MY SERVICE CAREER IN THE ROYAL AIR FORCE 1940/1968
INCLUDING BOMBER OPERATRIONS WITH
No. 49 SQUADRON IN 1943/44

By
SQUADRON LEADER T J PAGE DFM

The years of my youth from 1922 to 1938/39 slowly passed and the storm clouds of war were gathering over Europe again. This was something that youth and many others in the countryside were unaware of because news was very limited, wireless was in its infancy and newspapers were few; in fact, many of the older people could not read. The young did not see newspapers because some parents considered them a corrupting influence. On reflection, perhaps this was a good thing. Now seventeen and on the first Sunday in September 1939, and not required to work I decided to visit my grandmother at Coleswood near Ramsgate and cycled the thirty miles there through the lovely countryside, past my old schools and my birthplace at Sarre and on along the road that passed through Manston aerodrome. Already there was greater activity at the air station and once more, my boyhood ambitions came to the fore.

Soon after arriving there the air raid siren sounded, it was eleven o'clock the 3rd. September. The government had declared war with Germany. Being apprehensive, and, like many others, thinking there would be an immediate invasion as the place was near to the South East Coast of England, I decided to return home straight away. History relates that nothing much happened until the following springtime. The winter of the year 1939/40 was very harsh with snow and ice. As spring approached aerial activity over Southern England increased. Fighting Aircraft appeared overhead, their long condensation trails making patterns in the sky. There were sounds of machine gun fire. At times aeroplanes would streak fast and low across the countryside further kindling my love of flying machines and the air.

At the time I was living in the small village of Westwell in Kent below the North Downs. In April 1940 at the age of eighteen, I began to feel more independent and assertive so I left my employment and cycled fifteen miles to the recruiting office at Canterbury and enlisted in the Royal Air Force and was immediately accepted and placed on reserve service until called for duty. I had accepted the 'Kings Shilling' signed the Oath of Allegiance and proudly travelled home wearing the badge of the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve. The first part of my dream had come true.

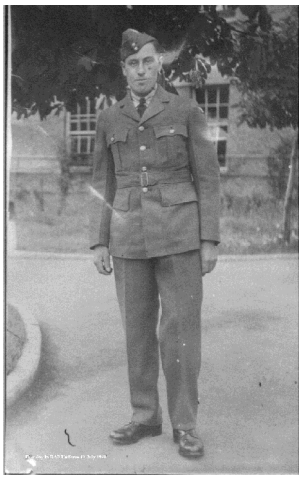
Overhead the air fighting continued with Fairy Battles streaking low over the Kent countryside. They had taken great losses over these early days of the war.

The three months passed and orders came to report for Royal Air Force duty.

On the 19th July 1940, the time came to leave home. My dream was coming true. This was a day of apprehension; I was now committed to whatever lay ahead. Where would life lead me? RAF service could be worldwide as the Empire still existed and now there was a war on. My dreams of being an Airman did not include war. Walking away down the lane there was a last look at the cluster of cottages of Westwell nestling at the foot of the wooded downs before they disappeared from view.

On the Monday afternoon the 19th July 1940, I arrived at the sand bagged and barbed wire protected gate of the RAF Depot at Royal Air Force Uxbridge, entered the restricted doorway into the guardroom and reported for duty.

There were many Volunteer Reservists from all parts of the country joining for duty that day. We wondered what was before us. Each barrack room contained about twenty beds and a certain amount of overcrowding was necessary because large numbers of new recruits. The iron beds were rather unusual in that the foot part slid under the head part. The mattress was in three parts named 'biscuits'. When not in use the whole bed was neatly stacked away. This provided extra space in the barrack room for day use and was in accordance with the spick and span neatness of service life with a place for everything and everything in its place, a form of discipline. The staff NCOs explained the routine of the barracks.



Next was the first and foremost of the induction formalities. This was the 'Swearing In' to become legally bound by the Air Force Act and allegiance to the Crown. This made one legally bound by the Air Force Act and to ones allegiance to the Crown. There was a roll call of Names, Initials and Religion. Each airman received a service number. Mine was 922297.Afterwards we were officially Airmen of the rank of Aircraftsman 2nd. Class. Each Airman received an Identity Card RAF Form 1250 and Identity Discs; called 'Dog Tags', both to be carried on the person at all times, uniform, kit and accoutrements. The kit was such items as shaving brush, button stick, cleaning brushes, knife, fork, spoon, mug, kit bag, and mess tin. The button stick is still in my possession. The accoutrements were, webbing belt and harness to support a haversack, water bottle and bayonet, finally there was a gas mask. In the evening, the new recruits were off duty. I went to the cinema in Uxbridge town.

The new intake of Airman were mustered for training as Airframe Mechanics and on the Wednesday, we travelled by troop train to the training school at Morecambe in Lancashire. On the way to the railway, station at Uxbridge small local boys offered to carry the heavy kitbags for a few pennies, an offer taken up by many of the new Airmen. It was obvious that the lads were well versed in the routines of the RAF and were showing enterprise. Each group carried food rations for the long slow journey and at various stops on the way urns of tea appeared.

Some of the recruits passed the time by playing cards. This was wartime and the trains were steam driven. Rail traffic was heavy with troops and war material on the move.

Towards evening, the train arrived at Morecambe. The Airmen then were marched round the streets and given accommodation in private houses known as billets. Billets were private houses where the occupants with space to spare were required by law to accommodate Service Personnel. Compulsory billeting is only authorised by Parliament in wartime. Three of us found ourselves in rather a poor billet whereas some other Airmen found relative luxury, a home from home atmosphere. The billeting was rather unexpected as everyone thought we would be in Royal Air Force Station barracks.

The technical training took place in various commandeered large garages and factories. Tuition was by lectures and practical work amongst a collection of Aircraft and Aircraft parts, workbenches, tables and chairs completed the layout of what was a large classroom. Here I was in my element and enthusiasm made it easy to learn and the practical work was most satisfying. A Fairy Battle was in the classroom. It was the first aircraft that I was able to inspect and sit in.

Towards the end of December the course was finished and we became qualified Flight Mechanics ‘A’ (for Airframe) and were promoted to Aircraftsman 1st.Class. Over the Christmas, I went home to Westwell in uniform for the first time. I carried posting instructions for a new unit

On this leave, there was a shot down German Me 109 fighter Aircraft at Westwell. Later I would be required to dismantle crashed German Aircraft.

The new unit was No.257 Hurricane Fighter Squadron whose Commanding Officer was Squadron Leader Stanford-Tuck, one of The Few of the Battle of Britain. Soon my new skills were tested. This was a fighter squadron. The Aircraft took off to repel approaching enemy Aircraft. The term used was "scrambled" When the alarm sounded, the mechanics would rush to their allotted aircraft to assist the pilot into their parachute harness and strap them in the cockpit seat. When the engine was started and the Aircraft ready to go the wheel chocks would be removed before positioning oneself at a wing tip to help turn the aircraft if necessary and then salute to the pilot before he took of It was then a wait, hoping that the pilot and aircraft would return. Sometimes they did not return and everyone waited for any news of what had happened.

Between flights the aircraft had to be refuelled and checked for any damage and made ready for the next sortie.

After three months on No.257 Fighter Squadron, it was time for more training at RAF Insworth near Gloucester for a three-month course to increase my skills to that of a Fitter.

The course finished in July, 1941 and I was remustered to a Fitter IIA in the rank of Leading Aircraftsman after being in the Royal Air Force for the happiest year of my life, so far, despite the fact that there was a war on.

