

## **Geoffrey H.Paine**

### **My life in the Royal Air Force**

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From its formation I was a member of The Air Training Corps, I rose to the dizzy rank of Corporal and was a member of 1157 Sqdn (Falmouth & Penryn, Cornwall)  
I was a pupil at Falmouth Grammar School, sat & passed my Cambridge School Certificate.

As soon as I was 18 I volunteered for RAF Aircrew and went to Sentinal House, London to sign on. Went through a strict medical and did an aptitude test in a sort of mock aircraft cockpit to check my coordination. This was successful and I was clasified as fit for Aircrew as PNB (Pilot, Navigator or Bomb Aimer).

I returned home and continued at school where I studied Air Navigation.

To start my training I had to be 18 + 3months so on 30th August 1943 I reported to the Aircrew reception centre at Lords Cricket Ground, London. Went through another medical (plus an FFI !!)was issued with my uniform and then spent a few days in St John's Wood doing drill etc.

On 20th September I went to No6 Initial Training Wing at Aberystwyth, billeted in The Bell View Hotel on the sea front. Accomodation was OK but food was a bit scarce! Lots of drill on the sea front and classroom subjects in the University. There were about 20 of us who were non swimmers and one cold morning we were marched up to the University swimming baths. We were lined up along the side of the pool and told to climb up to the highest diving board and jump in!! We were fished out with long polls by the insructors! One of the cadets was unable to jump and was taken off the course for aircrew to transfer to ground crew! Apart from drill and classroom subjects we did clay pidgeon shooting and fired Lewis and Bren guns on the firing range. We also had to go into a Gas chamber and temporally remove our gas masks!

After Christmas leave I went Grading School AST Station Ansty, near Coventry to fly in the lovely Tiger Moths. Communication between the instructor and pupil was through a Gosport tube and it was quite common to inhale a strong smell of whisky! After only 6 hours flying

I was sent on my first solo (I think it was a bit of a record judging by the instructors boasting to his colleagues!!) During our spare time we had to lay taxi ways using bricks which came from the bombed houses of Coventry. We also did guard duty at night.

Following a short leave on 25th Feb. 1944 I was posted to the Aircrew despatch Centre at Heaton Park, Manchester. On the 13th March I was posted to what had been No.17 Initial Training Wing at Scarborough. During the first parade the CO asked if anyone was a model maker? I volunteered!! Solid wooden models of aircraft used for aircraft recognition training had "disappeared" and they were on the CO's inventory, my job was in the workshop to make as many models as possible! At night I sometimes did guard duty down on the coast armed with a Sten Gun.

On 26th of March I was posted to the ex No. 2 Itw at Cambridge which was in Pembroke College (didn't do much there except scive to escape route marches).

On 6th April posted again! this time to RAF Waltham, No 100 Squadron Lancasters where I packed thousands of incendiary bombs and worked in the Sqdn office.

Back to Heaton Park on 20.05.44. 31st May 44 posted to RAF Bourne (near Cambridge) 105 Sqdn Mosquitos. There I Assisted in Operating the "Sandra" light, a search light which was turned on to shine vertically when the Mosquitos were returning from a raid to assist them to pinpoint the airfield.

Back to Heaton Park on 18th July 44. This was another delay in aircrew training and I was given the option of staying at Heaton Park, volunteering

to help on farms or going to London to do bomb damage repairs! I volunteered to go to London. (a good choice!) We were stationed at RAF Hornchurch and each morning we paraded in a hanger and given details

of where a doodle bug had landed and where bomb damage repairs were

needed. There were about 20 of us in my squad with a Flt Sgt in charge,

we had our own troop carrier equipped with all the necessary tools with

which to replace dislodged roofing tiles, repair broken windows (a yellow waterproof material) plaster board to replace bomb damaged ceilings. We operated from Hornchurch from the 3rd August 44 until 5th December (No 55 Repair Unit). On 6th Dec. we were moved to operate from 55 RU

at Kew. On 2nd Jan. 45 we went to RAF Hendon to repair and clear the remains of a barrack block which had received a direct hit by a V 1 at 7 o'clock one evening (not a pleasant task which involved picking up body parts when clearing rubble).

