

WARTIME

Michael and I were cycling from Leeds to my home at Pilmoor, North Yorkshire when we made the decision to tell our parents we wanted to join the RAF on our eighteenth birthdays. The cycle trip was a frequent weekend exercise for us as Michael lived in Leeds and I was currently living with my grandparents there to allow me to take up an offer to train in the office of a leading jeweller.

The parents raised no objections at the time though we later learned that it was a shock when we joined as soon as the birthdays arrived.

Michael and I had been brought up pretty well like brothers with our family's firm friends and the Payne's weekend visits to Pilmoor almost a ritual.

Both fathers by the way had served in the Great War [Then the "last war"] my father, as a Sergeant Major in tanks and Mike's also an NCO who had been both injured and badly gassed.

To our satisfaction we were both accepted as aircrew entrants and told to go home and await a summons to start training, we both registered a desire to be pilots [as did everyone else!]

After what seemed an age but was in fact several months we were called to attend Aircrew selection interviews [at different times]. Mine was at Cardington, the home of the R100 airships.

In the intervening time we had discovered that if selected for Pilots there would be a delay of up to nine months before we could hope to be called up. Navigators and other aircrew on the other hand could expect a pretty quick call up. We therefore decided to change our preference to navigators [a mistake on my part as I soon found out at my interview]

This was conducted by four somewhat aged but high ranking gentlemen one of whom having looked at my papers barked "I see you have changed your preference to navigator Don't you feel you have what it takes to be a pilot" VERY shaken I Tried to explain that I had made the change to get into the war before it was all over. NO LUCK and when a little later he asked me what sports I took part in and I said shooting and fishing [the truth] he again shot me down with "not a team player" After all that I was absolutely delighted to be offered Wireless Operator /Airgunner being convinced that the best I could hope for was a job in the cookhouse.

After another long wait I received my real call up papers and reported to PADGATE where we were equipped with uniforms etc and then transported to Blackpool to learn the rudiments of drill and for those who needed it to learn the morse code in the BLACKPOOL tram sheds. A piece of cake for me since I could already receive and send morse at good speeds due to my membership of the Radio society of Great Britain but a real sweat for some of my comrades.

During this time there was no home leave and our next port of call was the Radio school at Yatesbury. Yatesbury is near Calne (home of sausages and pork pies) and at the time about the coldest place on earth. We had coke stoves in the huts and each evening we would stoke up until the stoves were literally red-hot but they died out overnight and we froze. A previous year the camp had to be closed because everything including the water supply froze up. Subsequently some bright sparks anxious for some home leave tried to sabotage the main water supply pipe with the result that "water guard" was instituted a deadly cold boring duty which everybody tried to avoid.

At the school we learned all the technicalities of aircraft radio plus such useless things as flag and light signals. At my oral exam I was asked to give the chemical formula for the working of an acid accumulator which, having done school cert chemistry was fairly easy. However the examiner professed to be impressed and put me up for a commission. I was quite pleased about this until I discovered that what was really being offered was an instructors job at the school so I said “ Thanks but no thanks “

The next phase should have been air operator training but as the supply of aircraft was not coming on stream quite as fast as some sections of the crews we were sent out as ground wireless operators on a number of differing jobs. The first of these was to a met office ground station set up in the middle of a wood in Scotland, again freezing cold and with the only washing facilities two cold water taps set up on a rough wooden bench in the open. These met stations were set up to provide communications in case of a break down of normal teletype and telephone services. Met reports were sent out in five letter or figure code groups and at pretty good speeds. No trouble! Should we miss a few groups we could always phone up the sending unit and fill in the gaps! Life became much more pleasant when I was moved to a billet in the local manse, a large house with an even larger bathroom with taps which actually gushed steaming hot water and a lovely housekeeper who sent me off to my duty watches with a flask of hot tea and home made scones enough for the whole watch. This happy state was speedily brought to an end when I was “ loaned “ to No 4 commando at Troon Ayrshire who were training for the Dieppe raid and were [as today] short of communications equipment and staff. After being dumped into too deep sea water off the Isle of Arran with a radio strapped to my back and rescued by an alert naval rating with a boat hook. This loan shortly and to my great relief came to an end. Postings to Bracknell, York [a quick visit to home] and another army loan followed, taking up I suppose about six months until joyfully another posting back to Yatesbury this time as a staff member of the air operations section. Air ops being a second course undergone by wireless operators destined for aircrew. Thanks to this staff job when my actual air ops course came through I had friends in the right places and passed through quickly and with distinction!!

Now at last I was getting down to the business of being an aircrew member and went straight away to Evanton for an Air Gunnery course. A dangerous business this since the aircraft used were Blackburn Bothas deemed unfit for real operations due to a bad habit of turning over and plunging to the ground if they lost power on one of their two engines. However we survived and I passed out as “above average” having secured two hits on air-to-air firing using only 200 rounds! Here we received our sergeants stripes and our brevets and were at last allowed home on leave.

The leave over I was posted to an Operational Training Unit and it was here that something happened which was to have a very significant bearing on the rest of this history. **WE BECAME A CREW.**

We had all arrived at the O.T.U [number 29 but whose location we were not allowed to enter in our log books and which I have now forgotten] from the training units for our respective “trades” and with no connection or knowledge of the others. Normally I think the crewing would have been made by the staff but in our case we were approached individually by John Williams [then a Flying Officer] and asked if we would like to join his crew. Later I discovered that John was an experienced pilot who had himself been an instructor at O.T.U, had been allowed to look at our records and had chosen his crew from those with good results and records from the previous training schools [you will recall that I had for a short time been on the staff at Yatesbury flight training section].

Fortunately for John's selection method we all hit it off well and I for one felt very confident both with John and with his selection.

We did of course make our own particular friends and Ken Jewell the Aussie rear gunner and became close friends. Not that this meant that we were not close to the rest of the team.

As I have said we had all arrived at OTU as individuals. Now we were to learn the Business of crewing a plane and to discover how our experience in our respective trades fitted into the business of manning the aircraft and taking part in "operations". For our skipper it also the time to learn how to handle a plane much heavier than The ones he had previously handled. This was to occupy about eleven weeks from May to July 43 and was carried out on Wellington 111 aircraft. A well built and respected plane in its day but already rapidly being replaced by the newer breed of four engined bombers. Lancasters, Halifaxes and Stirlings. Total flying time on this course was 96 hours Day 57 Night 38 and comprised night and day bombing practice, air to air firing for the gunners and cross country navigation exercises for Alan and myself. One item I notice in my log said simply "Full war load " 35 minutes - nit along time for John to find out how the aircraft handled with a full load of bombs! It was at 29 OTU that I had my first experience of a side of operational flying that was to become familiar in the following years.

When I said that we arrived at 29 as individuals I overlooked the fact that among the w/op Ags were a few who I had been with at Blackpool and Yatesbury, old friends who like myself had been shunted around the country awaiting this moment.

Among these was "Ginger" Wilson who I had known from day one more or less and who was at that time my steady drinking partner when we were allowed out into the town. We had one heavier than usual evening and on our way back to camp stopped to take a rest in a local churchyard.

A few days later Ginger lost his life in a mid air collision at night involving one of our Wellingtons and one from another unit nearby. I attended a service at the church.

Our next phase was at a Conversion Unit where John learned how to handle a four engined aircraft, the Lancaster, and we accustomed ourselves to the positions and equipment which were to become very very familiar to us.

I said four engined aircraft but in fact the first three training trips were on Manchester aircraft, a two engined predecessor of the Lanc, which had a short and very unsuccessful life on operations.

Happily the rest of the course was on Lancs, which took about three weeks and 38 flying hours - not a great deal in view of what we were shortly to experience.

No rest for the wicked and no leave with a chance to show off my brevet and stripes at home at this stage. We were immediately transported to our first operational station Syerston a "good" posting since Syerston was a "peace time" station boasting proper brick built accommodation and first rate facilities. It was also quite well placed for recreation with Nottingham within easy reach and a great pub just across the river Trent close to the airfield (the only snag with this pub was the problem that access to it was by a rowing boat which meant that if the boat was on the wrong side either for coming or going someone had to swim over and get it).

The station was home to two squadrons and we were allocated to 61 squadron in No 5 group again a very good posting.

Two days after our arrival we did our first operational flight ("Trip" from now on) a mine sowing operation off the Fresians a task known as "gardening". This in aircrew parlance was a "piece of cake" but for the first time we experienced the feelings of hours flying in a darkened aircraft and in an area known to be patrolled by

the enemy. It was only a three-hour trip! but at the time it seemed a whole lot longer than that.

However this was just a taster and three days later we were off again this time on a “real” bombing raid to Manheim this time a six and a half hour trip with all the trimmings - searchlights ack ack and the deadly flying onions -- flaming round balls which seemed to be coming up gently through the night sky and suddenly racing towards us at terrific speed.

To round off our first week, on the following night we were despatched to Munich (nobodies idea of a pleasure trip) an eight hour thirty minutes jaunt which coming on top of the previous nights jaunt must certainly have convinced us that this operational thing was really a serious business!

A seven-day break in activity in my logbook at this juncture suggests we might have been blessed with a spot of home leave and to fill in this gap I return to the subject of the crew. Even at this early stage a good bond was developing between us and I am happy to say we had no “ odd men out “ or doubters of any kind. We all understood that everyone’s job was important for the safety of the others and we all had confidence in their ability to do that job well. An important factor, as I was to realise later in the tour when I had an opportunity to assess some other crews.

