

Sqn Ldr G G Whittle, DFM

I was just 16 when the Second World War started. As a family we lived on the SE approaches to London and not a long way from RAF Biggin Hill. As a result I did witness several of the air battles during the summer of 1940. The first major raid against the civilian population of London took place on the first Saturday of September 1940, a glorious summer's day. Around 4/5 o'clock the air raid warning sounded and then the sky was filled with Germany bombers, a sight not seen before over the UK.

I moved to Letchworth the following month but returned home at various times which including the Christmas holiday period during which time the City of London suffered its fire bomb raid. That was quite a sight even though viewed from a distance.

At the age of 18 I volunteered for aircrew duties and was accepted for training as an Observer and enlisted into the RAFVR being called up in March 1942. My training all took place in the UK, the flying part at West Freugh in SW Scotland. Not the most glamorous part of the UK but during the winter of 1942/3 a good introduction to our home weather conditions. Graduating on 1 March 1943 it was off to OTU the same night. Weeks on the Wellington was followed by conversion to the Lancaster and then with my crew to 101 Sqn, Ludford Magna in June.

We completed our first op, mine laying, 72 hours after arriving on the Squadron. Sorties to such places as Cologne, Nuremberg, Peenemunde, Turin and Berlin followed. On 27th September we were tasked to attack Hannover. On approaching the target we were coned by searchlights, hit by ack ack fire and a night fighter all within seconds. An engine was set on fire and a fire started in the fuselage. Diving to avoid the night fighter the engine fire was extinguished and then feathered, later to be restarted. After an interesting 10 or 15 minutes and the on board fire also out we set course for base with an aircraft that required a lot of TLC from the pilot and limited navigation aids. Diverted to Lindholm we left a badly damaged aircraft somewhere on the airfield as on landing we ground looped because the port tyre had been punctured by shrapnel. The outcome of the incident was that all the crew received immediate awards, Pilot and Engineer CGMs, the Bomb Aimer DFC, W/Op, 2 Gunners and myself DFMs. Unfortunately on our next sortie I perforated an ear drum and was hospitalized and on their third trip without me they were shot down over Belgium, the Pilot, W/Op and my replacement bailed out but the others were killed plus the newly acquired Special Operator.

Some months later I was given a height restricted medical category and did some air/sea rescue work before being earmarked for the Tiger Force which with the end of the Japanese war never materialised. I eventually gained a full flying category and spent some time in the All Weather world on the Mosquito, Meteor and for a short time the Javelin. I took early retirement in December 1961