

Dear- John- Here as promised my story of my war.

Only 15 yrs old at the out-break of war.

As a 17yr old I tried to join the R.A.F .sent home until I reached 18 ,at the time working making cables for barrage balloons ,this being a reserved occupation so I was 19 before they let me go.

Finally joining up at 19, sent to London to be kitted out also inoculated & vaccinated ,walking between two rows of nurses armed with needles which they happily plunged into ones arms.

We all had a piece of white cloth which we put in our forage hats (at different- stages this was moved showing more or less of the white, this showed how far in the training you were)

For the next stage I went to Bridlington for I T U, at this point we learned drilling in between aircraft recognition and all about the 303 browning gun which would be the gun in turrets, stripping them down and reassembling both blindfold and with gloves (this being the conditions we would be under. One our two things to mention, we in my intake were handled by the worse corporal there he made us march everywhere at light infantry pace, almost jogging. We were always at each destination ahead of all others and then have to wait for them. One night we had to stand guard at the officers-mess (this was a hotel on the sea front. Some myself included had never done any rifle drill so new nothing of presenting arms ect to overcome this we were to do the darkness hours so when approached point the bayonet and call (who goes there & pass Friend). The rifles had no ammunition ,the reason given was a cadet previously had been on guard with a loaded rifle , a police-man thought it a joke to hide behind the garden walls and creep-up on him. Not replying to the challenge the lad fired putting a hole though the policemen's helmet, we were not told the state of his trousers, but from then on no ammunition was allowed. The last day before leaving Bridlington dingy drill ,dressed only in P.T,shorts .A maewest was put on cold and wet, we had to leap into the sea swim out to a dingy climb in roll out and swim back to the jetty, this on a very cold October day Next day embarking a train for Scotland, to begin our serious training to become air-gunners.

The destination was Dalcross , close to Inverness. Traveling day and night we reached the mountains as dawn broke I could appreciate the views. To prepare for flying we were given some of our flying gear.

After a few days in the class-room doing the usual recognition & gun practice the big day arrived. Clad in flying gear we were marched out to waiting planes. These were twin engine Anson's fitted with a gun-turret and two Browning 303,s. five cadets climbed aboard taking turns to fire at a drogue towed by a smaller aircraft, each fired 200 rounds. Imagine standing on the tarmac next to a plane for the first time, (prior to this even a car ride was an event now to be going into the great blue yonder. The first day we met our tutor he got the list of our names he gasped and said this could only happen to me (19 in the squad 7 Johnsons & 1 Johnstone, this was to be a nightmare he said.)

The flying was sometimes firing other time a camera fitted in place of the guns and fighters made runs at us we took evasive actions an fired the cameras .It was beautiful scenery to fly over and as it was November the high mountain tops were covered in snow. Half-way into the course we had a week-end pass I decided to spend it in Inverness, booking a bed at the Y.M.C.A. after a good sight-

seeing day I took the last train back to camp. No corridors I shared a compartment with a young lady who turned out to be a Yorkshire lass, she talked all the journey whilst I was trying to hear the names of each station, she assured me she travelled the line on a regular basis she would tell me when we got to Dalcross. A couple of stations later the train began to draw away she suddenly said that's your station I leapt up, opened the carriage door and leapt out, we had already cleared the platform, I hit the ground rolled over on the cinders before getting to my feet and dusted myself down, as an old gent who ran the place came toward me shaking his fist and saying how stupid I was. Then as I explained my reason for the mad way I had landed at his station. He then dropped the bombshell this was not Dalcross this was three miles further down the line, no more trains that night. Striding away from the station I set-out along the unlit country road after about a mile I came to a junction, choice should I go left or right, no sign-posts mentally I tossed a coin deciding to go right. Half a mile later I heard a coach approaching, (this was the first and only vehicle to have come along that road. Climbing aboard I sighed with relief it was going to my camp, many strange looks came my way, walking the lonely road in pitch darkness what was I doing?. A few nights later I had to do a night's guard duty, my companion was a man older than myself who had served on ground crew, 2 years before volunteering for aircrew, so he knew every way of making life easy for himself. After reporting to the orderly officer, he informed us we had to go around the camp until Goclock next morning when we reported back to him, wishing us goodnight he added I'm off to bed. It was a bright cold November night, no cloud the sky full of stars and the ghostly Arora-Borealis lights shining away. After everyone was asleep my comrade scrambled under the officers fuel compound and filled two sand-bags with coke handing one to me we returned to our hut, our fuel allowance was almost gone so this was a top-up to our supply, my companion then removed his great-coat before settling down to sleep. I tried to follow his example but the fear of being discovered mine was very fearful night. An hour or so before daylight we put on our gear made our way back to rendezvous with the officer, I was happy we had got away with it. The week before Christmas 1943 the big day arrived, our passing out parade, we had to go onto parade without stripes[some of which we had been supplied the day previous, after we were given the stripes & air gunners wing leave the parade with them visible. The only way this could be achieved the night before we sewed these on our tunics, the great coats stayed plain, parade over the great-coats were removed, showing three stripes and gunners wing. Leaving camp to march to the station after a quick lunch side pack, back-pack 2 kitbags one under each arm and the great-coat slung over a shoulder, (one kit-bag contained had normal kit the other flying gear, now on we would have to lug all this lot where ever we moved.) On the journey to Edinburgh I began sewing stripes to my great-coat, a lady sharing the compartment took pity on me and took over the job. Before running into the station at Edinburgh, we crossed the forth-bridge in darkness, I prepared to leave the train knowing I would have to change trains for my final destination Doncaster. Even as I stepped from the train the tannoy announced the train for London would be leaving another platform within the next few minutes, hurrying as best I could I reach the platform as it just began to move a guard seeing my plight took a kit-bag pushed me into a compartment, this was an empty 1st class one so I did the journey in comfort. We only had one stop at Newcastle so arriving in Doncaster for 4am. On leaving the train I had a longish walk to the exit, ending in thirty or so steps, at the top an old ticket collector asked to see my pass, off-loading the kit-bags I removed the pass from my pocket out of my eye corner I saw two S.P., s watching the proceedings, replacing the pass I picked up my gear two steps tuck me level with the police, to my amazement one stopped me demanding to see my pass. I had already decided it was too early to go home so I would go to the nearby Y.M.C.A. and have breakfast. I told the S.P. I