I have not gone too far into our personal backgrounds partly because I cannot now remember some of the others but briefly John at twenty-five was the grandad of the crew with the rest of us just approaching our 21st birthdays.

John was big and strong, had been to university and radiated calm and competence at all times. He was, after the war, to become Cannon of RYE Cathedral.

Alan, the navigator was I think ex university and even at that time quietly religious, He and John would be found playing chess together. After the war Alan became a priest engaged in Missionary work in Africa. The rest of us would be reading or perhaps playing cards, after a short time I developed an interest in the work of the radar section and spent quite a lot of time with the Canadian radar mechanics in their section, gaining some quite useful knowledge about the new forms of navigation and early warning systems which were coming on stream at the time and also making some good friends. From time to time the whole crew would go out together although the frequency of operations at this time did not permit of too many, even mild, drinking sessions

Leave over we were back in the routine of an operational station in one of the most intensive periods of the air offensive against the cities and war machine of the Third Reich. with little time for too much introspection. Days not occupied by actual raid trips were filled with bombing practice or other exercises designed to keep us on our toes and sharpen the edge of our efficiency.

Two days after our return something happened, which had great significance on our future (I believe)

In the late morning of the 22nd September we air tested a plane, which was to be part of our lives for some important days and nights of our lives.

“M” FOR MICKEY” became “our” aircraft and with her came a GROUND CREW “ Titch”. “Ginger”, “Tom” “ Sgt Nick” and “Ron “ ALL OF US welded into one unit. A family as close and perhaps closer than many real families and once again there was this factor of confidence a sure knowledge that everyone would do their job properly for the benefit of the rest.

That may sound a bit strong but believe me having a ground crew you believed to be “ the best “ was a big confidence builder.

At six fifty that same day we took Mickey to Hanover and as often happened in the

future she brought us safely back.

Mickey by the way was not a new aircraft when we took her over, in fact she already carried an impressive testimony to her experience in the rows of bombs painted on the side of her forward fuselage. She was officially “Mother” the normal R/T word for M but I thought this was not quite right given her object in life and dubbed her Mickey which name was taken up with enthusiasm by all concerned and cemented in place by the addition of the “Mickey the Moocher” logo to her paintwork, based on a cartoon character and beautifully executed by the ground crew.

Perhaps Mickey had learned a few tricks of her own in her ops before we took over and put them to good use in our time with her.

Mickey was in fact soon tested. The next day we set off for Hanover again but had to return to base when the hydraulics of the rear turret refused to function but three days later we were off again with the same destination in mind. This time all went well or at least until just after we had dropped our bomb load on the target.

We were picked out by a searchlight and John initiated a dive and avoiding action. The next thing was a number of thumps on the aircraft and the dive became rather more protracted than was comfortable. I had looked through the bomb-loading slit in the floor near my seat and seen Hanover in what seemed a mass of flames and I thought WE are not going to be given a great welcome if we bail out into THAT. After some time and at a much lower altitude than we cared for John managed to control the aircraft and we headed for home. All was not well however and we eventually made an unscheduled landing at Newmarket. All in one piece but not in too good a state as far as Mickey was concerned with a number of holes in her wings to prove it.

We had in fact in our initial dive passed under one of our own aircraft in the act of dropping its load of incendiary bombs and they had either passed through or found a home in our wings.

Someone handed me what I thought was a hot drink but which turned out to be neat spirits and having taken a good swig I very nearly passed out on the spot.

We returned to Syerston by road since M was in need of a spot of repairs.

Three days later we were flown to Newmarket to collect her, which we duly did quite happily. Mickey went into the hangar for more treatment and we were cheerfully informed by the boys that we had flown back from Newmarket with two incendiaries still in one of the petrol tanks ... great joke!

Mickey was ready for service again on the second of October and we flight tested her that day ready for our next visit to Germany and it is perhaps of interest to take the next few days in detail to illustrate the routines which were typical.

First step would be the flight test about 45 minutes airborne checking everything out in the air and briefing the ground crew on anything which might require attention on their part – this usually took place on the morning of the day of operations but in this case because Mickey had just been in the hanger for treatment we did it a day early.

The next day (and every day when there was even a possibility of our being required for an op) I went out to the aircraft, using whatever transport I could find to reach its dispersal site, and ground checked my equipment, radio, Gee navigation system and the aircraft inter com system. These latter used two small accumulators for its power and it was the operators (not the ground radio mechanics) duty to check that these were fully charged or to have them changed. Woe betide any operator who caused a late take off or an abandonment due to faulty batteries!! Usually other crew members would be at the aircraft or we would have gone out together each one of us with a specific and important check to carry out. This took up most of the morning and after

lunch we would have a break before assembling in the crew room for the BRIEFING. given by the squadron commander aided by specialists on such subjects as the weather expected en route and at target, possible enemy “flak” (anti aircraft) concentrations, fighter activity etc with occasionally news of some fighter escort in the earlier stages.

FINALLY the bit we were really waiting for the exact name of the target and the number of aircraft involved. This latter information was eagerly awaited on the basis that the more planes involved the more chance we had of escaping personal attention by enemy guns or fighters.

We attended the briefings all kitted out in whatever outfits we individually favoured I liked my standard battle dress with a thick pullover plus my leather flying jacket and fur lined boots with my escaper’s maps and commando knife stuck in the boot tops.

Occasionally we carried our revolvers but not always.

Briefing over and depending on the proposed take off time we might have a snack but more often would collect our chutes and board one of the crew buses to be taken out to the aircraft. Take off time could be anything from six o’clock to eight thirty.

Return to base between three a.m. and five am,

ON return we were collected from our dispersal and bussed to the crew room for de briefing where anything special was noted.

By this time we were pretty tired and the effects of the caffeine tablets we all took to ensure wakefulness -- an absolute essential for the gunners who could not afford to nod off at any time. —Had worn off.

We were then transported to our various messes where we were treated to bacon and eggs (a luxury), which not unfrequently were wasted because the recipients fell asleep in mid meal.

Then to bed – with no engine noise no thumps and bangs and no sudden unwanted illumination by searchlight!! Bliss.

Not for too long though Wakey ! wakey We are “ on “ again tonight and the whole procedure as above starts again, This time its Frankfurt and then three whole days off before we do it all again for our old bete noir --Hanover,

All in all a fairly strenuous five days -

Lets leave bombing for a while and take a look at other minor events but first a different view on the Hanover trip.

The other day finding that small memory “breaks “ were irritating me I decided to get someone else’s recollection of events and I called up Jim (Soilleux) our Flight Engineer. Jim is always cheerful when I call him despite having to use an electric buggy to get to the pub nowadays.

We talked specifically about the Hanover effort. Jims job was to watch over our fuel supplies and balance the tanks to help stability. His version is that Johns dive was to avoid a head on collision with a four engined aircraft coming straight at us and of course going the other way !!

Some time after the incident he noticed that we had lost all the fuel in one of the tanks and he had to get cracking transferring fuel from one wing to another to “balance “ In a break from his efforts he noticed something shiny sticking up in the starboard wing (the engineer stands up on the right of the pilot and has a good view both forward and to starboard) Jim called on Arthur the bomb aimer to take a look and he confirmed we had an incendiary bomb sticking out of the wing.

One might suppose that the aircraft going the other way was responsible but who knows. We didn't have time to take his number !!

Jim also told me that we had gone into “corkscrew” mode on quite a number of occasions to avoid fighter approaches. He thought that these occasions were, to him, the most frightening.

Perhaps the best description I have read about corkscrewing is in “Bomber Command “ by Max Hastings a really first class account of all aspects of bomber operations.

I quote ... “ no good captain tolerated chatter on the intercom, it was sacred reserved for the paralysing second when the rear gunner shouted “ Fighter port! corkscrew port NOW! “ then they would head into the mad stomach churning routine of fighter 22 evasion..... the gunner who could see the enemy directing the pilot who could not. The aircraft screaming in torment the smell of vomit wafting up from the bomb aimer or navigator overcome by fear and the violent movement (NOT in our aircraft !!) and the fuselage shivering as the gunners fired. Some in the fear of causing the aircraft to break up banked cautiously. and died, others who lived recognised that the danger of a wing collapsing was nothing to that of a fighter's cannon. So steep bank to port. full left rudder, fall SIDEWAYS for 1000 feet wrench the aileron control to starboard, soar into a climbing turn THEN opposite aileron an dive again”.

Perhaps being somewhat cocooned in my little “Office” I did not find it quite as gut wrenching as poor Jim who had to cope with it standing and with precious little to hold on to However I did notice it!!.

Anyway enough of the dramatic stuff for the time being and on to matters personal. Somehow during all this I had managed to be sent on two short radar courses and undertaken two exams passing both with over 90% and more or less forgetting about them with other things to think about. Others had noticed however and one day I was called into the Signals Leader's office. He had noted the marks and said he proposed to recommend me for commissioning. I duly filled in the papers and gave them in to him. Two days later a well known Group Captain, famous for having called us “ a lot of errand boys “ took the then Wing Commanders crew on a trip –probably to show how it should be done – and failed to return. There I thought goes my second chance to be commissioned. Quite some time later the new Signals Leader called me in and said he had found my papers in his in tray and proposed to honour his predecessors intentions for me. I duly saw the Wing Commander and was approved to go before the station commander - a Group Captain well known (amongst other things) for a slight stammer. He interviewed me and at the end announced that he would approve my commissioning saying “ Yes you are suitable not like that chap before you he's the sort who wears cc coloured socks .Non plussed I stammered that I had thought he was wearing RAF socks (not too bright of me) I know said the GC but he's the type who www.. would wear coloured socks !! .