The new posting was to No.71 Maintenance Unit at Slough in Buckinghamshire. Arriving there, I found that the unit was in a commandeered garage close to the Hawker Aircraft factory at Langley. The factory was manufacturing Hurricane aircraft.

The duties at Slough were the collection and delivery of aircraft between storage, units and stations and the recovery of crashed aircraft both RAF and German for salvage in the area of London, Kent and Essex. I remember collecting a small aircraft from a place named Fairfield. It is now London Airport.

The duties included the sending out of servicing parties to RAF Stations to service aircraft that were beyond the stations capability.

At one stage, there was a month’s detachment to the RAF Station at Cosford in Shropshire to do a Junior Non

Commissioned Officers course to learn the disciplinary aspects of service life and leadership. The course member's accommodation was in Fulton block, a barrack that was a byword in the service for its extremely high standard. This was to learn the art of commanding Airmen on parade and of Air Force Law. I returned to Slough as a Corporal and given charge of a servicing party.

It was not long before my servicing party went to service a Boston Aircraft at Royal Air Force Manston in Kent. This was the airfield of my boyhood dreams when living close by. The work was in a hanger that had escaped the German bombing; it still stands today, and is close beside the road that goes through the centre of the aerodrome. I have such memories of travelling that road in the years before

One morning there was a damaged Short Stirling bomber standing outside the hanger. It was very long and tall and the biggest we had seen. This type of Aircraft was new to the Royal Air Force. The aircraft had landed there after a bombing raid on Cologne and had received damage to the port fuselage the basic wing and engine were of the Short Sunderland Seaplanes design. The sight of the Stirling was very impressive.

This was the day the 2nd of May 1942 when I flew on my first ever flight. The Station Commander had come to the hanger to fly a small tandem two-seat aircraft and I ask him if I could fly with him. He replied by saying, "Go and get a parachute". We flew over Canterbury to see the damaged caused by the German raid during the night. This day would trigger a drastic change in my service career.

After the servicing of the Boston Aircraft at Manston, the party returned to Slough travelling by train with heavy toolboxes. A few days later there appeared on the Daily Routine Orders an appeal for Aircraft Fitters to volunteer for flying duties as Flight Engineers to assist Pilots in flying the new four engine bombers that were rapidly coming into service; the Stirling's, Halifax's and Lancaster's. The experiences at Manston made me volunteer.

My next servicing party duty was at RAF West Malling where they were flying Boston's. Here I was able to get a flight in the back cockpit with the Radar Operator.

I was then required to report to the Aircrew Selection Centre in Euston Road, London for a medical examination to see if I was fit enough Aircrew. I passed the examination and went to RAF St Athan in South Wales for aircrew training as a Flight Engineer.

It was October 1942 when training commenced. (Photograph – Thomas, back row third from right)

Being an Airframe Fitter the first part of the course was on the theory of Aircraft engines and their construction, working, servicing requirements and finally on how to operate them for maximum efficiency particularly in relation to range flying.

After engine theory, it was instruction on the airframe side of the Lancaster airframe. The flying controls, the fuel system, and the hydraulics that operated the undercarriage and the flaps and other miscellaneous services. There were vacuum and air pressure systems to drive instruments, automatic pilots, wheel brakes and other emergency apparatus. The aim of the course was to understand the whole Aircraft. Part of the course included a week's visit to the Rolls Royce Engine factory at Derby and a week's visit to the Aircraft factory of A.V. Roe at Chadderton.

Finally, there was a short course at Stormy Down in South Wales on air gunnery and gun turrets. For the Flight Engineer to know something of gun turrets and gunnery was to not only complete the knowledge of the Aircraft but also so that an Engineer could operate a gun turret especially during low level, mine laying when the Bomb Aimer was busy.

The course was finished at the end of December and the successful course members promoted to the rank of Sergeant Aircrew and awarded the coveted Flight Engineers flying badge. It was time to leave Wales where it seemed to be always raining.

Lancaster Aircraft - Flying Training

My new unit was No.1661 Heavy Conversion Unit at the Royal Air Force Station at Winthorpe just outside the town of Newark in Nottinghamshire. Here I joined the following aircrew to form a seven man crew to fly Lancaster's.

922297 Sgt T J Page Flight Engineer Self

1345759 Sgt J Morrison Pilot
"Jock"

1479510 Sgt J Dorian Navigator Jimmy

1553978 Sgt H C Annett Bomb Aimer
Hughie

1294976 Sgt R I Green Wireless Operator Ralph

1580722 Sgt E Green Middle Upper Gunner
Ernie

1578799 Sgt H. T. Maggs Rear Gunner Hayden (Taffy)

On the 20th February 1943 the all sergeant aircrew assembled at the Aircraft dispersal point with a Flight Sergeant Staff Pilot Instructor to fly on their first flight together as a crew. This was to familiarise themselves with a new type of Aircraft. Disappointedly we found that the Aircraft was an Avro Manchester and not a Lancaster. The Manchester was a two engine aircraft and was unsuitable for Squadron operational service. The shortage of Lancaster aircraft had made it necessary to use them for the initial conversion of new crews at the Heavy Conversion Units. This particular Manchester was No.L7398, which had seen operational service on Nos.49, 97 and 106 Squadrons. It was in poor condition and did not inspire confidence.

All external protective covers, flying control and undercarriage safety struts on the aircraft had to be taken off and panels checked for security as they could cause a great hazard if they came off in flight. The caps of the petrol tank filler had to be checked for security before priming the engines with petrol ready for the start up. With pre-flight checks done both outside and inside the Aircraft by the Flight Engineer the crew would board and each would do their

respective checks for their station. I would secure the entrance door, stow the entrance ladder and go to my position beside the pilot to start the engines and assist with the preparations for take-off.

On this first conversion flight, the Instructor said to me "Watch what I do". This was to be only my third time in the air, an event in its own right. Now I was to be instructed how to assist the pilot in flying the Aircraft. The Instructor did the take-off, talking and demonstrating as he did so to both the Pilot and me. Away from the airfield, he showed the handling characteristics of the Aircraft, its flying and stalling speed in various configurations. The Pilot would then try the various manoeuvres himself to get the feel of the Aircraft. The duration of this first flight was 1.55hrs.

On the 6th March 1943, the day came for conversion to the Lancaster and after three hours flying with an Instructor we took off in Lancaster No.W4190 for a further period of practising circuits and landings. On the 13th March, we flew Lancaster No.R5541 on a six-hour cross-country flight followed by periods of flying by night with the emphasis on taking off and landing in the dark. On the 24th March the crew became proficient and ready for full operational flying after a total of 53 hours flying.

On the 26th March 1943, we went to No.49 Bomber Squadron at RAF Fiskerton, an airfield about five miles east of Lincoln. Lincoln Cathedral was to become very prominent to us in the next few months for on most take offs the runway use was East to West which took the aircraft directly over the cathedral.

On the 31st March, we flew our first flight on an operational squadron with some local flying in Lancaster Mark III No. ED 452, followed during the next two weeks, with practice bombing sorties, air firing and cross-country flying. On the ground, there were practices drills for emergencies and explanations as to what to do in a crash landing and how to escape from the aircraft by parachute. In addition survival if forced down into the sea.

By the 12th April Jock the pilot had already flown on two operational bombing flights over Germany as second Pilot with other crews to gain experience of flying amongst enemy defences before taking his own crew as Captain of an Aircraft.