had no intension of putting my gear down until I reached there, seeing I was determined he waved me through I did not see them again. My home was about half a mile away Knowing Dad would be getting up for work at 7am I left after a good breakfast to arrive at that time, sure enough he had just arisen as I arrived, pleased to know I was home for Christmas he went back upstairs to tell Mum before leaving for work. Mum came down stairs, after making a great deal of fuss, (she did not know I was coming home for Christmas.), finally I got to bed, so ending 1943 at home. The next morning Christmas—eve after breakfast I strolled around town looking at the decorations I admit also admiring my three stripes and the half wing with A.G. on it. At one window I saw a young pilot officer obviously also brand new doing the same as myself across the street, I could with-out turning round let him pass but suddenly I turned round and threw a salute any drill sgt would be proud of, taken completely by surprise under one arm he had small parcel's the other his cane, he did some smart juggling to enable him to return the salute, managed to splutter Merry Christmas sergeant and pass on. As always the leave soon went by but Mum insisted I visited the photographer so she had a photo in uniform, showing at 19teen I was a sgt. My next move was to O.T.U. at Bruntingthorpe all trades were put together for the first time, during this time crews sorted themselves out. I Didn't get that chance the flying part of the course, at a nearby air-field Bitterswell. Six crews weeks ahead of us were short of a gunner, to solve the situation we were set an air-craft rec test, top, six allocated to a crew that they named. Six were driven to meet our crews, met at the guard-room of a crew member. Called to be the midupper gunner for Watkins crew, a navigator stepped forward obviously older than myself I was impressed by his attitude we became friends at once. He helped me with my gear, taking me to the hut the whole crew shared with a second crew. Leaving my kit on my bed we made our way to the sgt mess, on the way Duggie explained the skipper ,radio op and rear gunner had been doing circle's & bums the night before. Reaching the mess Duggie was looking around for the skipper he spotted a person lying out in one of the arm chairs, the face covered with a news-paper, this fluttered up and down in time with his breathing, I begged he should not be disturbed, but my companion said he will have to wake for lunch. Harold Watkins (for that was his name one he hated so all called him Harry). Removing the news page we were introduced, after which he promptly replace the paper and went back to sleep. One by one the other members of the crew appeared and we came acquainted, all but the rear gunner ,he had been resting with the others, when a Sqdn/Ldr entered and ordered him with others to go with him in a Wellington to fly to another air-field, they were refused landing permission, so the sqdn/ldr came back in a temper, Suddenly we heard a commotion he tried to land forgetting to lower the wheels, luckily they had wooden props, these snapped as they hit the ground removing four inch from each he managed to lift the plane circle lower the wheels and land successfully. It cost him two ranks when later appearing before a court-marshal. Soon after the landing our rear-gunner joined us, looking relieved to escape unscathed. So I met Carson J Foy, our Canadian gunner.