A few days later we were all moved to a new war time base – Skellingthorpe the whole shooting match -aircraft, ground crews, admin staff, cooks and bottle washers. Skellingthorpe was all Nissen huts cold as charity a definite come down from the luxury of Syerston. The only thing that evidently was not moved was the result of my approval from the Group Captain, my papers being passed on at Wing Commander level so that I was duly called to be interviewed yet again by a new Group Captain (my stammering friend having remained behind in the comfort of Syerston) This new GC looked me up and down and told me that as both my papers and myself had only arrived on HIS station a matter of days before he did not know me and therefore could not possibly recommend me for a commission or anything else. Group Captains are like ships captains I just did not have the nerve to tell him I had already been approved at GC level. So there the matter rested. I suppose I should have enlisted John's aid to put matters right but barely a month later we were moved again to Coningsby and about a month later saw our crew suddenly moved to 617 Squadron.

Where after further delay I was commissioned, Even then the manner of my notification of having being selected for this honour was a bit odd .I was in my room one day when a portly gentleman arrived and told me was from Alkit a well known gentlemen's outfitters and had come to measure me for my uniform I was rather dubious about running up a large bill just on his say so but happily a few days later a letter arrived from Coutts bank containing a cheque book and details of what, at the time. seemed a huge amount of money being credited to this newly formed account to enable me to pay the tailors. A much smaller piece of paper also arrived from Air Ministry advising me that I was now a Pilot Officer and was being granted a weeks commissioning leave to enable me to visit Alkit and get my new uniform.

I travelled home "First Class " one of the perks and I have to admit to feeling quite good stepping out onto the platform from a first class compartment at little Pilmoor station and being greeted by a porter signalman I had known from being a small boy. My mother and father were pleased to see me in any uniform. Only later did I fully appreciate the strain they were under with newspapers daily reporting the progress of the bombing raids and often the casualties.

Battle of Berlin

In describing the ramifications of my commissioning I have of course moved on in time far ahead of my descriptions of our earlier experiences.

To return to that earlier period we were now taking part in the most testing period of the bombing raids on Germany with targets deeper into enemy territory, far more aircraft involved and both sides striving to obtain supremacy in their methods of defence and attack.

We were (as a crew) doing about three raids a week either on consecutive nights or perhaps with a one night break in between raids. Losses on most squadrons were about one or two crews per night, on paper about 5%, not a high figure you might think but the effect of between seven to fifteen missing places in the messes after each trip could not be ignored, However most of us stuck to the old belief that it would only happen to the “ other fellow “.

I have often told the story of when we attended a lecture early on in our training and at its end the lecturer said “ If I tell you that fifty percent of you will be killed in the next year or so you will look at the chap next to you and think “ poor devil “ but if I say twenty of you will have to stay on to clear all the chairs away you will think “damn me again”

All kinds of superstitions arose, beds or rooms became unlucky, and aircraft letters also had their adherents and those who were equally sure they were destined for a bad end. At Skellingthorpe we were in nissen huts and the one next to us was occupied by a friendly, well liked Canadian crew who had a strong liking for a gramophone record called “JAVA JUG “ which went “ I like coffee, I like tea, I like the Java Jug and it likes me “ They played it incessantly occasionally to howls of protest from our hut until after one night there was just silence .We would have given a lot to have the music back!! The hut was not re occupied for some time before anyone would agree to move into it. The tune has stayed with me ever since.

At this time news also began to filter back to me about the loss of friends from our training days. These included five of 52e the class I had been leader of and which had been together more or less from Yatesbury days until the time we were allocated to our squadrons > Among those lost was “Hoppy “ my close friend Cliff Hopkinson.

We had somehow stuck together throughout the period when we were filling in time between radio training and eventual operational training and in fact when one of the postings was to York, Hoppy had cycled to Pilmoor with me and met my parents. As soon as an opportunity arose I went to see his parents. They made me very welcome but it was a disturbing experience and I came away feeling somehow guilty for having survived, a feeling I was to experience twice again later and more deeply.

On November 23rd the target name for that nights operation was one we were to come to know all too well in the next two months ...Berlin!

Again I will turn to my old friend “Bomber Command “ for an accurate description of what Berlin signified to the crews involved ...”For the crews of the Lancasters, the battle of Berlin was a nightmare Northern Germany seldom enjoyed clear weather in mid-winter and that year conditions were exceptionally bad. Night after night Bomber command took off through the rain, sometimes through the snow into the atmospheres freak winds and sudden icing conditions loaded to the aircrafts limit with bombs and fuel for the 1150 mile round trip. Long hours at sub zero temperatures dulled the brain, reflexes were slowed and mistakes made. Frostbite was common even among the pilots and navigators, with the cabin that cold conditions elsewhere had to be experienced to be believed.

If there was ever a time when the crews felt they needed the best the aircraft could offer it was on a sortie to Berlin!

For 5 groups Berlin became the only target and 61 sqdn certainly got their share our crew doing nine consecutive trips to it, many of them with only one night break between trips

Our first two Berlins were not encouraging. My logbook records on the first one "three engined return" a brief note but encompassing something like four hours of nursing the Lanc back home in freezing flying conditions ! perhaps one or two grey hairs had their origin just then.

The next one also carries a little note "Diverted Catfoss" Catfoss is in Yorkshire and being diverted there added half an hour to the trip .It also added a great deal of confusion with a large number of five group bombers milling around at an airfield they were not familiar with in an area equally strange to them . "Bomber Command notes that two of the aircraft collided over Catfoss and were lost .

By the way just before these trips I had my 21st.

Speaking of the cold -- Reg tells me in a recent letter that on one of these trips he was trying to break the ice which had formed on his face mask and snapped off his oxygen tube .He passed out cold , being at about 28,000 ft and only woke up when we passed over the Zuider Zee on our way home . Perhaps our "no chattering on the inter com" rule was not so hot for keeping in touch with how everyone was making out !!

He also reminded me that on one of the days we were going out that night we were asked to take a Lanc up to 29,000 with a weather man on board to check on the icing conditions for the evenings entertainment He could see the ice forming on the wings and says no one in the crew was happy about it .

It is of note that despite the heavy rate of operational trips we were still carrying out exercises to improve our capabilities , the log notes "fighter affiliation" "high level bombing practice" , and searchlight co operation " as some of the duties .What searchlights we would be co operating with I cannot imagine .Usually the boot was most definitely on the other foot.

In the middle of all this we were all moved "lock stock and barrel" to Skellingthorpe NOT a popular move since as I have mentioned elsewhere it was all freezing cold nissen huts and someway from our usual haunts ..always assuming that we had any chance to go to them

However our stay there proved to be quite short and after only about six weeks we were on the move again and this time oh happy day to Coningsby a first class pre war station, All this was accomplished without a break in our operational activities> BERLIN continued to be the "only game in town" as far as we were concerned and our first two trips from Coningsby were not too happy . The log notes on the first one reports 1 engine and rear turret u/s "duty not carried out" and for the second one "3 engined return diverted to Mildenhall" (long runway)

These two trips were on the first and second of January No time for a New Year party !!.

On the sixth of the month however we had a break from operations and for a few days we returned to our old home at Syerston for a Lancaster Refresher Course where we performed under the eagle eye of a very senior pilot whose name was later to become familiar to me Squadron Leader Gerry Fawke DSO DFC .

The “real” object of this refresher course was to become evident about eight weeks later when about half way through our tour of operations we suddenly received a surprise posting to No 617 squadron and moved to join them at Woodhall Spa .> However back at the ranch (Coningsby) Berlin was the “only game in town” and it was becoming more unpleasant at that

One of the hazards was the length of the trip, which coupled with absolutely awful weather conditions, made it difficult for everyone to keep up the level of concentration necessary for survival. I had quite a few things to do which helped me to keep alert. There was the routine wireless work, listening to a specific frequency for messages from base (there might even be a recall .. some hope !!) and the coded weather forecasts and obtaining direction finding bearings when still within range of the limited number of radio beacons. . Once over enemy territory there was the joy of playing a game originated by w/ops themselves. We called it “Tinsel” and it consisted of searching the German radio bands to locate those being used to direct the enemy fighters and, once an active one was located, jamming it by tuning our transmitters to it and either holding down the morse key or relaying loud music from the receiver to it. Most further refined the game by using our small knowledge of German to issue our own countermanding instructions e.g. VECTOR VECTOR then giving a bearing opposite to the one just given by the ground control. It did not always work but Oh the joy of hearing a fighter pilot swearing at the ground control about what he thought were mixed up instructions from the ground.

Of the set there were other jobs to do one of the less pleasant being throwing out Window. Window was bundles of metallic strips, which we pushed down a chute located at the rear end of the fuselage. Thousands of these strips from all the aircraft on the raid completely upset the German defensive radar and when first used in July had resulted in significant reductions in losses with everyone jailing it as the best thing since sliced bread. Unfortunately the German radar technicians were very good and had succeeded in finding ways round it by the time we were attacking Berlin, Before I could carry out this task I had to disconnect from the main oxygen supply and connect to a small oxygen bottle so as to be able to move around without passing out. At the window chute once opened it was like standing in a ninety mile an hour freezing wind, which did its best to throw the window back in your face and also to remove your nose with frostbite. At this stage of the war the Germans had to some extent turned window to their advantage, using its traces to locate the general direction of the main bomber force and vectoring the Wild Boars onto it.

Back at the desk I could concentrate on the Tinsel and also take Gee bearings to Pass to Alan.