Before we commence serious bombing operations let us look inside the Lancaster to give you some idea of the duties and conditions under which the crew work. Starting at the entrance door immediately inside the fuselage there is a flare chute. This carries a high velocity flare that is dropped at the same time as the bombs to photograph and record the bomb strike. To the left are two stowage's one for the Rear Gunners parachute and one for a portable oxygen bottle. We then see into the rear gun turret to the rear.

Above the entrance door is stowage for the entrance ladder. It was my duty as the engineer to see that the ladder was in the stowage and the door locked and so inform the pilot. Close by the door to the front is suspended a remote recording compass positioned here away from all radio and electrical interference; the readings were shown on instruments in the pilots and navigators positions.

Going forward up the fuselage we pass under the Mid Upper Gun Turret

On the port side is a rest bed for use if a crew member is injured. Underneath it are 16 oxygen bottles for the supply to the crew at altitude. In the air I would monitor the supply to each crew from my position. Then there is the main spar of the aircraft with parts of the hydraulics and compressed air systems attached. Note the small gap to get through to get to the front cockpit.

Immediately after the spare on the port side is the Wireless Operators position. In fact he sits with his back to the spar – he does have a cushion.

Next on the port side is the navigator's position which is directly behind the pilot.

Now we come to the front cockpit with the Pilots control column and his flight instruments on the left. On the right are the Engineers engine controls and instruments. There are further engineer's fuel controls and instruments on the right side of the cockpit.

From the engineer's position he looks down into the Bomb Aimers compartment. He does have a drop down seat but most of the time was required to stand up being required to move about.

On the 13th, our names appeared on the Battle Order for operations that night to fly Lancaster Mark III No. ED 620. The decisive moment had come for us, the apprehension before each bombing operation was to start. These feelings were relieved to some extent by doing all the preparations necessary before us take off.

The first thing to do was to fly the Aircraft on a Night Flying Test (an NFT). This was to ensure that everything was working satisfactorily before the bombs and the correct fuel load for the flight were loaded on the Aircraft. Afterwards the time was with things personal, this included having a meal, and resting.

Later we would dress in the clothes suitable to withstand the cold of the particular aircrew position in the Aircraft. Air from the two inboard engines warmed the main cockpit.

Soon it was time for the briefing. There was a buzz of excitement as we trooped into the briefing room. There was a gasp as the route map on the wall was uncovered and the Target shown as the docks at La Spezia in the north of Italy. This would be a very long flight requiring full petrol tanks and flying for maximum range. Two hundred and eight Lancaster's and three Halifax's were to attack. A good point about this operation was that the route was out and back over the South Coast of England and the South of France where the defences were relatively light.

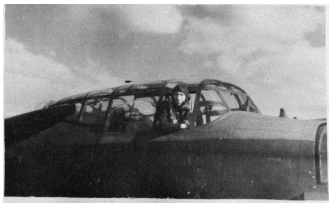
The next thing was to go to the Locker Room to collected flying kit, helmet, parachute and flying boots. I also carried a toolkit. During the flight, I completed a log of engine conditions every twenty minutes. The other crewmembers would also collect their flying kit together with those things necessary to their particular duty; maps and charts, target details, radio frequencies, a sextant for the Navigator a carrier pigeon for the Wireless Operator. Each crewmember would also have received in flight rations of sandwiches, a tin of orange juice and a bar of chocolate.

Now came the worst part of the preparations, waiting outside the locker room for the buses to take each crew to their Aircraft. It was at these times that the stomach would churn needed a call to the latrines as one thought of what lay ahead. This could be a nuisance when all dressed up and ready to go. There would be banter for some, quietness for others at this time and during the drive out to the Aircraft dispersed around the airfield.

At the Aircraft, the Pilot and Engineer reported to the dispersal Flight Office to check the Aircraft loading and talk to the ground staff and the Pilot would sign the Aircraft logbook. Before flight, as the Engineer I would check that a battery trolley was plugged in for starting the engine and there was ground crew standing by to prime the engines with fuel.

With the crew aboard I would secure the entrance door and stow the ladder. Moving forward up the fuselage I would see that the oxygen supply under the rest bed was turned on and the electrics were connected to the external battery trolley

I would then take my place on the right hand side of the cockpit beside the pilot. Here we would start the engines and do the pre-flight checks.



On seeing a green Verey light from the control tower, it was time to taxiing to the runway for take-off. I was checking engine temperatures and oil pressure, as it was easy for engines to overheat at this stage. The Pilot called up each member at his crew position to see if all was ready for take-off.

At the threshold of the runway, we would do our last minute take off checks before the Pilot turned ED620 onto the runway to await the green light to go. . Each Aircraft took off at 30-second intervals after a signal from the Control Tower. Our take off time was 20.50hrs.

On seeing the green light from the runway controller, the Pilot eased the throttles forward leading with the port outer and when the Aircraft was running straight, he called for full power and I pushed the throttle levers fully forward. The Aircraft gathered speed down the runway and this was one of the most anxious times as the loss of an engine when fully loaded with fuel and bombs would be disastrous.

It took the entire 6000ft runway to gain flying speed. The loss of an engine on take-off when fully loaded with bombs and fuel would be disastrous. When safely clear of the runway, the Pilot said undercarriage and I lifted the undercarriage lever, secured it into position, checked to see that the undercarriage was fully up and locked.

When safely airborne I reduced the engine power to complete the initial climb to a safe altitude and closed the flaps in 5 degree stages from their one-third take-off position. The Aircraft then flew over the airfield for the Navigator to set the correct time of departure and to set the first course. I reduced engine speed to the climbing power.

At this time, it was still daylight. The rendezvous point was on the South Coast of England and we could see the other aircraft around us.

We settled down to our individual routines for the long flight with me monitoring and recorded at twenty-minute intervals the engine speeds, their temperatures and pressures of the oil and coolant, whilst keeping a check on fuel flow and other things and keeping a look out for other Aircraft. I was fortunate to have a view from the cockpit of the full 360 degrees around the Aircraft.

Darkness closed in as the coast of France was crossed. All went well as the flight progressed. Occasionally we would get a glimpse of a silhouetted aircraft below.

Eventually the Navigator gave an estimated time of arrival (ETA) at the Target at Spezia. The ETA time came and passed and so did the H-Hour time of attack but there was no sign of a raid anywhere. Raids could normally be seen from many miles away especially from altitude. The Aircraft was over the sea and it was soon realised that it was off course and the correct position not known. With the bombs still on and over half of the petrol gone I said to the Pilot “If we don’t get rid of these bombs we shall not get back to base”. We released the bombs into the sea.

We turned for home and as we did so I distinctively saw high ground which I later thought would have been Corsica or Sardinia. The intended landfall was on the South Coast of France at Montpellier but it was not until 30 minutes after that time that the Bomb Aimer saw the coast. After a series of course changes we eventually crossed the French coast at Boulogne at 4000ft. Some light opposition anti-Aircraft fire came up from the sand dunes but fortunately no damage occurred to the Aircraft. It is a long story of flying alone across hostile France.

Over the channel, there was very little fuel left in the number one tanks, Tanks number two and three were empty. It was necessary to find an airfield soon for landing. . Throughout this time there were anxious moments watching for any engine to cut out for want of fuel. After getting no reply to emergency calls for identification and landing, the misty coast was crossed and by chance, we saw an airfield. Without contact with the control tower, we landed the aircraft. The airfield was Dunsfold. The time was 07.40hrs and the flying time had been 10.50hrs. The aircraft had flown alone across the hostile territory of France expecting opposition at any time. Inspection of the number one tanks with the aircrafts tail down showed only the bottom of the tanks.

