never needed to actual bale out. This might have been part of the training but it didn't feel like it.

SL Packe, as part of his skipper training, flew on an op to Berlin but sadly was overcome, or so I heard later, and cowered in a ball behind his seat for most of the journey. On landing he was whizzed off and we never saw or heard of him again. It is sad to think of a man who had done so much in equipping airmen with excellent training, had succumbed involuntarily to a breakdown. So with a bump we were without a skipper.

This meant we had to find a replacement skipper and this is when FO Johnny Corke came on the scene and became our excellent skipper. Our flight became known as “Corkescrew”, for obvious reasons. We trained over the safe skies of England in Ansons and later Wellingtons. Further training involved the use of H2S, which was a form of radar navigation. It sent a radar beam from a dome mounted on the belly of the Wellington, to the surface below. Relatively smooth objects, like the sea, the beam was not reflected but sharp angled surfaces, such as buildings did reflect the beam. This was viewed on a CRT screen and the blips could, after a while, be interpreted as coast line or a city or even large buildings. H2S could be used without the need of standard navigation using detailed maps and compass. It proved quite effective in locating the target during Pathfinder operations.

So I was at last trained and ready for action after completing training with

No 3 E.F.T.S. Shellingford, England  
Primary: Souther Field, USA  
Basic: Cochran Field, USA  
B and G: Picton, Ontario, Canada  
A.N.S: Port Albert, Ontario, Canada  
A.F.U: Millom, Cumbria, England  
O.T.U: Harwell, Berks, England

and I had flown:

Tiger Moth Gypsy major 130hp  
Stearman 220hp  
Vultee  
Anson  
Wellington

It would be a few months before we were a crew and ready for action but that day came eventually and was received with relieve, excitement and trepidation all mixed together. But, we never spoke of our doubts or fears with each other, as it would have been pointless and unnerving too.

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