Gee was a navigational device which took signals from stations located in England and translated them into readings on a six inch cathode ray tube in a housing on the wireless operators table. These readings were plotted on large charts quite a difficult job with the limited space available. Watching the screen for seven hours or so was in itself a bit of a trial and the screen tended to stay in ones vision for some time after it was switched off. However it was a very valuable nav aid. The Germans had retrieved sets from crashed aircraft and by now were sometimes jamming the signals

It was now becoming obvious that Berlin was the main target and ground defences were being brought in from elsewhere making each trip more difficult. On one trip in particular I remember standing up behind Jim and looking at a tremendous lane of searchlights of all types like a flare path marking out the track of our approach and with all hell loose in between the lines of light and fighters picking off the bombers

on the outer edges . A day or two afterwards my mother sent me an account of the raid, which had appeared in the newspapers.

All good things must come to an end and on the 15 January 44 we did our last Berlin and our last trip with 61 Sqn . A great squadron to be on and we were sorry to leave. Although I have concentrated on the operational aspects life was not without fun and in both the N.C.Os and Officers messes we had some memorable parties .The sergeants mess had the advantage that they were allowed to invite WAAFs the officers only had one or two Waaf officers as civilian ladies were not allowed except on very special occasions. In any case the enthusiastic renderings of such well loved numbers as B...s to Mr Bangalstine and Lydia Pink might have left them shocked. Of course we could have fallen back on another favourite “ Ich gan speiler aufen meine toodlesac “ and various other invented German musical instruments” which was sung with accompanying gestures .
Next stop 617 sqdn .

Most people today have heard of 617 Squadron and the story of its formation from “old lags” specifically to carry out the raids on the Mohn and Eider and two other dams in the Rhur but at the time we were selected to join it as part of the replacement for the severe losses it suffered in that operation its fame did not appear to have spread to 617. As far as we knew it was just another squadron. (Possibly at the time the squadron number was not divulged for security reasons.

Whatever we arrived at Woodhall puzzled at our sudden move and unaware of any special fame being attached to 617.

My first intimation of anything different was as I was unpacking and settling into a room allocated to me in a building with a central corridor and with fanlights above the doors and I heard some crew members (of a crew I was to get to know well) talking and one was informing the others in a “not too keen on this –voice” that they had arrived on a special duties squadron which only did dodgy trips and had just lost a lot of crews on one of them.

I have been asked quite a few times what it was like joining this (now famous) group but I have to say that is exactly like being on the one we had just left.

The dams raid was seldom mentioned. There was no atmosphere either of despair at the loss of so many good friends or of any kind of triumph or bragging about the success of the mission. Nor were we treated as new boys but simply accepted as what all the new crews were, crews who had enough experience to settle quickly into the life of the squadron.

John in fact was made a deputy Flight Commander very shortly after we settled in and most of us rekindled friendships made earlier in training etc.

617 however was different from main force

Now we no longer set out surrounded by hundreds or even thousands of other aircraft heading en masse for the same target and the “safety in numbers” feeling was replaced by our working as a single unit.

In 617 we had shared our base with another squadron and our trips were very much a part of a larger plan involving many other units in 5 and other groups with bomb loads and briefings dictated by the requirement of the whole.

617 was very different with practically every operation being a “special” which had been planned and ordered at high level and as a result of a specific need. The Dams raid was the first and typified the type of work we were doing. A specific target calling for special armament and intensive pre planning and training, usually the latter being away from the norm. In nearly every case the squadron worked alone relying to a large extent on this training and planning to achieve success.

I do not want to over laud 617 but its crews and commanders were again a bit different from main force. On the normal squadrons there would be a smattering of very experienced crews but with the growth of the force and sadly the rate of losses sustained practically all squadrons had their share of green crews and of others painfully working their way up the experience ladder.

617 crews were all experienced and some were on their third tours.

The Flight Commanders were all well known and in Wing Commander Cheshire we had a Squadron Commander with a terrific reputation and capacity to plan and execute difficult operations. An Oxford Don his briefings always left you feeling that every factor had been carefully thought through to give us the best chance of doing the job AND living to tell the tale.

When I opened my log book to refresh my memory on what we had done in our first month on the squadron I thought “This looks pretty dull” since all the trips were noted simply as “Ops Special Target 1 x 12,000 lb” with no information as to

who or what received the benefit of the 12000 bomb we had carried. Seeking more enlightenment I turned to Paul Brickhill's book *The Dam Busters* which is the definitive work on 617. To my surprise I found that I had at some time, made tiny pencil references against the descriptions of specific operations which enabled me to relate my entries to ones described in the book.

The first of these on the second of March was an aircraft factory at Albert in France where Cheshire and Munro marked the factory (which the Germans had covered with enormous camouflage nets painted with dummy roads and buildings) using red flares and incendiaries. The rest of us then dropped our blockbuster bombs scoring direct hits. The book records "No more aircraft were made at Albert for the Germans"

The next operation was of a similar nature -- the Michelin tyre factory at Clermont Ferrand (making the Germans 24,000 tyres a month)

The War Cabinet was concerned about the risk of killing French people, the factory consisted of four large buildings -(three workshops and a workers canteen)and from high level the startling instruction came down -- we were to smash the three r workshops but on no account damage the canteen!! It would be fine gesture and good propaganda and, as one high officer remarked "a bloody miracle"

To make it more so it was a black moonless night. Cheshire flew three low runs over the factory to warn the workers who incidentally had been warned by the resistance to go to the canteen and we spent some time orbiting to give them more time. (All in all a risky business giving the possibilities of leaks tipping off the German defences)

Cheshire, Munro and Shannon all dive-bombed the workshops with spot fires Seven minutes later the bombing was over. Six of us had been carrying 12,000lb bombs ALL were direct hits on the workshop. Next day a Mosquito photographed the still smoking buildings withal the workshops destroyed and beside them the canteen untouched. Photos were sent to the Cabinet

As you will have gathered this phase of our work was concentrated on factories and Storages in France heavily involved in war work for the German forces and these included an explosives dump at Bergerac on the banks of the Dordogne and another at Angouleme. both were totally destroyed and provided fireworks which lit up the sky for miles.

On the second one we had a little firework of our own when our port outer caught fire and not for the first time we had to labour home on three engines.

This reminds me that we had of course left Mickey behind at 61 and were now the "Owners" of "B" for Beelzebub after a certain well known Mirror cartoon character Beelzebub Jones, a cowboy. The sketch for the paint job on the aircraft was gladly donated to us by the Mirror cartoonist whose name I regret I have now forgotten. (It was Hugh McClelland)

In this stage we had been concentrating on damaging or destroying factories or storage facilities which were providing supplies to the German forces based in France and who would be the main opponents when the Allies opened the "second front"

During this time and indeed before it the question of bombing accuracy was becoming of paramount importance, Carpet bombing by the main force relied largely on target indicating flares dropped by leading aircraft until a new force known as the Pathfinders was formed. Elite crews equipped with the best available navigational equipment and special marker flares. These crews were good but they were still dropping their markers from over 20,000 feet. and the results were not always too

good. For our work we needed much greater accuracy and the ability to pick out targets as small as factory buildings without damaging surrounding residential areas. Already 617 had achieved a lot but some of the best raids had been marked by our leaders diving down to dangerously low altitude in Lancasters not ideal for the purpose.

I have not previously mentioned the very close relationship between Air Vice Marshal Cochrane & Wing Commander Cheshire. They had frequent meetings to discuss this question. The AVM and other senior officers argued that this low level work would result in unacceptable casualties for 617 and on a well defended target it was certainly very dangerous.

Cheshire had an answer. They would use Mosquitoes which, with their superior speed and manoeuvrability, would, he hoped, be able to get in and out so fast as to give the ground defences insufficient time to attack them.

Mosquitoes were like gold dust with lots of other squadrons, including pathfinders, wanting them. However Cochrane promised to see Harris and put our case.

He succeeded and soon 617 had three Mosquitoes. These were flown by Cheshire, Munro, Shannon and Jerry Fawke (Jerry had already entered our lives when he checked us out prior to our joining 617. Later in my story he will figure prominently). Just at this time we were reaching a milestone in our operational careers. The end of our first "tour" of 30 operational trips was in sight and in the normal way of things we would have finished operations and gone off to other jobs. However Ken and I had already decided that we wanted to continue with the job we had joined up to do. By chance Bob Knights was losing his wireless operator and rear gunner and we offered to fill this gap.

The offer was accepted and a few nights later we took part in the first of the mosquito marked operations at Juvisy marshalling yards seven miles south of Paris.

Cheshire, Fawke, Shannon and Kearns put down spot fires on the target and 617 bombed the target accurately, followed by 200 Lancasters of 5 group.

It was eighteen months after the war before the yard was again in operation.

Our next outing again with Bob was something new. 617 were again to mark a target but this time it would be in Germany and aircraft from both 5 and 1 groups were to attack the target. The target was Brunswick. The result good but poor visibility led a reserve Pathfinder force to mark off target and despite Cheshire repeatedly calling them off the main force bombed this marking.

The day after this raid Ken and I with others were sitting on top of an air raid shelter enjoying some sunshine when John came up and told us that the others had now decided that they wanted to carry on and asked us to rejoin them.

Although we were happy with Bob we had not had time to get too involved and we said yes to John without too much heart searching.

Our first outing with the old team was one of the longest trips on the tour, ten and a half hours over all and much of it over well defended territory and to a very heavily defended target. MUNICH.