We now started doing a mixture of day and night flying, a lot of which were cross-countries ,these were devised to give us conditions as near to operations as possible, for 5hrs+ we flew on a given route, practice bombing places where the bomb-aimer dropped small bombs to test his skills, anywhere along route fighters would attack, so the gunners gave instructions for evasive action, the fighter pilot would give his thoughts on how the crews re-acted under attack. At the end of strenuous course came the climax, a Nickel Raid over enemy territory, this was a 5.20hr operation, where we dropped news- papers ,ration coupons ,Frans ect. Dropping these over Orleans we ran through some flack other-wise uneventful .we had no mid-upper turret so I was front gunner ,next

we went to a conversion unit where we flew Stirlings, we were . also joined by the last crew member, The engineer Fred Jowett ,we were on parade when these engineers marched on , as their names were called the name of the pilot was divulged to them. Fred was ex-ground crew who had decided to get onto flying, his forage cap looked as though he had used it to wipe oil covered engines ,his trousers had pieces let in to widen at the bottoms giving a bell-bottom effect (these caused him to be put on a charge and he had to have them put back to normal.) We only spent 2weeks on Stirlings before changing to Lancasters.and another week to be posted to our first operational squadron 61 we shared the station with 50 squadron at Skellingthorpe ,c lose to Lincoln.

Our first op was on the 13th June a week after D-day. This was to help the troops, warned we would be bombing near our troops so we had a code to stop bombing, this was (Billy Bunter) hearing this from the Master Bomber we had to abandon the raid . seconds before we dropped ours the call came Billy Bunter, the skipper ordered bomb-doors closed so an anti-climax we turned for home. To avoid others our skipper chose to climb two thousand feet , long after we turned we could see some idiots still bombing, the controller was screaming out the re-call sign finally yelling (that means stop bombing you silly B.....) we flew to a designated point in the north sea, got rid of our load and headed for home. Learning those who maintained their height on return ran into night-fighter and some were lost., we had only gone through flack with-out much trouble. No fighters seen.

Op2 was another night one a German target Gelsenkirchen this was a different kettle of fish. Like all German targets it was heavily defended, the flack was unbelievable search-lights, and night fighters added to the problems. Some had already bombed before we arrived ,Dante's inferno comes to mind, The flak fires burning and each bomb added to the inferno below. The round flight took 5hrs. 40 Lincoln Cathedral was a welcome sight on return.op3 night again a longer flight to Limoges marshalling-yards deep into France 6hrs-40, op4 Prouville pretty uneventful op5 nights again marshalling yards at Vitry a long one 7hrs-35, these raids were all reasonably strait forward apart from flack.op6 a day-light raid at Beauvoir Par-De-Calais supporting the army. So 10 days of June and we had already completed 6 ops.

At this point we were rewarded with a 48hr pass, the skipper who came from the Manchester area left for home, all apart from myself, were too far to go home, so decided to accompany me to Doncaster for a night out. They booked a night in a hotel, we then went with me to meet my parents. You can imagine they were overjoyed to get to know them, after a lot of talking and a meal, as soon as opening time came around we adjourned to my local. Dad never a drinking man was persuaded to go along even-though 2 halves would last him all night I didn,t count our intake, but later told me we consumed 9 pints and 9 whisky chasers. Carson, being a Canadian found in the snug were ladies, (he preferred being called Jack this his 2nd name). He kept going into the snug buying and drinking with the women, so a stack of drinks awaited him each time he came back to us, you can imagine the state he was in by time was called. We had arranged to spend the rest of the night at an indoor fair-ground in town. I walked Dad home then walked to the hotel, the others had put Jack to bed so we left for the fair, which operated until 12pm. Next morning we met at the rail station to return to camp. No Jack this was causing confusion should we call the Police ,when they called Jack for breakfast his bed had not been used. Before a decision was taken he strolled toward us a grin all over his face a brown-paper parcel under his arm (this was his uniform he was now dressed in a smart suit. The journey back we heard his story. Leaving his hotel room he came looking for us. He actually passed us but in the total black-out walked pass without being aware of it. After

some time he realised he was leaving town. About turn he stayed right. Entering Doncaster from this direction, the road split at this point he should have gone left, right took him into an area called Marshgate. This led him to an unfenced canal. Falling into this must have sobered him quickly luckily he fell between the lock-gates, this enabled him to find the steel rungs to the top. Here he sat, not daring to move should he fall back in, nearby were the railway workshops, a young man leaving work heard his cry even in the sheer darkness he crossed the canal gates as a short cut. Taking Jack home he was fed given a bed, after a breakfast loaned him a smart suit. The parcel contained his uniform still wet. Back in camp he put on his spare uniform I went with him to the village post-office to return the suit.

