

## **Sqn. Ldr. Geoffrey Whittle, DFM RAF (Ret'd)**

On reaching the age of 18 in September 1941 I volunteered for aircrew duties and was accepted for training as an Observer. Called up in March 1942 I undertook all of my training, which was brief to say the least, in the United Kingdom. Flying training was undertaken in Scotland during the months of November 1942/February 1943, not in the best weather conditions but a very good introduction to things to come.

Passing out at a wings parade on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1943 I left that evening for 27 OTU Litchfield which started the following day. There I crewed up with my Pilot and W/AG and converted to the Wellington aircraft. That was followed by conversion to the Lancaster at Lindholm in Yorkshire. It was at Lindholm that the full crew complement was made up.

At the end of training in June we were posted to 101 Squadron based at Ludford Magna, a wartime airfield near Louth. At that time I had completed 200 flying hours one third of which was at night. Our first operation, two nights after joining the Squadron, was a mine laying sortie to La Rochelle and our first raid on Germany was to Cologne.

As part of Bomber Command we took part in operations against Berlin, Nuremberg, Turin and Peenemunde, the German Flying Bomb Research Establishment which put back the German Flying Bomb attacks on the UK by several months.

On our 15<sup>th</sup> operation against Hannover, near to the target the aircraft was caught by searchlights attacked by a night fighter and ground AA fire all within seconds which resulted in severe damage that included an engine fire and also one within the fuselage. We managed to evade our attackers attack the target and get home. As a result all the crew were decorated with immediate awards of 2 Conspicuous Gallantry Medals, 1 DFC and 4 DFMs.

Unfortunately, on our 16<sup>th</sup> operation I suffered a perforated eardrum and was hospitalised. On their 19<sup>th</sup> trip flying with a replacement navigator the crew was shot down and 5 of the crew were killed, The Pilot and WAG survived and became POWs.

Whilst in hospital my Commission was Gazetted back dated 27<sup>th</sup> September.

After six months ground duty I returned to flying with a height restriction of 8000 feet to become part of the Air Sea Rescue Service before being earmarked for the Tiger Force scheduled to go to the Far East (which never materialised due to the war ending). In the years after the war (with a full flying category restored) I served in Aden, Egypt and Germany in a variety of roles.

I attended the RAF Staff College at Bracknell in 1959 and was then posted to Fighter Command HQ at Bentley Priory from where I took early retirement in the rank of Squadron Leader in December 1961

I initially went into banking but decided the life was not to my liking so joined NAAFI as a Trainee District Manager. During my 26 years with the Corporation I spent 18 years overseas serving in Cyprus, Libya, Singapore, Berlin and Gan and visiting several other countries like Nepal, India and Bangladesh. My final appointment was as a Departmental Manager at NAAFI Headquarters in London from where I retired in 1988.

Settled in Hampshire I became a District Councillor in 1989 for East Hampshire, and after moving to Lincolnshire in January 2007, I became a District Councillor for North Kesteven District Council.

Now living at Ruskington where both my son and daughter also reside I have been very lucky to have had a varied and interesting career, seen many parts of the world and now live in a lovely village with my family nearby.

Reflecting on my time in Bomber Command I had the upmost admiration for those older aircrew who had families (my pilot was 33 years old with a family). I was young ---and if not flying just enjoyed life.