This target was also important because it saw success for the MOSQUITO marking plan on a major German target. The risk for the four mosquito crews had been enormous, not from the enemy, but because promised long range fuel tanks had not materialised in time and the fuel range calculation left a very very slim margin for anything unforeseen. To help a little they were to return to Manston. They all made it but with gauges (not accurate on low readings) showing less than ten minutes flying. Cheshire was on the approach when the runway lights began to flash on and off.

A warning that a German fighter was in the area. Its target was Jerry Fawke, the fighter had stalked him round the circuit and moved in for the kill as he was occupied with landing and with wheels and flaps down. The fighter had a sitting target -- and he MISSED. The runway lights were put out and Cheshire made a careful approach and landed using his landing lights. Once again 617 were lucky.

Now that the technique had been established Harris gave Cochrane a full squadron of mosquitoes and two Pathfinder Lancaster squadrons. With the instruction that 617 was to train the mosquitoes in low marking leaving 617 free for some special items he had in mind.

DDAY

The first of these specials was one which at first sight did not suggest anything very important. For some time we had been carrying out training in what was a most boring occupation. Flying on straight courses turning at precisely timed points then flying a reverse course slightly ahead of the first throwing out window at precise speeds and height

Now this was to be put into practice and would give the impression on German radar of a large convoy of ships moving at seven knots towards the French coast. (Below were small boats bearing sound equipment replicating the noises made by large vessels on the move)

The operation would require the most complicated and accurate navigation, flying technique and split second timing for the window drops.

When Cheshire was asked if we could do it he said "Yes my crews are good enough but I don't think they are going to be very happy about doing a stooge job on invasion night"

The scientist who had worked out the plan replied "As it happens there will be no flying job more important than this on the night"

"The training went on day and night - unspectacular, tedious and demanding meticulous care and skill"

Not at the time being privy to the reason for it we became somewhat restless so Cheshire had an idea. One Sunday afternoon he lined up all the crews not flying, took all their hats and money and dropped them out in the countryside where "Dads Army" and the local police had orders to apprehend and arrest any airmen without hats. Both police and escapees entered into idea with (sometimes too much) vigour. Best idea was Kearns crew who made tracks for favourite pub and borrowed money from landlord to spend the evening in approved fashion.

On the 5th June the station was sealed off from outside and the crews attended a briefing with armed guards at the door where we were told the exact reason for all the training. and that the invasion was about to start. With another squadron working further north we were to simulate our own invasion fleet.

Timing of the turns and forward movement was critical as was the accuracy of the window dropping - an error of four seconds would make a suspicious change in the position of the "convoy" on German radar.

The squadron had been split into two sections for the task and the change over from one section to another was also critical

Each section was on for four hours and for that four hours we flew in the blackness over the channel. Extra men were added to each crew, an extra pilot, extra navigator and three men to assist with putting out the window (thank goodness)

The last section had its reward as it turned for home. The German coastal batteries opened fire NOT AT THE AIRCRAFT but at the "invasion fleet" below.

.Quotation “It is history now that the Germans really thought that the invasion was coming in that area.

Inland from Dieppe and Boulogne the bulk of their army which should have been hurrying to the real invasion army waited and waited poised to swoop on the armada that was not there. By the time they had woken up other squadrons had blasted the bridges over the Seine between them and the real invasion Allied troops were consolidating their positions with greater freedom from counter attack than they had dreamed possible. “

THE Dams raid was undoubtedly 617's greatest achievement and the operation above held no risk of attack from fighters or anti aircraft fire ,and no heroics it had only long tedious hours of practice and four hours of tension but arguably its effect on the war and on the lives of many allied soldiers must rank it high in importance.

For us it also marked another milestone , our final trip on our first tour.

However there was still plenty to look forward to including another task which was to be very important to the lives of many civilians at home.

Next episode --- THE EARTHQUAKE BOMB and its effect on Hitler's new secret

weapon threat -- the Vs and the Big Big guns

E EARTHQUAKE BOMB

Earlier I have mentioned the squadron's preoccupation with accuracy and it was a measure of the success we had achieved that the squadron received a visit from the two American Air Force generals Spaatz and Doolittle who came to enquire about our marking technique.

Cheshire explained our technique and Spaatz enquired if we had any particular problem and straight faced Cheshire said that one problem was how to find some way of de calibrating our bomb sights “ because the damn bomb aimers are all lobbing their bombs into the same hole !! “

“Is that so” said Spaatz with grin well how about a bombing contest and we'll show you how to land a bomb in a pickle barrel “ The contest never came off because there were other more important things for both sides to do

Just behind Calais the Germans had restarted work on bomb proof rocket and Big Gun bases. Thousands of slave workers were busy working on massive block houses.

Whitehall knew that the rockets were intended to fall on London . Intelligence had suggested that the weight of the missiles might be as high as ten tons and the rate of delivery as high as thousands per week . If these secret weapons started up before the RAF could destroy the blockhouses London would be destroyed and the invasion would also be wrecked

Barnes Wallace had designed a new bomb with the capability to penetrate over ninety feet of earth and concrete . With their reputation for bombing accuracy and their new SABS Bomb sight only 617 had the ability to use this new bomb to its maximum potential.

Much of the above occurred before D.day but it was only a day after the D Day operation that Cheshire and Munro were driving round the perimeter of the airfield when they came across a convoy of lorries carrying heavily sheeted loads and when they subsequently took a look at what had been delivered they saw that the new bombs had arrived.

Given the name TALLBOYS these bombs were spawned out of an even bigger ten ton bomb Barnes Wallace had worked but which had been shelved since the weight of it so reduced the range of the aircraft as to limit its viability.

With a weight. of 12,030 lbs they were still an awesome sight to us -- 21 feet long Slim and perfectly streamlined – a big change from the cookies we had been using where a lot of explosive was needed. They sliced through the air much faster than any bomb had ever done before and on exploding made a crater eighty feet deep and one hundred feet wide.

The bombs were made by Vickers and , because of the very special nature of the casing they were in short supply . There were strict orders that no bomb was to be wasted. If the first one dropped did the job the others were to be brought back !!. This made for a small problem . The bombs were so heavy “all up” no one was sure how the aircraft would perform on landing. Cheshire solved this problem with the instruction that if we returned with bombs on board he would be the first to land . If he made it successfully we could all follow suit and land -- if not we were to take them out to sea and drop them. Happily this potential waste proved unnecessary though I must say there were plenty of fingers crossed every time we did it. Forty eight hours after Cheshire spotted the bombs being delivered the call came to use them for the first time . Not as expected on the rocket sites but on something quite important just the same.

SAMUR TUNNEL.

Intelligence had reported a German Panzer division moving up from Bordeaux to attack the invasion. The trains carrying these troops and armour had to pass through the Samur railway tunnel near the Loire and a hundred miles into France.

To attack the tunnel before the train reached it we would have to move fast and a tunnel on a dark night would be an elusive target. To quote Dam Busters “ Only one squadron could do it and only one bomb ! .

The raid was laid on with speed and the first attack using the new bombs carried out with precision all bombs falling close to the markers laid by Cheshire . First impressions were disappointing , the new bombs did not make a splash like the block busters we had been using , only making a red pin point as they entered the ground and the crews expected more . Only next day when the photos from a reconnaissance aircraft came in and they saw the giant craters one hundred feet across and seventy feet deep did they realise the potential of what they had been given.

One bomb had fallen on the hill 60 yards from the tunnel mouth . The hill rose steeply from the mouth of the tunnel and at that spot there was 70 feet of earth and

chalk above the tunnel – the bomb went straight through this cover and exploded in the tunnel blowing about 10,000 tons of earth into the air and the mountain collapsed into the tunnel.

The panzer unit did not get through and it was many days before they could reach their objective – too late for their planned counter attack.

The Germans brought their full efforts to bear on re opening the tunnel and got it cleared just when the Allies broke through and took it over !!.

617 now had the weapon it needed to tackle the looming danger of the German secret weapons. But the weapon was to prove invaluable in meeting another danger currently wreaking havoc on the convoys carrying men and guns over to Normandy. E BOATS sneaking out of Le HAVRE and other French maritime bases and under cover of darkness torpedoing our ships.

By day these E boats sheltered in massive concrete pens at these bases, practically impervious to ordinary bombing.

Cochrane had an idea that if the bombs could create an earthquake on land surely they could create a tidal wave in the sea. Wallis promised him they would and on June 14th we set out in the early evening to put this to the test.

Wing Commander Cheshire and Sldr Micky Martin were flying Mosquitos and were marking the target for and 400 more Lancasters of 1 and 5 groups were to follow with normal bomb loads.

We had never seen flak like it, in the dusk the red and green tracer filled the air and put up what looked to be a solid curtain over and around the drop site...Flak was nothing new to us, we had seen it often enough but flak in daylight looks more scaring than at night since at night exploding flak simply flashes on and disappears but in daylight it leaves ominous black shapes which seem to fill the sky and emphasise just how much of it there is. Moreover on those occasions and on subsequent attacks we made on these naval bases the flak was coming from naval vessels and shore units and their accuracy.

Cheshire was satisfied with his first marking run and called in the bombers to aim on his red markers. We went in at 12,000 feet and fifteen tallboys(6 tonners) Went in almost together. The other Lancasters then moved in with their bomb loads, A recce photo next day was staggering. not a single E boat was left afloat, some were thrown up on the quay and the rest just torn apart by the tallboys and the smaller bombs. LATER when British forces took LE HAVRE they found that the tidal wave had smashed through doors of the pens and destroyed the insides. Three Tallboys had made direct hits on the pens and penetrated the heavy concrete roofs to destroy the moorings inside.