Now we could get on with the war. July 4th we attacked V1 installations at St Leau D,esserent at night. Three nights later the same target. After a ten days leave (on ops leave was granted every 6 weeks) on 23rd night raid to Kiel as usual a German target heavily guarded. Shortly after our bombs were released Jack the rear-gunner shouted to the skipper to corkscrew evasive action a F109 fighter was coming from below to attack us he started firing at once, I only got a brief view as he broke away, he dived down before his next attack from the same direction Jack had been watching him so called again for evasive action, blasting away with his 4 303 Brownings, again I had a brief glance but estimating his direction aiming ahead of where would go I managed a longer burst for him to fly through. Part way through his 3rd attack Jacks guns jammed he yelled to me to keep firing this I did as the 109 repeated his attack this time it was slightly different instead of powering away he seemed to flip over and drop down Jack insisted he crashed so claimed a kill which was accepted. I always said it was Jacks kill but for his alertness at the start the end could have been different. Our tracer's looked pea size from the fighter tennis balls being returned. The corkscrew to evade was executed by diving toward the attacker, climbing away in opposite direction climb and dive again looking from the rear it appeared as a spinning motion so the corkscrew name. The diving was so violent weightlessness was achieved and climbing the g-pushed so hard it felt that someone had applied a ton weight had been applied to press one down. At no point was a direct shot possible at each point of the manoeuvre the aim point was needed to be offset different amounts making the gunners task more difficult. Nine raids achieved in July but raids 11 & 12 were never to be forgotten. The 11th was a daylight to st Cyr near Versailles in mushroom caves the Germans were using to assemble V1 rockets. Approaching the target a Lanc above opened his bomb doors to reveal two rows of rusty bombs, I warned our skipper but he said we were hemmed in adding he will see us and not drop them (wistful thinking), at this time I had to be quite as the bomb-aimer guided the pilot to the target. As our bomb-aimer called bombs gone so those above, left the plane above. Quickly they flipped from horizontal to vertical most went between the tail and wing, one however struck the starboard rudder breaking this off then continuing on its way. Our plane bucked around as the skipper fought to regain control, The intercom went dead so I was unaware of what was happening, we seemed to be steady so I sat tight. Never in my 20yrs had I felt so lonely but I had to stay alert in case of fighters. As I turned forward I found a second bomb had broken 4ft off the wing this dangled (like a bird with wing broken wing this fell off soon after.) A little while later I realised I had not seen the rear turret moving, as he moved side to side his guns would be seen, this was not happening. The mid-upper was backless, so by positioning forward bending down to look between my legs I could see down the fuselage, to my dismay a gaping hole, I then realise we had lost Jack, my stomach turned over I knew we had lost him forever in the most horrible way possible. I began glancing toward the cockpit where other crew members were, hoping to attract attention.

Eventually the engineer put his head up into the astrodome checking damage, I managed to signal him, to get to me he had to open the door which blocked the rest of the crew from the two gunners, minutes later he tugged at my trouser leg beckoned me to bend so he could yell in my ear. He had my parachute from the rear end, the skipper wants you to wear this in case we have to leave in a hurry(adding we will warn you if we have to jump.) It must have been another hour before the intercom spluttered into life, the engineer had got it working, this was a blessing for me at last I felt in touch with the others, now nearing the French coast, the skipper asked for a route to an emergency crash drome near Ramsgate which had oversized runway to help damaged air-craft to land safely. We crossed the Channel, when the skipper called to the navigator I have, brought it this far give me a heading for home. The radio operator signalled base about our damage. Fate again interfered as we got within sight of Lincoln Cathedral we were refused permission, to land, an aircraft ahead had crashed blocking one runway, we were diverted to an air-field near Newark, the skipper as an anti-climax made a perfect landing, he was told to taxi to the conning tower and turn around before stopping engines. The silence was unbelievable no one spoke as we vacated the plane, we did not take a ladder when flying this being made of metal would have interfered with the compass, I would have normally have jumped the three feet to the ground, on this occasion my legs were shaky, had I jumped I felt I would fall on my face instead I waited for the ground staff lend a hand. Still no words were exchanged, they seemed to feel the tension, the skipper was last to leave he flew in shirt-sleeves, unlike the two gunners wearing a lot of extra clothing to try to keep warm. The skipper's shirt was soaked in sweat he had fought all the way home with little more than half the controls,(he was awarded the D.F.C. for his effort s.) Still no words were exchanged until the station C.O. arrived in his car. He was very concerned about our plight he remarked one little thing he would do was entertain us to a slap-up meal in the officers mess, hardly had he utter the words when a dispatch rider closely followed by a crew bus ,we had to return at once for de-briefing, we did not get the meal. Next morning we were driven back to our plane for a photo shoot, as I was the smallest I had to creep along to the damaged tail pointing to the rear gunners chute still in its stowage how it stayed in that position was a mystery. Returning to base for lunch we found our names on battle orders for that night, working on the old adage, if you fall get up at once, we were to bomb a large marshalling yard at Leon deep into occupied France. After the flying meal(always Ham & Eggs), donning my flying gear the skipper came in and introduced our replacement gunner, he seemed miserable nothing I could say changed his mood eventually I gave up a hopeless task , A night op but we got air-born in daylight, crossing the French coast the usual flack greeted us nothing to worry about. Soon we ran-into an electric storm, thick cloud torrential rain which leaked every weak joint. Suddenly St- Almo,s -fire was upon us the four props had a foot of orange flame radio aerials festooned in blue fairy lights orange flames leapt from each gun resembling being fired my turret had metal strips to hold the Perspex's small orange sparks chased all around, to cap all else the plane would drop, reclimbing just to drop again. The new gunner began to scream, this got so bad the skipper ordered his intercom to be disconnected. Arriving at the target we were amazed to find an area free of cloud, the only flack was light so exploding well below however there was great danger of collisions. The Master bomber called for us all to bomb with full lights, must be the only raid when all attacked ,fully lit. the return journey through France did not improve we had almost crossed the channel before leaving the storm. Nearing home our radio-operator reported the state of the lad in the rear, we were ordered on landing not to leave our stations until further orders. As we landed a white van followed us around the perimeter-track, the skipper shut-down engines, the two S.P. s left the van entered the plane, taking the gunner away we could then leave the plane. Two