After a meal, we flew back to Fiskerton who had posted the Aircraft and crew as missing.

An examination of the navigation chart, and a check of the two compasses, revealed that the main one was under reading by thirty degrees and that the courses flown had always taken the Aircraft to the right of the required track. This meant that on the outward flight the true track had been down into the Mediterranean whereas the return brought the Aircraft back on track to the south coast of France. Afterwards the track had been northwards around Paris before the turn westwards. This very long first operational bombing flight at maximum range had been quite a lesson.

The Battle of the Ruhr started in March 1943. The aircrew, because of the intensity of the defence's searchlights, fighters and anti- Aircraft fire, knew the Ruhr area as Happy Valley.

On the 26th April, we attacked Duisberg with five hundred and sixty other aircraft. The Ruhr area was visible for miles away, a solid ring of searchlights surrounded it. Inside the ring, it was a fireworks display of rising shells, shell bursts, tracer gunfire and marker flares. Seeing the Ruhr it for the first time made me gasp and I said, “How do we get through there” no one answered, each had his own thoughts, the Navigator in his blacked out compartment declined to look.

Soon we passed through the searchlight belt and were amongst the anti-aircraft bursts and tracer fire, the Pilot, the two Gunners and me, keeping a sharp lookout for other Aircraft to avoid collision and for enemy fighters. We saw

Aircraft exploding, some catching fire and going down, others in searchlights. I was standing up at this time being required to move about to operate controls and to be able to read and to make a record of the instruments. The run up to the Target flying straight and level seemed to take a very long time although in reality it was only minutes. When the bombs left the aircraft, I would feel the movement of the cockpit floor. This was a relief. The Aircraft would rise up from the sudden loss of weight and the aircraft remained on course until the photoflash had gone off and the camera had recorded the bomb strike Only then was the Aircraft turned and dived away to get out of the target area. To look down from 20,000ft and see the great area of fire and the bombs bursting was a sight I would never forget. The explosions of the heavy 4000lb bombs affected the Aircraft. This flight took five hours and was without mishap but 17 other Aircraft were lost that night.

On the 28th April, we tried to drop magnetic mines off the coast of Juist in the Fresian Islands together with two hundred and six other aircraft. The weather was bad in the area, dark, rain and low cloud. At 500ft in cloud and bad visibility, the target area could not be located. Because the position of mines in the sea had to be known, they were returned to base. One hundred and sixty seven of the Aircraft laid 593 mines in the area of the islands that night. Twenty-two Aircraft failed to return. This was the greatest loss on any mining during the war. It was the only mining sortie undertaken by us.

The bombing operations continued. What was I doing in these frequent infernos? What had made me volunteer for aircrew duties in the year before not expecting this? It was not my knowledge of the German tyranny; so much of that had been, and still was, unknown or knowing that Germany had unlawfully invaded and conquered the countries of Europe, had bombed England and would have subjugated the British Isle as well if they had not been stopped in 1940. Fate had decreed I would be here because of my love for aeroplanes, and, if I was destined to be a combatant, what better way was there than to do this. The results of bombs dropped on German military Targets gave me no qualms of conscience, even if they fell on houses and killed civilians. All Germans had participated in the Nazi fanaticism of world domination and their excesses, these and the Italian had to be stopped.

It is not practicable to describe each raid as some were much the same as another but some are worthy of note especially the first two raids on Hamburg that started those great firestorms. This was the night when we first used Window.

13th May Aircraft Lancaster ED 452 Target Pilsen in Czechoslovakia

There was the instance where the target was the Skoda factory at Pilsen a place deep in the east of Europe. Out over the North Sea, the starboard inner engine shed its exhaust flame cover and some of the cylinder exhausts. In the dark a

long sheet of flame curled back over the leading edge of the wing, this would have been a fire risk and a beacon to enemy night fighters. The engine was shut down and the airscrew feathered. The Aircraft now lost air speed and was no longer able to keep up with the rest of the force; it would become a sitting duck to the opposing fighters. It was time to return to base to live to fight another day. It was dangerous to land with a 4000lb bomb on the Aircraft so it was dropped into the North Sea.

Arriving back at base still heavily laden with 6 x 500lb bombs and a large quantity of fuel on board the Flying Control gave instructions to land on the short South West/North East runway. This was to avoid any obstruction on the main East/West runway in case of mishap and with the subsequent need to divert the other returning squadron Aircraft to another airfield. The approach to the runway was faster than normal because of the high landing weight and with a gusty side wind blowing the aircraft floated before touchdown. With the heavy load and poor braking the pilot realised he could not stop before the end of the runway and shouted a warning to his crew to brace. ED452 plunged off the end of the runway into a field and the undercarriage collapsed. With fear of immediate fire and explosion, I quickly had the escape hatch in the roof of the cockpit off and dived straight out ignoring the drop from the top of the fuselage to the ground. The rest of the crew quickly followed and all ran as fast as possible across the field to get away. Fortunately, neither fire nor explosion occurred and the crash crews were soon on the scene. Taffy the Rear Gunner suffered a severe shake-up in the crash and was not able to fly again. We went to the sick quarters for a medical check.

At one time, we flew a total of 22.15hrs on 4 nights in 7 days in stressful conditions and were very tired. In May, the darkness of night was quite short. Take offs were always late in the evenings. By the time, aircraft had landed and crews had been collected from dispersal, removed their flying clothing at the locker room and then been de-briefed at the Intelligence Section it would be daylight. Sleep was difficult before returning to the airfield by 11.00hrs to carry out a Night Flying Test (NFT) in readiness for the next flight.

On the 12th July, we flew to Turin in Italy. Two hundred and ninety five Lancaster's took part on this raid in clear weather conditions. The view of the snow-covered Alps was fantastic. To see the twinkling lights of neutral Switzerland and Sweden was quite something. Once again, it had been a long flight at maximum range. LM 306 was short of fuel when nearing the South Coast of England and the aircraft landed at Exeter. We returned to base later in the day.

On the 12th August, we flew to Italy again to attack Milan. This was another long flight. Over the Alps, there were storms and flying in cloud, St.Elmos Fire danced across the windscreen and ice formed on the airframe resulting in a

lower bombing height of 17,700ft because of the extra weight. It was a successful raid with only three Aircraft lost. The Alfa Romeo motor works, the railway station and the La Scala opera house suffered substantial damage.

LM 306 had now completed three operations in four days with a total of 22.30hrs flying. It is not surprising that we had little sleep over those four days. It was a great relief to have leave. After debriefing, a meal and a change of uniform we travelled into Lincoln on the bus to catch a train to our respective homes. Two of us were travelling to London on the first part of our journey and after changing to a very full train at Grantham we both fell asleep exhausted in the corridor all the way to London and other passengers just walked over us.

There was relief, as always, as the enemy coast was crossed but no one could relax because of possible dangers ahead. The North Sea was very wide, wet and cold. Mechanical failures could occur from various causes not least from unsuspected enemy damage. The chances of survival if forced down into the North Sea were minimal. There was always the chance of bad weather over the base and collisions with other circling aircraft waiting to land. The circuits of other adjacent airfields were very close. It was easy to approach the wrong runway. There was also the possibility of enemy intruder aircraft in the airfield circuit.