The next day we took off to repeat the process at Boulogne, a successful attack but one which although we took part to the extent of sharing the flak we were not allowed to use our bomb and brought it home to have the experience of landing with it on board !!.

Several other attacks followed in the ensuing ten days with the weather frustrating some of the attacks and the return with the bombs on board becoming almost commonplace. Eventually St Omer, and St Pul were “dealt with”

I have mentioned the menace of the German secret weapons, the two types of rocket and the big guns with their heavily fortified underground launching pads and storages> If they were allowed to get going London would be destroyed. It was therefore essential that 617 with its earthquake bomb capacity really got going on them.

However there was another factor entering the equation the WEATHER . For days We rose at 5 a.m. for briefing only to find the trips postponed or cancelled, sometimes we even took off and battled through flak and fighters only to find the targets covered in cloud and to bring our bombs back ready for the next day At last the weather cleared , not too soon as London was taking a battering The squadron was able to attack the flying bomb storages and the rocket sites and when the allied armies burst through and reached the rocket sites in the Pas de Calais area there was nothing for them to do 617 had already destroyed them. At the end of July W/c Cheshire was called to Group where Cochrane told him that he was to be withdrawn from operations .He had done ninety eight operations and by the ruling casualty rate he should have been killed four times over.

He was replaced by W/c Tait another leader with a great record and another who one felt confident in following.

In the following first half of August we returned to attacking the ports and E boat pens with a railway bridge thrown in for good luck.

This period saw us subjected to the most intense flak w3e had yet encountered , usually from the guns of warships or naval shore batteries. Several times we were damaged.

On the 5th August we took part in an attack on Brest and some of the flak damaged our mid upper turret Reg called out and looking back I saw him leave his turret and slump on the floor. Grabbing an oxygen bottle and a first aid kit I hurried down the fuselage to him . H was saying something which I took to be “leg “ and tearing open the first aid kit I pulled out a morphia ampoule (trying hard to remember what the first aid lecture had told us about how it should be used) and prepared to cut open the heavy leather fur lined trousers which gunners wore whereupon Reg began to beat me on the head and inform me rudely that the area needing attention was his “HEAD “ A piece of flak or a piece of the turret which it had dislodged had hit Reg on the back of his head . Fortunately the leather helmets which we all wore had a metal buckle on a strap at the back for adjustment and very fortunately for Reg the buckle had taken most of the force of the blow leaving him with a bruise and a sore head which could have been much worse. It also served to remind us that the bright flashes of flak had hard centres and we had another reminder next trip when we were again damaged by flak. We completed four more very similar trips in August one of which I still remember with awful clarity . We were coming in at Brest to attack a Battleship and the flak was once again very heavy backed up of course by the ship itself . I had moved forward to look out of the side window of the cockpit ,as I sometimes did and could see other aircraft . Suddenly one of them was hit and completely disintegrated in front of my eyes . It was one of ours crewed by old friends, No chance for anyone on board. In the course of our two tours we had seen many planes go down but never so close to our own or so identifiable These last trips brought us to the end of our second tour though even then fate had two more blows to offer.

The Canadian F/Lt in charge of the Radar section had unbeknown to me approached the Wing Commander asking if he might have the benefit ? of my services now that I was no longer flying and a job was accordingly found for me under the grand title of Radar Liaison Officer.

I enjoyed the rest for a bit and the freedom to go into town almost any evening if I wished.

However there were two hard blows to take in this period.

Arthur Walker our Bomb Aimer had missed a trip due to illness earlier in our time together and undertook an odd trip with another crew . Once again a piece of flak entered his bomb aimers compartment in the nose of the aircraft. This time it was to prove fatal and after all the trips we had done together we lost Arthur on this one trip. Only a very short time before I had gone to his home with him and met all his family. Flying bombs were passing over his home ,(a peach farm with huge greenhouses) at Richmond at regular intervals when we were there and he was naturally concerned for the family.

The next blow was even harder to take . I received a letter from home telling me that Michael was reported missing believed killed . He had written to me only a week or so before telling me that he was flying with a flight commander and they were expecting to change their Beaufighters for Mosquitoes. I checked with his squadron commander and was able only to have confirmation that he had indeed been killed. Typing this now it seems strange that this part of the memoirs which began with Michael and I deciding to join up on our bike ride to Pilmoor should come to a close with the news of his death.

This was in fact not a good period for me personally . The ground job was proving less interesting than I had expected and of course most of the crew had been posted to other jobs . one chance of escape from the boredom arose when the squadron began preparing to attack the Tirpitz and Arthur Kell an Aussie who played for a Australia was short of a wireless op and asked me to join his crew . I jumped at the chance and for a week or two was happily training . Alas a replacement w/op arrived and although Arthur wanted to keep me it wasn't on especially as the Radar o/c had Not been too pleased at my defection from that job !!.

However he lost me anyway as I was now apparently back on the squadron aircrew strength and assigned to Bob Knights again doing various routine flights within the UK but not operations.

About this time a notice appeared on the squadron notice board asking for volunteers to join BOAC -- Bob and I both applied and after a short interval we were advised that we were accepted and a posting to Scotland came through with a date just after Christmas . I was overjoyed , just what I wanted Christmas leave and then a new flying posting with the chance of a post war occupation Fate had other ideas, almost before I could get my breath back I was called into the office and told that I had been posted to an unknown station in the west country where I would be assigned to a new squadron . In vain I pointed out that I had already been posted to BOAC - AH but this was an RAF posting the other a civil one and the RAF took precedence !

And in any case this was more urgent. SO URGENT that when I arrived at the dashed place , the name of it long forgotten , I found one WAAF officer handing out rail warrants with instructions to go home on leave and await instructions In fact it was February before I heard from the RAF this time with instructions to report to 46 Squadron Transport Command at Stoney Cross , a wartime airstrip built for the American Air Force and situated on the edge of the New Forest.

Stoney did nothing to dispel the bad mood I had been in since leaving 617 . It was a nissen hut station a far cry from the semi luxury of the Petwood and COLD , freezing both by day and by night and without a single amenity.

To add insult to injury the reason why we were there was to train on Stirlings . The equivalent of being taken off the Rolls Royce of Bomber Command and presented with the least loved banger of all. And who was my skipper on these lumbering brutes but Jerry Fawke an expert on flying Lancs and Mosquitos !!

(Was there some connection between my being there and he being the Squadron Leader ?)

Fortunately we were only there for one month , though it seemed longer and there was one small bright spot.

As I have said the station had been occupied by the USAF preparing for D Day and in a investigation of the surrounding woodland we found a large dump of petrol in five and ten gallon tins, not guarded and not locked up in any way – mana from heaven for those of us who were car owners. I had acquired an Austin 7 from my school chum (and eventual best man Geoff Wilkinson whose family owned the only garage in Easingwold near my home, and where I went to school.

One night a few aircrew friends and I set off into the jungle and liberated some of the petrol . The tins were very thin metal and our attempt to carry out the raid in silence met a snag. The petrol sloshed about in the tins and the sides whanged in and out making more than enough noise to waken the dead. Once back at our nissens we Had to make rapid arrangements to hide the loot but for days a strong smell of petrol should have excited suspicion.

Next stop believe it or not was Leconfield near Hull . Here we received a motley collection of reinforcements including a good number of Australians all ex bomber crews , some with limited experience , none having completed a tour but all the pilots well decorated. No gunners only pilots , navs and w/ops.

And! As a special treat a new aircraft to play with HALIFAXES .

Ten days resulted in eight hours flying for familiarisation on the aircraft

More leave having first been kitted out for an overseas posting.

What exactly did the Air Ministry have in mind for us one wonders ??.

Leave ended and we found ourselves passengers on Dakota aircraft and on our way to Cairo via Sardinia and, Castel Benito tripoli.

OVERSEAS TOUR

As I mentioned earlier we found ourselves part of the Middle East Forces and were transported to Lyneham (the main centre for transport to the Middle and Far East)

And swiftly became passengers on Dakotas en route for Cairo with stops at Marseilles ,Sardinia , Tripoli , and finally at Cairo west .

I had become friends with Donny Flett an Australian W/op . Both of us were pretty fed up , Donny because he had just married a very nice English girl and me because I had just lost a much desired secondment to BOAC. .At each stop we proceeded to drown our respective sorrows with a beverage known as a Pink Elephant (main ingredient Cherry Brandy !!)

Cairo west did little to improve our state of mind . True we now became a squadron again No 96 Sqdn RAF Middle East Forces but we were swapping our relatively luxurious accommodation in the UK for not at all luxurious one man tents and with mess and bath and toilet facilities of the same ilk .

Add to this after spending some time in the UK learning about Halifaxes and Stirlings we found that we were now the proud possessors of DAKOTAS .

Now I would never run down the Dak it was and still is a great work horse when it comes to moving men and materials and very reliable but switching from the Lancaster to the Dak was a bit like going from a Rolls Royce to a Deux Cheveux .

At the time the move seemed to represent just another piece of Air Ministry stupidity but as I write this I can see a faint bit of sense . What was being planned was a big push to remove the Japs from S.E.Asia . This would require the transport of a huge quantity of material and large numbers of troops. The latter perhaps being dropped

into the territory either by being landed at small airstrips or possibly dropped by parachute or towed in gliders, All three of the planes we had trained on would be needed, Much later I was to hear of a plan where we were to release gliders off the coast and then, since we would have insufficient fuel to return to base ditch in the sea to be picked up by the navy. Happily the atom bomb put paid to that one,

The first thought was to carry on drowning the sorrows but work swiftly intervened and we began a fairly hectic schedule of trips to, Tripoli .Malta . Lybia . etc Airfields I was to become very familiar with at the start of my civil flying career when the company I joined started Malta Airways,

In the middle of this busy period for 96 sdn I received an urgent order to present myself at Headquarters in Cairo and on reporting there I was wheeled in front of a very senior officer wondering what particular crime I had committed.