days later we got 10 days leave, This was very fortunate because the lad was paraded before the whole station the stripes and gunners wing torn from his uniform reduced to the ranks and lack of moral fibre stamped on his papers. What made things worse ,was, he had been discharged from hospital to join us that night. Having been shot-up on his last op.

28th July we raided Stuttgart, like all German targets very heavily defended, the flack very heavy , splinters from bursting shells rattled along our fuselage even the smell of cordite was strong. Next morning making the normal air-craft check a member of our ground crew asked me to get into my turret, thrusting a length of pipe in a hole 2" above my head the exit hole between my guns into the fuselage. He produced the lump of shrapnel he had dug out but would not part with it, I had not been aware of my luck, but pleased my lack of size had been useful on that occasion. Mixing day and night raids, some aiding the army others on German cities we neared the magic 30, a shock was in store R,A,F, announced the tour was to be extended to 36. Our skipper suggested we would do 33, then take our entitled 10 days leave come back do the other three, when we could claim another 10 days end of tour leave. At the end of our first leave we returned to squadron, only to find the "goal-posts" had been moved again down to 30 we were Tour-Expired +3.

Four of us had decided to carry on with a 2nd tour declining the six months rest we were entitled to ,Our Navigator was married with two children, said enough, as did the bomb-aimer, whose mother was ill, he spent the rest of the war as 61sqdn bombing officer. The skipper had a choice, we could join 617sqdn, or pathfinders lastly 9sqdn, who's Lancasters had been modified to carry the 12,000lb Tallboy bomb (another of Barnes Wallis's creations). He chose no9 No surprise as he had started dating a stunning W,A,F, officer ,the trouble with this we discovered she had been married twice previously both pilots and both had been killed.

The first op at 9sqdn was to be the Battle-ship Tirpitz. Twice before 617 & 9 had flown out to Russia then attacked the "beast" from there. This time because the Germans had moved it further away ,this time as they thought out of our range . Lightening the planes by removing the mid-upper turrets ,front turret guns and a heavy plate of bullet-proof steel from behind the pilot ,a Wellington bomber wing tank was bolted into the fuselage to give more fuel capacity , After briefing I went to the locker room expecting to man the rear turret. The skipper must have known my intentions he came in to the room to tell me the squadron gunnery officer a sqdn/ldr knowing we had no rear-gunner had said he wanted the job. Hopelessly out ranked I had to accept ,he handed me a 48hr pass as a sweetener. They had to fly to Kinloss north Scotland next morning setting off for the raid. As soon as they left Bardney I left for home (I do not think they realised I had attended the briefing so knew all the details of the raid. It made things awkward when at home my Engineers wife (she was a sgt in the Army and demanded to know where her husband was, Despite suffering the 3rd degree I refused to give any information except to assure her he was O.K. I was back at base when they returned triumphant, next day all who had taken part of the raid were ordered to the ops-room. Not being there I can only re-peat as I was told. The C.O. walked into the room carrying a pail full of medals Mr Churchill had ordered a certain number of medals was to be presented for the raid.no specific names. First everyone who had taken part in all 3 raids were awarded one ,it was then found all who had flown 2 were also covered, still a number left ,not enough to go round, now it became a farce, the rest of the names went into a hat, now things got worse, commissioned ranks got a D.F.C. non-commissioned D.F.M. so Even if a non-com,s name was drawn and only D.F.C.s were left he got nothing. In face of this one member of a crew could get a medal, the rest who had done the same as

