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It was 1940. It was a significant year for Britain, and young men and women, clerks and shop assistants, were offered, the promise of another life and another world full of yet unknown opportunities.

I was 16 and I joined the Air Training Corps. We paraded and drilled under the stern eye of Hassan Officer Asht one evening in the week and on another learnt the Morse code. This, together with algebra & trigonometry which I had never encountered before broadened my horizons and prepared me for my application to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve at 17½ years. In the interview we learnt the rudiments of navigation and I studied "Teach yourself to Fly" one of an optimistically subtitled series. One lesson was an imaginative joyride and Rudder Bar on the front seat of the bus. My year or so included an opportunity to fly which I did via Miles Magister, which prompted me to write "My first flight" now lost to posterity. Waiting for my call up I sported an RAF VR badge.

While waiting off the days on the locker room door of the warehouse where I worked.

My parents saw me off on the train to London and I recall my father kissed me, possibly believing he might not see me again. His loving gesture was fortunately misplaced, however, for I was home on leave in a week, as I had never been summoned to St. John's <sup>wood</sup> London where those of us who had not been inoculated and vaccinated received this painful procedure and we were kicked out. We were told that a £1 tip to the Barber would ensure a tasteful haircut but this proved to be a fallacy, as was a collection for our Discip. corporal's marriage.

We were taken to Newgate Hall Baths were the prospect of young men swimming in what were euphemistically called "slips" up and down decided their destiny for Initial Training being (ITW) Those who demonstrated their ability to swim a length were sent to St Andrews in Scotland and those who could not go to Scarborough, ~~where~~ <sup>which</sup> unlike Scotland provided there ~~had~~ swimming facilities.

Foolishly the swimmers could not get leave home from Scotland as easily as the now swimmers at Scarborough. It was one lesson among many which one learns in life.

At I.T.W we came to grips with Navigation, astrophony, signals, and the inevitable drill. Our drill instruction managed to demonstrate movement from one of the concrete blocks defending the sea shore without disappearing, falling in, and for our part we leapt from one block to another miserably clad in singlets and shorts.

Eventually we were posted to what promised to be, and was, actual flying. Perhaps some were deemed more suitable for training as Navigators or Bombaimers but for my part I went to Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) at Thetford.

There we actually flew in Tiger Moths from a grass field. The latter figured in our training because we were told that when one could distinguish blades of grass

from the green grass alone, one could pull back the stick prior to an optimistic three point landing, rarely accomplished in practice, for the instructor had to bear much leaping from terra firma into the air before the blessed moment when the plane came to a halt.

I do recall the "spin" however, should you need this manouvre to lose height. Pull back the stick as far as it will go while closing the throttle. The plane will go into a stall, that is, the nose will come up before it goes into a dive. At the moment apply full rudder to either ~~the~~<sup>but</sup> port or starboard and the plane ~~commences~~<sup>will</sup> a dive, turning the while — the spin. This is not recommended after a greasy breakfast.

I never did solo but in any case before we had finished our training we were all deemed to

Heaton Park in Manchester for a series of psychological and aptitude tests. At the end of the week we were all considered suitable for training as Air Gunners, including one of our number named honorably Snooks, who had soloed. I think this was because the P.W.B (Pilot Navigator Bomber air category) had chalked up the training programmes in Rhodesia, Canada, and even America as I recall, or equally Bomber command needed more Air gunners.

Oh I forgot — to get out of the spin you put the stick forward — full throttle and opposite rudder and do none of it unless you have reasonable height. Gunnery School we were posted to a place called Storay Down in South Wales, where I met a fellow trainee named Bill Jones, with whom I am still friends after with surviving crew members, after 67 years. Bill came from a village named Garnant, and we lived there

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whenever he could get a weekend pass.  
he learned how to take a Browning  
.303 10 pieces and put it together and  
hydraulics, that was to understand the  
working of a gun turret. Some practice with  
the guns too.

he went to St Albans, there ~~had~~  
three of us went up in an Avro Arrow  
with a pilot and rendezvous with  
a Harvard towing a drogue & drogue.  
Each of us took our turn in the gun  
turret from which we fired at the  
drogue using belts of ammunition  
covered with wet paint in distinctive  
colours. The idea was that then (and  
if) ones bullets hit the drogue then as the  
bullet entered it there remained a hole  
ringed with the colour of the gunner's  
bullet. The drogue was then dropped over  
the airfield and we had the unenviable  
task of counting the hits of each gunner.  
~~we~~ sat in a darkened room identifying  
flashed on silhouettes of aircraft.

The time came for our final exams  
and oral tests. Much of what I'd  
learned about hydraulics eluded me  
but the examiners said "Do you want  
to be an Air Gunner?" and when

I said "yes please" (I was brought up to be polite) they said "right - you've passed!" I think this had to be because Stotey Down was being turned into a POW camp for German officers.

(So you will be glad to know) we were given our sergeant stripes and airgunner's half wing, and all us gunners met up in London and went to see Phyllis Dixey in "Peekaboo" <sup>operations training unit</sup>. We went to O.T.U. at which crew members of all trades were assembled in a hall and told to sort ourselves out into crews. Bill Jones and I stayed together, and as he is a bit shorter than me he became rear gunner and I midupper.

I cannot explain the chemistry which formed crews, but ours became six (because we didn't ~~have~~ have a flight engineer until later) consisting of a pilot from Tasmania, David MacQuitty (Mac) Hananets, Navigator, of whom more about later, John Orr, Bob

B.