This gentleman gave me a very steely glare and in a tone which suggested that I had committed some kind of serious sin barked " You have no right to be here you are tour expired ! and then to emphasise the gravity of my " crime " twice.!

Before I could even begin to enjoy the thought of going home and on to BOAC.

He solved the problem (to his satisfaction) " You will have to volunteer to carry on operational flying."

End of interview -- he did not even wait for me to acquiesce

Our time at Cairo was to prove very short and after only one month we were on the move again.

With the move our title also changed yet again and now we became 96 Squadron S.E.A.A.F.

We became passengers once more this time from Cairo to Habbaniya then via Bahrein in the Persian Gulf and from there to Karachi .One night stop in Karachi and then on to BILASPUR in Central Provinces which was to be our home for some time. Bilaspur is or was at that time a key town on the Indian railway system.

Here we had proper buildings albeit with somewhat primitive washing and other facilities. We also had a proper airfield with a control tower and radio equipment.

I was now back with Gerry Fawke who was O.C A Flight.

Initially we carried out a lot of trips carrying supplies to and from all parts of India Before commencing a period of Glider towing followed by parachute dropping exercises . This training included Jumpmaster training for the wireless operators including self with a couple of jumps to let us get the feel of things. Our proper job of course was to make sure the troops left the aircraft in an orderly manner.

If you think that sounds easy try standing in front of thirty fully equipped Ghurkas ,determined above all else not to disgrace themselves by not jumping coming down the aircraft with their boots crashing on the metal floor and all completely oblivious of the fact that there had to be a small time interval between each mans jump to avoid crashing into the previous jumper's opening chute . Our arms were black and blue as a result of trying to instil some sort of pause between each man.

The jumpers were each attached to a static line running along the aircraft and connected to the D ring which opened the chute.

Once the troops had gone these lines had to be hauled back into the aircraft, another job for our aching arms and a pretty dodgy one too for is the pilot decided to change the attitude of the aircraft you could find yourself sailing towards the exit door with the pull of the thirty statics to help you on your way and of course no parachute if you did not let go in time !!.

We had a tough old army warrant officer in charge of the jump training . on one occasion he was jumping with a “stick “ of Indian troops when one of the men had a partly candled chute opening close to him. He somehow managed to grab him and they came down together . The Indian was calling on Jesus to save him. The W.O. told me afterwards he had said “ Never mind Jesus you just hang on and we will both be all right.

We stayed at Bilaspur for some time doing a variety of jobs including night supply dropping to some of our forward troops in the jungle – not something I greatly enjoyed.

Then one day a number of us took off to land on a jungle airstrip called Mhawbi. The strip had been prepared for us by engineers but their preparations did not include any kind of accommodation and before we could settle in we had to pitch tents for our own sleeping quarters and others for admin , mess tent and cookhouse. The cook we had taken with us dug up a meal of stewed bully beef and I still remember it as one of the best meals I have ever eaten. As with all overseas troops we had our own camp beds with us so we could at least get a little sleep. Our visit was a preparatory one for a move by the whole squadron and after a few days we returned to Bilaspur where Gerry promptly went down with a bad case of dysentery . As I was therefore spare I was” promoted “ to Squadron Adjutant and when the main party moved to Mhawbi left in charge of the rearguard at Bilaspur.

Not an exciting job but I did have my own jeep !! I also had a heck of a scare when going to take something out of the bottom drawer of a filing cabinet in my office I tangled with a scorpion which bit my hand. Confident I did not have long to live I jumped into the jeep and set off for the camp medic who of course was right on the other side of the airfield about a mile away. By the time I reached him my arm was swollen and very solid . I expected immediate action but he gave it a cursory look and said I would have a stiff arm for a few days but did not offer any other advice or action, and added it was quite handy anyway as he had some papers he wanted me to sign.

My job as o.c the rump of 96 was to ensure that all our equipment and “ the remaining bodies were all safely loaded onto the aircraft which were by now running a shuttle service to our new home at Mhawbi . This took a week or two and then I joined the last flight from Bilaspur . The air freight on those occasion included my Charpoy (Indian bed with a base constructed using thick hempen rope) not exactly a slumberland but a lot more comfortable than our folding camp beds !!

From Mhawbi we were to undertake lots of flights to destinations all over India .Malaya and odd trips to Saigon . and Bangkok.

Conditions at Mhawbi were not good , it was very hot and everything combined to make life uncomfortable . Water was strictly rationed , food pretty awful and with little variety. Life was not improved by the jungle livestock which included a lot of large rats who amused themselves by running up the slope of our tents and sliding down the other side (Don’t ask me why).

One day being very fed up with this rat race I devised a trap to catch a rat live.

The trap was set and we all retired only to be woken at one o’clock in the morning by the most unholy racket = a rat was caught in the trap , so far so good , but it was creating all hell and had awoken most of the occupants of the surrounding tents who were themselves making quite a noise shouting at me to do something about it.

Easier said than done !! I thought of shooting the darned thing but as we were on a strong dacoit alert a revolver shot would probably put the whole camp on red alert.,

Fortunately my Indian batman . who I had brought with me from Bilaspur came to see what happening and solved the matter with his Kookri
I mentioned a Dacoit alarm –The Japs had more or less retreated from the area but had left behind groups of local Dacoit sympathisers who bedevilled the airfield by making lightning raids purely to do what damage and to steal what they could lay their hands on .

Gerry was still quite ill and for a time I was “spare “ and the Wing Commander appointed me Adjutant once more coupled with the responsibility for the welfare of the unit.

There was of course absolutely nothing in the way of entertainment and a complete lack of the items which elsewhere might have been supplied by NAAFI . I discovered that there was a unit at HQ in Calcutta designated to provide this kind of thing and with the Cos permission hitched a ride to Cal to see what I could dig up. Success ! I found a sympathetic chap at the unit and impressed him with our lack of amenities . Believe it or not I returned to Mhawbi complete with 16mm projector , a small mobile generator and a promise of future supplies of “ movies “ and also of beer and other delights. I may say I regard this trip as one of my most outstanding efforts in the war !!.

The news about the projector soon spread around the camp and I was inundated with volunteers to construct the “cinema” . the result was not bad, the seats consisting of sand bags and the screen ,courtesy of the aircraft engineering ground crews, was a very creditable effort supported on a timber framework and made from tent material suitably doped white.

I had a few fingers crossed moments as our first show started but the electricians aided by a handbook soon mastered the art of projection and the first showing was voted a great success. I would like to tell you what the film was but like many other things it has faded into the memories lost category. The film shows became a regular event and my contact at HQ kept his promise to send us new films.

The beer supply also improved with one notable and unforgettable exception later on when the powers that be in England decided to celebrate the end of their war !!

Although most of the boys considered that any kind of celebration was very premature it did seem an excuse to “down a few “ in the language of our Aussie contingent and I had requested extra supplies from my contact who informed me he had been promised some UK tinned beer -- previous supplies being bottled of unknown origin !! . The beer duly arrived and on VE night I put it out into the various camp outlets . It was greeted with joy until we opened the first ones . Whatever had been put into the cans in UK it had not been proofed against the temperatures etc of the journey and had not “ travelled “ . What came out was the most disgusting fluid imaginable.

There might have been a riot and I might have been lynched but our Dacoit friends decided to stage their own celebration attacking in some force and torching two fighter planes parked on the perimeter as well as firing wildly into the camp. Happily there were no casualties as a result but over all our VE were something to forget and feelings were not improved when copies of the SEAF NEWS arrived with details of the good times had by all at home.

As Gerry was by now no longer with the squadron a new Flight Commander was appointed and I therefore had a new skipper S/L Paddy Northmore a large man in every sense and one I really enjoyed flying with. And we now had some interesting trips as well , the Japs having vacated most of S E Asia , Our regular itinerary

included Saigon , Bangkok , Kuala Lumpur and many parts of India as well as Singapore , Penang and Batavia.

During this time I took a spot of leave and hitch hiked a lift on a plane to LAHORE where I had the first of two surprise meetings . I decided to pay a visit to the local cinema and settled down to watch the film . conscious that the seat next to me was occupied by an army officer. The film ending the lights went up and we both had a surprise .The officer ,a captain, was one of my closest friends from school days –John Tillott the son of our headmaster. Neither of us by this time knew anything about the others whereabouts or progress . We had both decided to take a leave in Lahore And arrived at the same cinema and in adjacent seats in what must have been a million to one chance . John and his wife visited us here at Reigate the year before last and John loves to recall a day when we launched a pig trough on Pilmoor pond and foundered in “mid ocean” he now lives near Rugby

There being no flights I could scrounge a lift on we decided to go to Calcutta by train a two and a half day journey which was pretty dire but in some ways interesting.

Arriving at the hotel which served as the headquarters of the RAF I had the second surprise meeting when I bumped into F/1 Humphries our old “Adj” from 617 and our old C.O wing CMDR Geoffrey Cheshire. Their presence there it later transpired had something to do with a very important event the dropping of the first atomic bomb (Cheshire was on one of the American bombers as an observer)

Back at Mhawbi things were fairly normal the next piece of excitement being the news that Japan had surrendered !!