he got zero. My skipper who had earned his for bringing back a crippled plane was disgusted by the whole procedure. Unlike our first tour the time at Bardney was much more leisurely pace, we were there almost a year, often a month between ops, this did not go down with the skipper, he bemoaned the lack of action, so much so, to stop his complaining the C.O. allowed us to go on a (main-force) raid over Dortmund, a night raid of 1,000 air-craft. Not carrying the tallboy, in its place a 12,000lb thin skinned bomb, this instead of being a perfectly designed shaped bomb (this was for maxim penetration ability) this resembled a number of bins bolted together. On contact with the ground the blast caused damage. Taking off from Bardney, as we flew south more air-craft joined, until the sky looked full. As always being a German target the opposition was very heavy, glad to leave behind. Jan-12-45, we set off for one of our longest raids, Submarine-pens at Bergen. These were the base from which the Arctic convoy ships were being attacked. As usual we were no 1 wind-finders. Flying over a supposedly deserted air-field our bomb-aimer chose where the run-ways crossed as his guide to start his machine, flying around for a given space of time returning over the aim-point stop the equipment and that gave speed & direction of the wind, five other planes did the same our Navigator worked out a mean average this then was then radioed to all others on the raid. On our second run the bomb-aimer was counting the number of German fighter planes taking-off to attack us. This should not have been too worrying we were told 2 sqdns of Polish Mustangs were our escort. We saw none of them, the Mustangs apparently spotted a J.U.52 cargo, gave chase to shoot it down, leaving us unprotected. We bombed successfully, turned home when the fighters struck. A plane behind us from our sqdn was pounced on by five fighters This was there plan of attack 5 to 1 our comrade put up a great fight, they shot down one of their tormenters but the overpowering numbers finally was too much, the Lanc hit the sea breaking up. One of the remaining four made a bee-line for us, this looked to be our turn. He realised his friends were not following, they were too busy strafing the wreckage he turned and joined them. This gave us our chance to escape. Only the one plane of 95sqdn was lost but 617 lost 3 plus sqdn/ld Iverson who was attacked before he bombed, with one engine gone he disposing of his bomb (part of his crew bailed out and were taken prisoner, he regained control, and limped back to one of one of the Shetland Isle. I often wonder if the reason for 617 suffering heavier losses than us could be because after the Tirpitz raid they had not replaced the mid-upper turret. Only 4 303 Brownings in the rear turret as defence it would be easy for the fighters to pick the less armed planes. Our final raid was April-25th 1945, this being Hitler's eagle-nest. Not only two squadrons carrying Tallboys but many others with conventional bombs took place. The building was just below the mountain ridge. This was the reason it was only damaged, rather than being completely destroyed, we were pushed out on our run-up, we had an alternate target, a S.S. barracks lower down. Our Tallboy was a direct hit, the building was completely destroyed debris flying all around us. This raid was top news-worthy so on return the reporters were awaiting us. Our rear-gunner being a "wag" came up with a story, (a door from the building flew past his turret, anything else? Yes there was n/o 13 on it.) out-rages as it seems this went in next morning's news. On one raid with 617 on a viaduct two of their planes were carrying 22000lb bombs. So large the Bomb-doors were removed, strapped to the under-side of the air-craft.

After 10 days leave for V.E. Day we got back to base with a decision to make, Volunteers were being asked for to go to the far-east for the war with Japan which was still raging. My skipper was first in the queue. I had already completed 44 ops and due to marry in September, so decided to decline. Within days I was posted to a new squadron (North-west strike force). It was expected that the hardened Nazi, s would go into the mountains, and fight a gorilla war. With a new crew I began *RECAN!*

low level bombing we also flew back & forth to the continent re-patriating ex P O W.s. We were stationed at Gainsboro even nearer home so was able to visit my bride to-be on every opportunity. After a few months it was apparent there would be no further troubles with the Germans, despite our objections, we were taken off flying and forced to take ground duties. To decide what they would be I was sent from Gainsboro to Burn near York. On the 14th of September 1945 despite my protests I had to go to this new station, (the 15th was my wedding day,) told to get my leave pass when I got to Burn. Next morning I was informed I had to go to (the ball-game first, each new posting the C.O. would give his talk, always the same thing "You play ball with me ,I will play-ball with you. Watching the time tick by I dashed to get my pass to get home, to my dis-may the only bus to Doncaster had already left, I had to Thumb a lift, finally a kind motorist offered me a lift, Two of my crew from Gainsboro who I had asked to watch the occasion told me to carry on, they would follow as soon as possible. Days previous I had been promoted to Warrant Officer, this should have been in a uniform in better material, no way could this be arranged in the time, instead I had been issued with a new uniform with W/O badge on the sleeves. Arriving in Doncaster I sprinted home to find my parents were in as bad a panic as myself. A quick cup of tea ,the best man and myself dashed to the church (a mile away) . My best-man Tom Amy was a child-hood pal (He joined the R.A.F. together with myself he had been held back by his employer, but just managed to complete a tour,as a rear-gunner on Halifax Bombers. The Wedding went smoothly without any more snags. After the service the party was held in a nearby pub. My Brides Mother worked in catering so in spite of rationing there was no shortage of anything. One of my crew who had managed to get to the whole thing ,was a great piano player, kept every-one entertained until time was called, this with an hour extension was 11pm. This then moved on to my Mother-in-laws to carry-on to small hours of the next-day. My two crew members were southerners, after been found a bed and a Yorkshire break-fast, said later they had been over-whelmed by the hospitality showed to them. After a wonderful 10 days leave with my new wife, I returned to Burn. We were now had to pick the ground job to take. This was a farce ,all jobs I would like, (to keep near air-craft were filled. Cooks or drivers, were the only choice, and which-ever chosen we were to be sent abroad. New-wed this was the last I wanted to hear. I had to report to Kirby near Blackpool to learn driving.