(Took a suitable title for a Scot as we would have had three Johns)  
John Cameron (Caw) - later on ~~in~~ in  
Lancasters Peter <sup>Pete</sup> Gillespie joined us  
as flight engineer.

~~we did the usual~~  
~~we flew first in Wellingtons~~  
that because it doesn't have a  
Mid upper turret meant I had to stand  
with my head in the astrodome. I  
didn't have guns until we flew in  
Lancasters

Stan Daniels our Navigator  
was a policeman in Cervie Street, and  
as such was only able to join the  
forces for aircrew, for which he  
volunteered.

~~he did circuits & sweeps~~  
by day and night and bombing ~~excesses~~  
exercises. It was useful in my  
astrodome keeping an eye out for  
other aircraft on the circuit. It is  
a sobering thought that over 8000  
~~excesses~~ aircrew were killed in training

later it was Bill and my  
opportunity to demonstrate our skills against  
an "attacking" Harvard.

~~opportunitiy to demonstrate our~~  
~~skills.~~ He took films in the rear  
 turret with a gunsight linked to  
 a camera. The film was later  
 developed and shown to the crew.

During this gunnery exercise  
 the pilot responded to directions  
 from the gunner to "dive starboard"  
 or "climb port", a manoeuvre called  
 the "corkscrew" the principle of  
 which is to climb away at right  
 angles from a diving fighter or  
 dive at the same angle from a  
 fighter climbing in pursuit with  
 its fixed cannon or guns  
 bearing on a key area of the  
 Duster, often the rear gunner  
 with his four Brownings, or  
 engines and fuel tanks. \*

Scanning was a key  
 exercise to avoid a surprise  
 attack, turrets turning through  
 $180^{\circ}$ , bombardier vigilant for  
 head on attacks ~~behind~~ with his  
~~rose~~ ~~turret~~ guns,  
 bombardier's position, and pilot  
 contributing to a general  
 awareness.

The R.A.F. founded on the side of  
 the fuselage was regarded to be the  
 best target for a damaged gunner  
 in the saddle of an attacking fighter.

of threats from attacking fighters. Once the fighter had committed to its attack the bomber would perform the corkscrew, presenting a different target.

Chat over the interview was kept to a minimum and to the essentials necessary, for necessary essentials.

Our first operation together was ~~first~~ into France and then into Germany. The operation was called "Deepstrike" and involved entering the area partially occupied by the allies, in particular to divert fighter aircraft away from the main force which was bombing WEST, just beyond the Rhine in preparation for Montgomery's crossing. Deepstrike employed "window" - strips of paper with a metallic side. This was dropped by the bombardier in handfuls according to a prearranged plan. I reported a single engined fighter on our port quarter which I took to be a

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Focke Wulf 190, but I could have been wrong. I reported it but almost immediately it ~~flew~~ fell back and disappeared. It was said that fighter aircraft were less likely to attack if their quarry appeared vigilant. Nothing else happened to us before we returned to base.

What happened next proved tragic and kept us on the ground until we were transferred to a holding unit. Mac, our skipper was one of those brothers in Bomber Command flying in pairs. One had been killed on ops. and we learned ~~that~~ that the second brother had been killed, resulting in Mac being taken off ops. just as we were ~~just~~ about to begin our first op. and posted to Transport Command in which he served until the end of the war.

For our part we were what ~~that~~ was described as a "headless crew". Due to be posted to a holding unit the following day I was having

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when

my last cut in the mess ~~and~~ Bill Jones came in to tell me I was on the battle order that night. The crew's ~~had~~ upper gunner was either sick or dead - I never enquired. I attended the briefing, which was, as I recall 15 an oil refinery, and as the hours grew near kicked up and gave <sup>a</sup> "whisky water" pill.

Out on dispersal we ran up the engines, ~~were bombed up~~ and ready for take off when one or more very lights went up from the control tower and the op was scrubbed.

\* With a new skipper we ended the war without incident, so this lengthy account <sup>is</sup> as I have told the producer's, not one of "derring do" we were, never the less ready to take part, ~~perhaps~~ with hopefully with our survival, which enabled us to arrange a reunion of the remaining five of us in 1999 meeting for the first time for 54 years.

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After the war had come to an end we flew to Pomioliano, near Naples, to bring back soldiers for demob. or going on leave.

Then with independence of India looming we flew to Sylhet in Bengal, from there we later bombed up with 500lb bombs at Nagpur enroute to Karachi. I have no idea why here armed thus, each of us being provided with 38 calibre revolvers.

Home in Britain I was finally made redundant. ~~Stationed~~  
 Billed in a cafe in Belfast I was designated "Embarcation Assistant" collecting boarding cards from waifs and sick airmen sailing on the "Ulster Monarch" or the "Wessex Prince" to Heysham in Lancashire. Fit airmen were obliged to go north to Larne for the crossing to Stranraer.

Finally (and I know you will be glad to learn this) I was transferred to a maintenance unit

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at Attlebridge, Norfolk, where I  
came face to face with the enemy.  
German Pows were employed to  
pick up freight from the railway  
stations and I sat beside the German  
driver with others behind.

Surely this is the end I  
hear you say, and indeed it was.  
Kitted out in suit, raincoat, and  
tilly, I returned home for three  
weeks leave before coming to grips  
with commerce.

As the old lady said as  
she breasted her last "It's all been  
most interesting"

Total	John H Torner
Leader	(Flight Sergeant)
Time	1812 689
12 minutes	

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