One night we were returning below cloud at 3,000ft just off Cromer with other aircraft. Navigation lights were on. Suddenly cannon fire hit the aircraft. It was from the British Navy. Also attacked was Aircraft JB 235 of the squadron. The noise was uncanny as red-hot shrapnel passed through the fuselage close beside us. We waited to see if any faults developed but things, so far, appeared normal. The Pilot called for reports and the Navigator said "Ralph's been hit." Ralph was the Wireless Operator and sat in the centre of the aircraft with his back against the hefty main spar; this no doubt had shielded him from injury that is more serious. Squeezing past the Navigator I went to Ralph's aid to see that he had received wounds in his legs and shoulder area but the most serious at the time was a hole through one of his hands. Getting the first aid, I applied bandages and put a tourniquet on the wrist before going back to my duties in the front cockpit leaving the Navigator to watch Ralph later returning at intervals to release the tourniquet to prevent gangrene setting in.

At Dunholme Lodge, the weather was foul with low cloud and driving rain. The aircraft was required to circle for some time before getting position six for landing. Air Traffic Control had been informed that on board was a wounded aircrew member. Eventually the turn came to land but on the downwind leg of the landing circuit it was found that the undercarriage would not come down; it was obvious that the hydraulic fluid from the system had been lost. There was damage in the bomb bay area where the pipes were located. Fortunately, the

emergency air system was working and I was able to lower the undercarriage and flaps. The landing was very heavy.

At dispersal, when the engines were shut down, the levers that operated the fuel cocks failed to work and hung loosely down. The control cables in the bomb bay had been severed. Fortunately, no petrol lines to the engines had been damage. There were shattered bomb doors, broken pipes and cables, holes in the tail plane and flying control rods shot through, luckily they held to keep control of the rudders and elevator. This new aircraft was taken out of service after one bombing trip. The original crew was now down to five having lost Ralph and Taffy and spare aircrew were to fill the rear gun turret and the wireless position on subsequent operations. Jock, the Pilot, had been a Warrant Officer since the 6th of June and was now commissioned to the rank of Pilot Officer. Jimmy the Navigator, Hugh the Bomb Aimer and I were Flight Sergeants.

2nd October. Lancaster ED 426. Take off 18.36. Target Munich. 03.15

Two hundred and ninety-three Lancaster has attacked the target. Eight were lost. ED 426 bombed at 22.41 from 19,000ft.

On the 20th October after a raid on Leipzig Jock, the Pilot completed his tour of 30 operations and afterwards we sadly broke up leaving the others to complete their tours flying as spares with different crews. I still had four more to do. No longer would we men experience the close friendship and respect that had built up over the last ten months flying, living and working together and going out on the town. The memory of the bond that bound us, especially in periods of great danger, would never fade. Such a depth of comradeship would not be experienced again.

Jock left the service in 1948

Hugh the Bomb Aimer became a Flying Officer. On No. 97 Squadron, he killed on 11 November 1944 whilst on a second tour. His name is on the RAF Memorial at Runnymede

Ralph the Wireless Operator settled in Bournemouth and suffered in his later years from the wounds received.

A commission was granted to Jimmy the Navigator. He left the Service in 1946. Sergeant G Green was demobilised in 1945. Since those days, there has been no contact with them but I was proud to have served with them.

I stayed on the Squadron as the Flight Engineer Leader as I had four more ops to do. These were;

With Plt Off Roantree in JB 466 on the 27th January 1944 to Berlin.

With Plt Off Dickinson in JB 399 to Leipzig on the 19th February 1944

With Wg. Cdr, Adams the CO in JB 466 to Stuttgart on the 1St March 1944

On the 15th March, I flew my last operation to Stuttgart with Pilot Officer Lett whose Engineer had suffered injury to his hands on their previous flight. The Engineer Alan Morgan had gone back down the fuselage to assist the Wireless Operator who had passed out through lack of oxygen from a faulty portable oxygen bottle. Alan himself also passed out for the same reason. Whilst removing his gloves to assist the Wireless Operator his hands touched the severely cold metal of the fuselage and they became frostbitten. Meeting Alan 49 years later he showed me his damaged hands.

906 Aircrew of No. 49 Squadron failed to return. This was a loss rate of 33% of the Aircrew who flew with the Squadron

Fifty years later, on the 24th April 1994 a Roll of Honour showing their Number, Rank and Name, date of death and place of burial in a foreign field was dedicated in the Fiskerton village Church of St. Clement of Rome.

In May 1995, a memorial was placed in the centre of the old airfield at Fiskerton to all those who were lost and those who served on the Station during the two and a half years from January 1943 to mid-1945.

I flew 211.50hrs by night on 30 sorties over enemy territory plus 2 almost to the enemy coast. Seventeen of the sorties had been in one Lancaster Aircraft No. LM 306 with the Squadron letters EA-F (F for Freddie). The Targets were The Ruhr = 11, Berlin = four, Italy = three, Hamburg = 2, 11 other German Targets and one Mining operation. I remember the stress, the tiredness, fear, and the pride in belonging to Bomber Command

My next posting was in April 1944 to RAF Winthorpe near Newark where I had done my flying training, there to be a Staff Flight Engineer Flying Instructor. This was not much fun, as we had to fly old Stirling aircraft to teach new crews. This was to save new Lancaster's for the operational squadrons.

Soon after my arrival there, I saw a Stirling approaching the airfield at about 1500 feet. The port outer engine caught fire and within minutes, it dived into the airfield and exploded. The new crew of seven, a Staff Pilot and a Staff Engineer died.

On one flight, I had an engine doing 3800 revolutions when the maximum was 2800. There was every risk of the airscrew shearing off and hitting the cockpit. Fortunately, we got it under control.

After a few weeks and 32 hours of flying, 13 of them at night, I was sent out to all the Stations in Number Five Group Bomber Command to lecture on the new Airborne Lifeboat that was being introduced to the Air Sea Rescue Squadrons. When this was finished, I returned to my base at RAF Scampton and on the 19th July 1944 I was commissioned as a Pilot Officer

Shortly afterwards I was posted to RAF St. Athan in South Wales to train Flight Engineers. The introduction to the Officers Mess and its customs was a great experience; other Officers were most charming and helpful. It was an agreeable task teaching new aircrew the duties of a Flight Engineer. Occasionally the Maintenance Unit on the other side of the airfield called for a Flight Engineer to assist the Test Pilots to fly Lancaster's to and from the factory at Baginton. This became a pleasant task. Just the two of us, the pilot and engineer, flew the Lancaster's on these flights. I can well remember these flights flying low over the Malvern Hills. During my posting at St Athan, I did the Flight Engineer Leaders Course from 20th June to 25th July 1945 despite the fact that I had been a Flight Engineer Leader on an Operation Bomber Squadron in 1943.

I spent happy years at St. Athan. In 1945 the war in Europe ended but there was the Japanese war to finish. Fortunately, the Atom Bomb finished that war and that saved many lives. Fifty-five Thousand Bomber Aircrew had been lost.

On Monday the 16th February 1947, I reported for duty to Headquarters No 3 Group, Bomber Command at Royal Air Force Mildenhall.

On the Tuesday, I was posted to No.44 (Rhodesia) Squadron at Royal Air Force Wyton in Huntingdonshire. On Wednesday, I was once again in the air flying as the Flight Engineer to Flight Lieutenant Jack Wheeler in Lincoln No. RF 458. By the end of February, there were over 6 hours of flying in both Lancaster and Lincoln's.