Reporting to the new station I entered a Nisson-hut for the inevitable (ball game). The hut was so full bodies were stood on forms at the back of the room, called to attention as an officer entered, I was smoking A bad habit I had at the time, he yelled to me ,(can you not read?)there are no smoking notices stuck to the walls, despite the fact these were hidden, he kept ranting on, making the point clear he hated air-crew we were more trouble than worth. As we left hut I waited to get him alone, pointing out as a senior N.C.C.O. he should have waited until we were alone before speaking to me as he had in front of lower ranks. This only annoyed him more he then told me (I have a corporal in my office ,he,s been there ever since the war began, doing more for the war effort than all us air-crew put together. I must admit this out-burst left me speechless. This was to be only the first clash with this idiot.The sgts mess on the camp could not cope with the numbers of ex-air-crew on the course so we ate in the airmens dining hall,we had 7 W/O,s along with dozens of sgts & flt/sgts. The limited time for lunch meant long queues we were surprised some of the lower ranks walking to the head of the queue. We found that the officer which I had had my run-in, had instructed his men not to take their turn. The W/O,s went to the start of the queue, sending them to take their turn. Very soon they went running to sir. He soon came in and promptly put the 7 of us on a charge. The officer in charge of the whole camp listened to both sides, he then told the 7 to leave the room, from the

corridor we listened to our tormentor as he received the dressing down of his life, he scurried from the building, red faced without a glance toward us. We were called back to be told we had acted correctly get on with it. Almost the end of the course came before we were clash for the final time. A notice informed we were to attend a church-parade. To get his revenge he put us in ranks each to be led by one of his corporals we went to see him pointing out there were enough W/O,s to head each rank. As usual he would hear nothing of it. On the morning of the parade all air-crew stayed in our huts. After the parade he stormed into our huts he was in a temper he could have us shot for disobeying his orders, raving on for what seemed an age, he left in a wild temper. We can only he recalled how he had made a fool of himself last time nothing further was said so we assumed he considered what happened before. No tears were shed as we kicked the dust from our shoes as we left. After a short embarkation leave I went to Manchester,s Heaton Park to await an over-sea,s posting. During three-weeks there it never stopped raining. Twice a day 3hrs at a time we stood in pouring rain listening to sheets of names being called and where there next destination was to be. Finally it was a relief to be called to leave the rain behind. My new posting was to be Egypt. 20 or so of us were bundled into the back of a canvas-topped lorry and whisked off to Dover where a ferry-boat awaited us the small pre-war ferries had no stabilisers. Being November the crossing was rough so all were pleased to dock in France. An electric Train awaited us, the first brief stop was Paris, where we took on food & drinks for the journey. All that night until lunch time the next we made fast progress, lunch time we pulled into a siding, organisation was excellent we were able to shower & take a hot meal. Back aboard the train we spent the rest of the day & then the night, awaking in a mountain region before descending into the Port of Toulouse, on the Mediterranean sea. Leaving the train (it had been far from comfortable, the wooden slats of the seats left a lot to be desired.) The boat awaiting us was opposite it had been a cruise liner taking wealthy passengers back & forth along the Med. 7 W/O,s share half one deck, so we had lots of room, two 3,s and 1 two was the cabin arrangements, we fed in the officers dining-room but not at the same times. Playing cards, reading and writing passed away the time, we shared a small anti-room with a steward to serve drinks ect. One day a discussion took place, the subject length of service. Being the only ex-air-crew it was obvious all the others as time serving men had been in the R.A.F. longer than myself, I would be wise to just to listen. Seven years seemed to be average, until one of my cabin mates was asked, the reply took my breath away, I was glad I had stayed out of this discussion. How long have you been in the R.A.F. was the question. I joined in January 1923 he replied, (this was a year before I was born.) A married man this was his 3rd over-seas tour. He hoped this time his wife could join him.

We finally left the boat at Port Saïed for the first-time ever I was sleeping under canvas. This was a transit camp where we waited our next assignment. The second night I was awakened by a terrible noise and the strange feeling some-one was throwing sand over me. Leaving my bed I managed to light the storm lamp, my bed was covered in sand the impression of my body was plain before the sand covered it completely. The sand-storm raged for what seemed hours ,little could be done until it finally passed over except to block off where it was entering the tent. Eventually it did pass-over, upturning our beds and throwing the sand out with what-ever came to hand. As dawn broke we stepped out to a scene of carnage, many had fared worse than us their tents had been blown away ,leaving the occupants searching far and wide for their belongings (what a night).