We carried on with similar flights as before the only bits of interest were the groups of Japanese who were trying to find someone to surrender to . The first of these incidents was at a disused forward airstrip where we had landed to check on its serviceability. I left the plane and walked towards a temporary building at the perimeter and the next thing I knew was the arrival of a motor cycle and sidecar carrying a Japanese officer and followed by a large group of soldiers.

Not being too sure at this stage if all the Japs had “ Got the message “ I had a few minutes of doubt about my situation .

The motor cycle pulled up the officer got out and marched over , saluted and bowed then took out a large sword (happily holding it flat) and tried to present it to me .

By now the rest of the crew had arrived and with a mixture of sign language and the officer’s small store of English we managed to explain that we had insufficient room in the dak to accommodate him . his motor bike and his troop

But we would immediately call up our base and arrange for him to be collected.

After more bowing and scraping we left . I have no idea if anyone was sent to pick him up.!!

About this time I was called into the Wing Commanders office and informed that as the current Signals Leader was being posted home I was to take over his duties and would as a result be elevated to the dizzy rank of Flight Lieutenant. However this turned out to be one of the shortest promotions ever as only about a week later I had another call to the office . The Air Vice Marshall who was to take over command of all British Commonwealth Air Forces of Occupation Japan - AVM Bouchier had instructed 96 Sqdn to provide him with an aircraft and crew to take him to Japan and to fly him about his duties there. The crew were to consist of experienced people of officer rank and as far as the wireless operator was concerned that meant me . Alas

the Wing co informed me it did not carry the lift in rank I had been promised for the Signals Leader job.

So it was that Dakota 547 became the official transport of the AVM and an interesting new period opened up for us.

The first indications were not too good ! . Kn547 was (As were all our aircraft) a work horse fitted out with nothing more than jump lines and rough side seating for parachute dropping or general carrying work. Its outside paintwork was of course the drab brown of all wartime Daks.

When the AVM saw it he exploded . He had expected a Rolls Royce and been presented with an old banger. Quite how he thought the engineers at a jungle airstrip would have the wherewithal to transform this into some kind of plush job fit for an AVM I don't know . Happily the dak was put into the care of the well equipped engineering base at Singapore (where we had taken it to present it to him) and came out repainted and bearing his wife's name as a logo !!) It was also lavishly appointed inside with plush seating a new toilet facility , a small bar , tables etc. It also bore the three stars of his generals rank. My seat remained as unchanged and uncomfortable as ever.

The next stage was the journey to IWAKUNI in Japan where we were to be based This was interesting as we went via Manila and Okinawa and at the latter stop we were able to see the tremendous damage done by the US Navy before the landing there . Damage which had virtually turned most of the ground into ploughed fields and yet the Japanese had somehow lived through it and were able to inflict heavy casualties on the landing forces.

We were also able to see how the Americans fared in the field -- excellent mess facilities with first class food , a mobile laundry unit and a PX (equivalent of our NAAFI but very different) stuffed with goodies , clothing , radios and boxes of sweets and chocolates . Shortly I was to experience the difference -- a ration of one small bar of chocolate a week and not much else.

IWAKUNI as you will see from the map is on a large circular bay on the northern island of Japan facing the Pacific and with Hiroshima on the opposite side of the bay. Not long before we had arrived a typhoon and tidal wave had flooded the airfield and large parts of it were still under water.

However it was a well equipped station with good accommodation and I had my own room complete with a nice Japanese " Batwoman" . We had a little problem initially as she and the other girls allocated to our floor went into floods of tears the first morning when they were " shooed " out of our bathroom suite after attempting to pour warm water over us and scrub us down . The interpreter explained that they had taken their dismissal from the bathroom as an indication that they were not satisfactory !! . Peace was soon restored and as I had acquired a dictionary in Singapore I soon had a good working relationship with my lady (girl actually) I regret I have completely forgotten her name but she stayed with me until I left Japan and presented me with a very nice Kimono accompanied more tears ,when I left.

The only snag at Iwakuni was the very poor provision made by the Commonwealth Forces supply department . Literally nothing was available outside the supply of food and that was the worst I had come across even at the jungle strips like Mhawbi. Apparently some directive had come down from above that Japanese supplies were not to be used so everything had to come in by sea or air and most of it came weeks after we had arrived including bedding etc for the other ranks.

The mess food was terrible and I still remember going in for lunch one day and being given a plate bearing a two inch square of stew meat ONE potato and a spoonful of gravy hiding one piece of vegetable.

Needless to say we speedily located suitable Japanese eateries and bought our own food.

What a contrast though when we took the AVM to Tokyo to meet McArthur and were entertained in the U.S officers mess . Huge trays of marvellous food . I well remember the first breakfast I had , a huge pile of flapjacks with maple syrup followed by a sort of brunch – by RAF Iwakuni standards enough to keep me alive for a week.

On one of our visits I found I was urgently in need of some new underwear and there was absolutely no means of getting any at I wakuni . Noticing that the PX sold all types of clothing I enquired if I might buy some underwear -- Yes was the reply but as I was not a member of the US forces I needed a chit to make a purchase of that kind.

I put the problem to the US major who was our liaison officer in Tokyo and later he appeared grinning bearing a chit for the purchase duly signed BY General Bull !! General MacArthur's Chief of Staff !! . I needed the pants badly but I would dearly have liked to keep that chit – what a souvenir .

With our very close proximity to Hiroshima it was not long before we visited the site It was of course in exactly the same condition as the day after the bomb and seeing it left a big impression on us , not something you forgot in a hurry.

Of course there is no doubt that the atom bombs speedily brought about the end of the war but later I had an opportunity to visit parts of Tokio which had suffered from conventional bombing by the US Air Force and what we saw there was almost as impressive as Hiroshima . We drove through miles and miles of complete desolation With absolutely nothing to indicate this had been a built up area except a chequer board of brown or red squares -- the remains of the roof tiles of buildings and homes reduced to powder by intense heat. The construction of most Japanese homes being largely of flammable material leaving them helpless against incendiary bombing. I wondered how long Japan could have stood up to this if the Atom bomb had not been used.

Despite the poor messing arrangements our stay in Iwakuni was not unpleasant , we soon found places where we could eat and even managed a bit of a social life. One of our perks was use of the AVM's jeep bearing his three star generals insignia and we got a little pleasure out of leaving it parked outside rather dubious places of entertainment in the town (we were not necessarily inside) I struck up a sort of friendship with the Chief of Police who had partiality for Scotch whiskey . We had one great session when he drank whiskey and I drank Saki and he ended up literally under the table . whiskey being very much more potent than saki and in any case the latter is served in much smaller glasses !! . I had his card for years with an invitation to revisit Japan when things got back to normal but I seem to have lost it in one of our many moves. He had a nice family with two girls of school age and a charming wife.

Our work consisted mainly of flying the AVM to Tokio for meeting with the American top brass but we also had the pleasure of flying the Australian PM – Mr Chifflery about Japan and eventually on his return to Australia.

At last my long awaited return to the UK for demobilisation came through. The AVM wrote a nice farewell message in my log book and I boarded a P.O passenger ship(The Ordunna) to Hong Kong where 96 Sdn had moved in my absence . My transport arrangements were a long time coming through and was billeted on an Aussie who had an apartment in King George mansions in Kowloon and had quite a good time as well as doing a few trips to China with Paddy Northmore. Unfortunately as my log book was packed in one of the sea going trunks ready for embarkation I did not enter these trips in it.

One thing I often think about . I was invited to a dinner at the house of a Chinese merchant friend of the Aussie's . a great affair with about fifty courses taking hours and hours to eat and after the host hearing that I came from Leeds suggested that I act as a source of suit cloth for him and he would finance the arrangement .

Alas at that time I had not developed a business instinct not was I or anyone else aware of the important trading position which HONG Kong was to occupy.

I often speculate on what might have happened if I had taken up his offer and coupled it with joining BOAC with the opportunity to do trips to Hong Kong.

The next stage was a passage to Singapore on the P.O. Otranto another very nice boat Singapore was by now fully cleared of Japanese and I had a very good time staying in the Raffles Hotel which had been the Japanese H.Q. with nothing to do but laze around and swim in the hotel pool.

Finally the Mauretania arrived to take us home and I Was given a nice cabin on the top deck (GOOD) and made Troop Deck officer of a much lower deck (BAD !!)

The troops were a very tough bunch indeed and not at all impressed with their conditions or the attentions of inspecting officers who expected them to keep everything neat and shiny for their regular visits. Fortunately I got on well with the Boys , doing what I could to alleviate the difficult conditions on their deck due to the heat and overcrowding and poor facilities. NOT so well with the inspecting officers Who did not seem to appreciate that "my" boys were only interested in getting home and out of uniform.

Finally we docked at Liverpool and I was given transport to No 104 release centre (I think it was LINEHAM) I was given a little book to say that I did not owe anything and fitted out with a suit which would have been great if I had planned a civil, career as a stand up comedian !!.However I was able to retain my flying suit electrically heated ! , boots gloves helmet etc.

Then came a train journey which I still clearly remember , home to Pilmoor .

The sight of England's green fields with their neat hedges seemed very special.

It was hard to believe that I had only been abroad for about eighteen months but the list of places I had visited seemed to belie that -- Egypt ,India , Burma (with its jungle) Malaya , Philippines Okinawa , Japan , Hong Kong , China , Singapore etc

So ended my RAF career (although I was sent a letter telling me that I was now in the RAF Volunteer Reserve and subject to call up if required .

However it was not the end of my connection with aircraft and flying and after a brief spell at home I enrolled at Air Training at Southampton and took my civil air operators licence. More of this later.