Now back where I belonged there began the happiest two years of my RAF service. The high standards of peacetime service were now observed. The Squadron routines and with a comfortable room and pleasant facilities in the Officers Mess life was very enjoyable. The comradeship of colleagues was again being enjoyed.

During wartime aircrew just flew aircraft but now in peacetime Aircrew and Officers had other duties to perform. I found myself as Squadron Adjutant as well as the Flight Engineer to the Squadron Commander. At one time I was required to attend an Intelligence and Photographic Interpretation Course and was then required to do raid reporting during exercises as well.

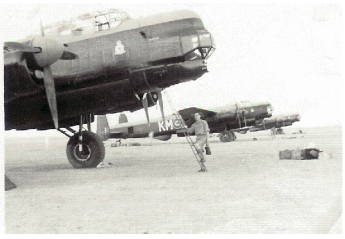
The months of 1947 passed with plenty of flying, it was different and relaxed after the hectic and dangerous wartime operations. On the 12th November, there was a pleasant flight out to Egypt to deliver spare parts to some of the squadron's aircraft. They were on detachment to RAF Shallufa in the Canal Zone. The Pilot was Flt. Lt. Cumber and the aircraft Lancaster No.TW 909, this being my first flight with a landing outside England in a foreign country.

The first part of the flight was to RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire for custom clearance. At 23.05hrs, we took off to fly by night to RAF Castel Benito in Tripolitania on the North Coast of Africa. Prior to World War II Castel Benito had been an Italian airfield and during the war the German Luftwaffe had used it. Later the airfield was renamed Castel Idris and in years after it became the International Airport for Tripoli.

The next day it was a 5hr flight along the North African coast to Shallufa in Egypt passing over the great battle areas of Sollum, El Alamein and Knightsbridge. On this flight, I flew the aircraft for two hours. RAF Shallufa was beside the Suez Canal and it was quite a sight to see large ships appearing to be travelling across the sand and to experience an RAF airfield in a hot desert.

After three days, we took off for the return flight to the UK via Castel Benito making a detour to fly over the Pyramids and the Sphinx. On the 20th November, we arrived back at Wyton after a total flying time of 25.40hrs.

On the 1st March 1948, the Squadron flew out to RAF Shallufa in Egypt for a month's stay on exercises. I flew as the Flight Engineer to Flt. Lt. Bristow in Lincoln No. RF 426.



On the 24th March with Flt. Lt. West in Lincoln RF 514, we flew to Khartoum in the Sudan for an overnight stay returning to Shallufa the next day. This round trip took 11.20hrs. On the 31st March, the whole Squadron return to Wyton via an overnight stop at Castel Benito.

In May 1948, the whole Squadron was engaged in preparations for Operation "Chessboard". This was to be a goodwill visit to Southern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) at the invitation of the Government. It was in recognition by the Royal Air Force to the people of Southern Rhodesia for the Rhodesians, who

had served, and those who had been lost, with the Royal Air Force during the war.

On the 9th June 1948 before the squadron of six Aircraft took off on the first leg of the flight to Southern Rhodesia with an 8hr45min flight to Castel Benito in North Africa. I was flying as Engineer to Flying Officer Barnes in the lead Aircraft KM-L No, RF417.

On the following day, the Squadron flew on to RAF Shallufa in the Canal Zone of Egypt for a three-day rest and for servicing of the aircraft. This flight took 6 and half hours.

The journey continued from Shallufa on the 14th flying along the Nile Valley to Khartoum in the Sudan for an overnight stop.

From Khartoum it was on to Nairobi in Kenya the next day for another overnight stop.

On the 16th it was on to the Belvedere airport at Salisbury, Southern Rhodesia. The outward flight took 38hrs 25mins. This was to be the base for the Squadrons stay in the Country. The aircraft arrived over Belvedere in formation and after landing the personnel paraded for a reception by the Prime Minister Sir Godfrey Huggins.

In the evening the Officers and Airmen attended a Government

There was now a two day rest for the Squadron. On the 18th Barney and I with the rest of our crew took off to take mosaic photographs of the area of Salisbury for the local authority. We think it was for a proposed building of a Dam on Lake Kariba. It was a flight of over five hours.

On the 19th and 20th the Squadron did formation flying over Rhodesia to be seen. On the second of the flights we had on board a passenger Mr Catsicas the Mayor of Umtali a Town in the NE of the country.

The Squadron now had a two stand down. The Squadron personnel were split up into groups of six to be the guests of prominent Rhodesians. Barney and I with two of our aircrew and of the two of our ground staff were to be the guests of the Mayor of Umtali. This involved a long overnight sleeper journey in a rather antiquated colonial train to Umtali there and back. This was an experience. Barney and I were the guests of the Mayor and we were rather surprised with the low standard of the accommodation. However this did not detract from the entertainment of Sun downer Parties of good food and drink in comparison to conditions at home. There were visits to the Vumba Mountains and an upmarket Hotel the Leopards Rock. We were also taken to Gold Mine and an orange orchard. What lovely orange juice it was.

On the 26th June the squadron flew from Belvedere to Kamala Airport Bulawayo flying over the Victoria Falls on the way. Here was another Sun

downer Party and an overnight stay as guests of the locals. Barney and I stayed with a lady Doctor

We returned to Salisbury on the 28th. On the 29th we took off to return home via the way we had flown out. We arrived back at RAF Wyton on the 5th July having flown for over 80 hours on a good will trip. What an experience. On the way home we flew low over the African Veldt. On return to Wyton the Squadron, members went on leave. There was a break in flying until August.

I then flew regularly as the Flight Engineer to the Squadron C.O and served as his Adjutant until the end of the year. On the 29th October 1948 came an appointment to a Permanent Commission in the Secretarial Branch. I was now a Flying Officer. The need for Flight Engineers was ending with the introduction of the new jet Aircraft and so, after nearly one thousand hours of flying my General Duties flying career was ending. It was two very happy years on 44 Sqn.

In January 1949 I was posted to Headquarters No. 3 Group Bomber Command for Intelligence duties but after three months I was moved on to Headquarters Bomber Command at High Wycombe for further Intelligence duties. The post was for a junior in the Intelligence Section of four Officers. A few years before my wartime flying destiny had been under the command of Air Chief Marshall Sir Arthur Harris (Bomber Harris). My feelings when working in the underground Operations Room from where my wartime flying operations had been ordered and controlled cannot be described. My new Commander in Chief was Air Chief Marshall Sir Hugh P Lloyd. One day in the Officers Mess there was the pleasure of meeting and talking to Marshall of the Royal Air Force Sir Hugh Trenchard the Father of the RAF.

The posting to High Wycombe was made even more enjoyable by being able to participate at weekends in the ATC gliding at Booker Airfield. In December 1949, the Air Officer in charge of Administration detailed me to represent Bomber Command at a meeting in the Air Ministry. The subject was the formation of the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association. Members left the meeting charged with organising and encouraging gliding in their respective Commands. Throughout my service Gliding and Soaring became a great passion which I have recorded separately.

The duties, mess life and atmosphere at Headquarters Bomber Command continued to be very pleasant.

The duties at Headquarters Bomber Command ended for in early 1851 for as a Secretarial Officer I was required to do accounting duties so it was necessary

to attend an Accounting Course. After the course, I was a posting to No.9 School of Recruit Training at RAF Bridgnorth in Shropshire to be an Accountant Officer. This involved collecting cash from the local Bank, the payment of bills, the accounting for the cash transactions and the conducting of pay parades for the Airman.