My posting was to Heliopolis (near Cairo) this was temporary I was soon moved to take command of a motor transport division on the docks at Alexandria. I had a mixed-bag of vehicles 3 ton Dodges and old Bedford's plus a few 6ton Studebakers. Drivers, mechanics and cooks made up our numbers.

Apart from off-loading the ships that docked, it was a-time when British forces were leaving Egypt so every-thing was being moved back to the Canal-zone. Regularly 100 or more would descend on us wanting loads to take to the zone-via Cairo. At first as I was green to the job I would receive a call from (either the Army, Navy or the R.A.F. requesting a lorry to move a load, asking the size of lorry required it would always be a Ten-Tonner, often a small crate was all the (load), I had a 15cwt Dodge so I would go out and decide the size of vehicles to do the work this worked quite well. Things were now beginning to run smoothly, I received a call from the Matron of the large services Hospital in Alex, she explained a number of her nurses were due a leave which they would like to spend in Cairo, would my drivers give them a ride? What red-blooded young man would prefer his own company on the 165mils drive across the desert? very few, so it turned out, as many related stories showed. There were snags in another reasons, when riots flared-up, sometimes these could sometimes be nasty. As a guest of a commissioned friend we were enjoying a cold drink in the garden of the officers club. High-walls didn't stop nail-bombs being thrown over, because the blast kept low men, wearing trousers fared well, but the ladies in skirts, had some leg wounds which were very painful. On another occasion, a number of M.P.s were surrounded in their office in the City centre. Not only were their throats-cut but the bodies were mutilated. When the news got back to a near-by Army Barracks, The men a(scotch regiment) with fixed bayonets were only storming out and taking revenge on the mob, but officers sealing all exits with tanks. Some-times the riots could last weeks this would leave my little area in serious trouble. We were dependant on the Army-barracks for our food ration,s the barracks were across the City, we had a small surplus of food but I may have 100 or more extra drivers in (they had come for loads to take back to Cairo, blocked in with us until the riots were over. On one occasion things were desperate, I arranged with the stores to stand-by ,we awaited until 2am while the streets went silent, with my little dodge, two guards armed with Sten-guns ,we dashed across and back with-out problems, a bit " hairy" each dog-bark set pulses to race, The 10mths went by I got a boat to take me to de-mob. We sailed all the way to Liver-pool, on a troop-ship, it was opposite to the out-ward voyage I had-not mentioned that 2weeks or so before leaving Egypt ex-aircrew were de-moted in my case from W./O to Sgt, a nice thanks for service given, only good side we retained our pay, still paid as a W./o.

The ship was a typical troop carrier, eating & sleeping (in hammocks) on the same deck, in a short while the smell was rather un-pleasant, so much so I found a corner on the upper-deck to sleep. Leaving Egypt we made a brief stop in Athens harbour, The green mountain-sides and ancient -ruins made a wonder-full back -drop but the harbour was very dirty. Sailing on, just as dawn broke one morning, the massive rock loomed out of the morning mist. Gibraltar an amazing sight to behold. Through the straits, encountering the rough sea,s of the" Cape" I spotted a small vessel Fighting its way again the waves ,at times lost from view as it dropped in a deep trough before being flung on the crest of the next giant wave. Hugging the French coast on this last leg ,eventually docking at Liver-pool.

We were taken to a large ware-house there all the R.A.F. gear was taken from us, racks of civvie suits in various colours to choose from and a hat which I can never re-member wearing, discharge-papers, and ration-books (rationing still went on for quite some time after the end of the war.)Everything was going at speed, no one had time to say (Thank-you, you are now a civilian. Although I had served a little under 5yrs, it amazed me how long it took to get back into civvy-street again,the things that happened then will always be with me. Now 70yrs later it amazes me how those few short years still influence my life. Many wonderful people I have met (lots of which are

now firm friends, places seen (book-signing ect) in parts of the country I would not have visited other-wise, all keep me busy. Shortly after leaving the R.A.F. I joined the Observer Corps we manned a post near Flingly air-port. The cold-war was in progress so this was an time of a cat & mouse game with Russia. during this period Russia obtained the secret of the Atom Bomb, using this as a threat against us and the U.S.A. this finally the reason I resigned. They were building an Atom-proof shelter. In case of a raid we had to seal our-selves in until the All-Clear. The idea of leaving my family in these situations was out of the question. I found out later many others followed my example. Prior to this our C/O who at that time owned the famous Flying-Scotsman engine took us to Farnboro air display, The observation coach was available so each coach got a spell of half-an-hour.

At a 9sqdn re-union I met you Chris we struck up a friend-ship which has lasted ever since, Thanks to you and Dawn we have shared wonderful times, for which I will always be grateful.

Ken.

Ken Johnson

UNCLE KEN.