Back once more to Heaton Park on 8th of Feb. to be kitted out with tropical

kit for flying training in Southern Rhodesia! We boarded Royal Mail Ship

"Andes" at Liverpool and sailed for Cape Town. On route we called in at

Freetown to take on water and amuse ourselves by throwing in coins for

the natives to pick up from the deep. Natives would dive under the ship if you threw in a silver coin, some rotten blighters wrapped up pennies in silver paper. You had to block up your ears to avoid hearing the VERY

strong natives language when they discovered how they had been fooled!

We arrived at Cape Town on about the 1st march and boarded a beautiful

steam train to take us to Bulawayo, Southern Rhodesia. I think it took 2 days and a night. Each carriage had bunks to sleep 6. A fascinating journey through the middle of South Africa. We arrived at Bulawayo on the 4th march and spent 12 days there to become acclimatised to being

several thousand feet above sea level.

On the 16th March (45) I went to No26 EFTS at RAF Guinea Fowl, near

Gwelo to start my pilot training on Fairchild Cornell aircraft. My

instructor

was Sgt Bruce. The weather every day was clear blue skys. After 7 hours 40 mins I was sent on my first solo in the Cornell.

On the 25th May '45 I was posted to No. 22 Service flying Training School at RAF Thornhill, near Gwelo flying Harvards. My instructor on Harvards was Pilot Officer Pearce. After 3 hrs 40min I did my first solo flight in the Harvard. Within just a few days of receiving my Pilots Wings along came VJ DAY, The end of the 2nd World War. ALL FLYING TRAINING Ceased !!

We were all called on parade and told we were to return home. We were given two alternatives! We could either await our demob date or sign on for 3 years plus 4 years on reserve and continue with our flying training at home. I chose the latter!

We all returned to Cape Town to await our boat home to England. I had four wonderful weeks in Cape Town climbing the mountains and learning to surf at Muzenburgh.

On the 10th October we boarded the RMS Del Pacifico for home. On the way we called in at James Town, St Helena ( where Napoleon was 'imprisoned' ) We arrived back in England on 29th Oct 45 and spent 5 days at West Kirby. After a short leave I was sent to RAF Stanstead where we had to unload and store in the hangers there oceans of equipment from closing RAF Stations.

From 28th Nov to 18th Jan I was at no 27 Aircrew Holding Centre at RAF Bircham Newton.

On 18th Jan 46 I started flying training again at No 6 Sfts, Little Rissington, on Harvards. The Station closed on the 9th April and we moved to No 6 SFTS at RAF Tern Hill where I received my RAF Pilots Wings, at long last!!! on 3rd September 1946.

After some leave I went to Aircrew GST at RAF Locking near Weston Super Mare.

More detachments! first at RAF Church Lawford from 25 Jan 47 to 28 April 47. The station was training Naval Pilots, I got in a little flying on Harvards. From 28th April to 7th May I was at RAF Kirton in Lindsey where I acted as a Despatch Rider on a 500cc Norton !! until 7th May 47.

Much to my surprise I then went to 242 Sqdn, Oakington and 511 Sqdn as second pilot on Avro Yorks! Route flying to India carrying freight and (on the side) trading bicycle tyres in Iraq and buying carpets in Karachi in India!!! Nice profits!! This was from 7th May 47 to 26 Aug 47.

27th Aug I went to No.2 PRFU at RAF Valley to qualify on Oxfords and Ansons. On 30th Oct 47 I went to No 201 AFS RAF Swinderby to qualify as pilot on Vickers Wellingtons. I qualified as pilot on Wellingtons and on 1.3.48 attended No 1 Navigation Staff Pilots Course at RAF Topcliffe flying Oxfords, Ansons & Wellingtons.

On 7.6. 48 I went as a Staff Pilot at no 2 Air Navigation School to fly ut navigators on Wellingtons. A most enjoyable time flying all over England almost every day and night with ut Navigators on board.

On 7.8.49 I was offered a Commission if I stayed in the RAF and signed on again. I opted to take my release so as to go home and join my lovely wife, Evelyn, having married her on the 26th August 1948!

My six Years in the RAF was so enjoyable and a really wonderful experience. Looking back it seemed like a lifetime!

I went on to farm until 1966 when I went as a Fulltime Officer in The Royal Observer Corps rising to the rank of Commander. I retired at 60 in 1985!!!!