In July 1952 came promotion to the rank of Flight Lieutenant. My next unit was at RAF Padgate near Warrington in Lancashire. It was another recruit training school. This urban area was a contrast to the lovely Shropshire countryside of Bridgnorth...

Accounting duties continued at RAF Padgate and time passed until April 1953 when I was posted out to Air headquarters Iraq for duties as the Accountant Officer on a RAF Staging post located on the Pakistan Air Force base at Mauripur near to Karachi,

On the 9th April 1954 came a flight by Hastings Aircraft of RAF Transport Command from RAF Lyneham in Wiltshire to RAF Station Habbanyia. The unit was situated between the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris near Baghdad in Iraq and was the Headquarters for all of the RAF stations in the Near East There was an overnight stop at RAF Castel Benito now named, Castel Idris. It brought back happy memories of flying with No.44 (Rhodesia) Squadron.

The Air Headquarters Habbanyia and Transit Mess near Bagdad on the 10th April 1953

I waited three days at Habbanyia for onward transport. I remember seeing the clear star lit nights and hearing the loud croaking of frogs on the two rivers Tigris and Euphrates. I thought of all those RAF personnel who had ser4ved here in earlier days

RAF Mauripur was a staging post for aircraft flying the long route to the Far East. At this time in 1954, air transport was relatively slow and was before the introduction of jet powered transport aircraft into the RAF. The unit was on a Pakistan Air Force Station near to the Capital of Karachi. All services received from the Pakistanis had to be accounted for and this was to be a large part of my work. In addition, I had to pay and account for the twelve Officers and three hundred Airmen of the unit and those RAF personnel seconded to the

Pakistan Air Force. There were also the Services staffs at the High Commission in Karachi to look after which included the Air Attaché, Group Captain Sands who had been my Senior Intelligence Officer at Headquarters Bomber Command in 1949.

Mauripur was on a flat, barren, desert plain with the hills of Baluchistan away in the distance to the Northwest. The Station, together with Drigh Road at the other side of Karachi, had been RAF during the days of the Indian Raj before the independence and partition of that great country in 1947 with its great loss of life and the making of two States. The effects of that period were still very evident in the refugee camps around Karachi where the people lived in appalling filth and squalor.

The small RAF unit was the only British one left on the whole of the Sub-Continent of India; this became very evident when I had to account for all of the petrol use by the British from 1947 to 1954. After protracted negotiations with the Pakistan Air Force Ministry, which fortunately was based at Mauripur, the time came for the bill of around ten million Rupees to be paid; this was the equivalent of about one million pounds sterling. In 1954, at today's values, this would be about £15-20 million. This would be the largest cheque that I would ever sign but finally the Pakistanis wanted the credit in £'s in London for International trade so the bill was passed on to the Air Ministry.

The special nature of the unit required me to deal direct with the Air Ministry and not through Air Headquarters Levant at Habbanyia, North of Baghdad. I received great credit for my work at Mauripur.

Mauripur was a two-year posting and difficult to bear especially when bouts of dysentery confined one to the Sick Quarters. The climate was always hot and humid and the khaki uniform of shorts required daily 'dhobi' (washing) by the Bearer (Batman) - these were the servants employed to do the domestic chores. Because of the hot, humid climate, duty was from 7am to 1pm for those personnel who were not required to meet and service incoming and outgoing Aircraft.

Afternoon siestas were needed There was always a daily coach to Hawks Bay on the Arabian seashore about three miles away for swimming and this was a favourite facility.

There was one highlight. At the Pakistan Air Force Station of Drigh Road was a Gliding School for training cadets and a Squadron Leader Jan Mikulski commanded this. Jan had been in the RAF during the war flying fighter aircraft. He came from a high-class

Polish family. He and his wife Mary had been pre-war gliding champions. Jan escaped to England but his wife Tula (Mary) and their daughter became prisoners of the Russians. The daughter died in a Russian camp.

After the war, Jan who was stateless enlisted into the PAF for the gliding post and Mary was able to join him. They became great friends and were charming hosts.

This friendship led to me being able to fly the PAF gliders. A total of 35 hours were flown over and around Drigh Road and Karachi in circumstances quite different from those in England. It was not wise to fly away from this area for any landing would be in remote and inaccessible countryside.

Thermals over Drigh Road were usually twirling 'Dust Devils' they were very rough and restricted in height by the cooler sea breezes drifting in above the hot air over the land. When soaring, Kite Hawks, Buzzards and Vultures would take advantage of the thermal uplift and surround the sailplane. Sailplane. If, when flying and searching for lift the sailplane pilot saw circling birds he flew in to join them. At over 7000ft, I circled with the birds of prey. This was a fascinating experience. It was certainly fascinating to fly with them and watch their flight feathers and manoeuvres although to see an ugly vulture peering into the cockpit from just above could be unnerving.

There was another pleasure at Mauripur. The Administration Officer was a Service pilot who was required at the time to keep in flying practice and so to do this a PAF Harvard two-seater-training aircraft was used. I went with him and had great fun flying a powered Aircraft. All went well until the PAF started to send in bills for its use. The Headquarters Levant stopped the flying. Looking back on the two-year stay at Mauripur it was a great adventure.

In August 1954, during the tour at Mauripur, there was a detachment back into Iraq to take over the Accounting at RAF Shaibar in the desert. Shaibar was near to the town of Basra on the Shatt el Arab the river mouth of the Tigris and Euphrates, which led into the Gulf of Aden. The detachment was for six weeks to relieve the Accountant there who was going home to England to get married. Shaibah had a bad reputation in the RAF as one of the worst overseas posting.

Many are the songs 'Shaibah Blues' sung in the home messes, especially by old sweats who had served there in the inter-war years. I contracted some uncomfortable infections whilst there. I think it was from the swimming pool. This required me to do my

work in the more comfortable air-conditioned Officers Mess. It was a relief to return to Mauripur.

April 1956 came and it was the time to hand over to my relief although the staging post was to close in the following December. Longer-range Aircraft were now coming into service that could now over fly the area. It took a week to fly home to England because of having to wait for available seats on the various aircraft flying between the homeward staging posts. Two days were spent at Habbanyia and two days at Nicosia in Cyprus.

I was now required to study at RAF Bircham Newton in Norfolk on a Course of Administration after which I was posted to RAF Jurby on the Isle of Man to train Officer Cadets.

Jurby held many memories; the stay there ended with promotion to the Senior Rank of Squadron Leader on 1st April 1958.

The next posting was to RAF Wellesbourne Mountford near Stratford upon Avon, which was the base for the RAF Airfield Construction Branch. The detailed was to command Squadron of Administrative personnel to accompany an Airfield Construction Squadron on a Task Force to construct a Rocket Tracking Station on the Island of St.Kilda. The island was in the Atlantic, forty miles west of the Outer Hebrides.

I received a quite unusual briefing from the Airfield Construction Group Commander. A Wing Commander of the Airfield Construction Branch was to be in charge of the Task Force and the building project; he was an Irishman of the building fraternity of uncertain temperament with little regard for RAF rules and Officer Conduct. This would require great tact in dealing with him to keep to the normal rules of discipline, administration and accounting. The Commander in Chief said that the Wing Commander was the only Officer he had to do the building job and wished me the best of luck. This information was confidential,

The passage to St. Kilda involved a long train journey to Cairn Ryan on the shores of Loch Ryan near to Stranraer in Scotland. Cairn Ryan was the mainland depot for the stores and personnel to be shipped to the Island by Tank Landing Craft of the Army; it was also the base for radio contact for administrative and emergency purposes.

The twenty-four hour sea crossing took place during a most unpleasant and ill making storm. Landing Craft were the only ships that could transport the heavy vehicles, stores and building materials and are able to beach and unload on the only small sandy cove. The rest of the Islands shoreline rose shear out of the water to heights of up to five hundred feet above sea level.

The Island was about two miles long and half a mile wide and very rugged. A hardy Scottish people had inhabited it up to 1930 until they became so impoverished they had to be evacuated to the mainland. The Island was now a sanctuary for many types of seabird and a few Soya sheep and was overseen by the Scottish National Trust. The few stone houses that had formed a line near the seashore were now roofless and in collapsed piles although the more substantial Factor‘s house and the Manse had been rehabilitated to house the Officers and provided a recreation area for the Airmen. The Airmen lived under canvas and the messing was in a Nissen hut erected for the purpose.

At one stage, the Wing Commander of the Airfield Construction Branch was required to return to Wellesbourne Mountford and I remained in sole command. During this time a party from the Scottish National Trust led by Lord Wemyss, came to visit the Island to see the flora and fauna. The ship anchored in the bay and the party was ferried ashore by a specially reinforced boat that could land on the very small and rocky slipway. The RAF personnel entertained the visitors within their very limited facilities and escorted them around the Island. Afterwards the officers went aboard ship and dined with the Captain and the leaders of the party. The ship then sailed round the Island for the visitors to see the many seabirds that inhabited the cliff faces and the Gannet colonies on the offshore Stacks. This was a welcome break for the four Officers.

The construction of the Tracking Station continued throughout the summer months. The office was a mobile caravan and from there I was able to keep in radio contact with Cairn Ryan on the mainland. Finally, the summer ended and it was time to withdraw before bad weather prevented the Landing Craft from getting to the Island. Everyone was glad to be going back to Wellesbourne for leave and to see his or her families. A small unenviable maintenance party came out to look after the installation during the winter months. At Wellesbourne I completed the work necessary to close down the operation and then had some leave.

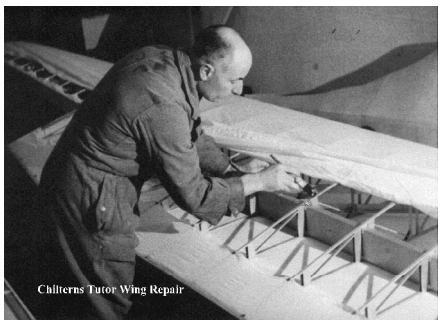
I had been out of England for five years and now it was to Royal Air Force Uxbridge to be the Senior Accountant Officer. Entering the gates and passing

the parade ground my thoughts were of those far off days in 1940 when first reporting for duty on joining the Service. I had come a long way since then and had advanced to a remarkable degree never thought possible when lying down to sleep on that first night in the barracks beside the square. Now I was to be the Senior Officer responsible for all the financial affairs of the Station.

I was now able to resume my gliding activities with the Chilterns Gliding Club at RAF Booker which was not very far away.


Chilterns RAF Booker Morning Line Up 5 Apr 59

In the evenings, using an available building on the Station, I was able to carry out repairs to the Club gliders, work that gave me great pleasure since my early days in the RAF as a Mechanic, Fitter and Engineer. Life was quite full and rewarding at Uxbridge.


Chilterns Tutor Wing Repair

A Royal duty occurred at one stage acting as an usher in the Central Nave of St. Pauls Cathedral when Her Majesty attended the dedication of a Memorial to the Americans whom served and died in World War II.

One of the Units at RAF Uxbridge was the RAF Regiment whose duties, amongst others, were ceremonial and it was the Custodian of the Queens Colour for the Royal Air Force. The Borough Council of Uxbridge granted the Freedom of the town to the Royal Air Force Station, which entitled the unit to march through the town with drawn swords, bayonets fixed and colours flying. The station personnel had been practising for the ceremony for some time and the parade was to be under the Command of the RAF Regiment C.O.

A week before the ceremony the Officer became ill and was in hospital. The Station Commander detailed me to command the parade.

This was a great Honour to troop the Queens Colour on that hallowed parade ground. Throughout the ceremony, my thoughts were back in 1940 when walking out of the station in uniform for the first time as an Aircraftman 2nd Class to go to the cinema.

After the Parade attended by Members of the Air Council the Contingent then marched the through the streets of Uxbridge with bands playing, colours flying, swords draw and bayonets fixed. At this time I was remembering the day eighteen years ago when marching the same route as a new recruit with a heavy kit bag on the way to the railway station to go to Morecambe for Airframe Mechanic training.

After the parade, there was a reception in the Officers Mess for the Civic Party, Members of the Air Council and other honoured guests. The sick Commander of the RAF Regiment was the President of the Officers Mess Committee and being Vice President it fell to me to take the Chair at the Formal Dinner.

The three years served at RAF Uxbridge were very rewarding

My next duty was at the Ministry of Defence in London was with the Personnel Department, in the section that dealt with the forecasting of the number of recruits that would be required in the various trades in the coming years based on the expected wastage and the Defence Budget. As the defence requirements changed from year to year, the task was not an exact science and the tool of the trade needed to be a crystal ball. It was interesting work and it gave an insight into how a Government Department worked. It also involved on occasions to be the Duty MOD Personnel Staff Officer overnight and at weekends and being one of the Bowler Hat and Umbrella Brigade commuting up to London from Oxhey each working day from where I had bought a house.

Duty at the Ministry of Defence was an experience and whilst there I was also the Treasurer of the Royal Air Force Gliding and Soaring Association. Finally ended in June 1964 and I moved to RAF Wildenrath, Germany. This was another adventure and a challenge driving off to Dover to catch the boat to Ostende and then across unfamiliar Holland and Belgium and into Germany. Driving on the right and then through the centre of Brussels and going the wrong way down a one-way street in another town was quite hair raising.

RAF Wildenrath was just inside North West Germany over the border from the Dutch Town of Roermond, a town handy for shopping. At Wildenrath I was the Officer Commanding the Personnel Services Squadron, responsible for about three thousand personnel including many German civilian employees, all the financial services of pay and allowances including the auditing of the non-public funds of the messes and all disciplinary matters including Court Martial, accidents and deaths. It was a full-time job, back in uniform and living in the Officers Mess. There was one pleasing aspect of the posting and that was it was a flying station, so much previous service had been on backup and training units.

Wildenrath was on the western edge of the Ruhr area and had been heavily defended during the intense bombing by the RAF during 1943. The memories of that time twenty years before were still fresh in my mind especially when visiting some of the towns that I had helped to bomb. There was one visit with other Officers whilst attending a course in Hamburg that a call was made on the Burgomaster (Mayor) of Hamburg at the Rasthaus (Town Hall) and the Burgomaster was talking about, and showing, large photographs of the destruction of the city caused by the wartime bombing and the subsequent rebuilding. I hovered in the background; conscience of the nights in 1943 when taking part in those devastating raids and looking down on the inferno from the storms above.

Whilst in Germany I was the Chairman of the Phoenix Gliding Club at the neighbouring RAF Station Bruggen and was able to continue gliding.

Finally in the early spring of 1967 the tour of duty in Germany was over and I moved to RAF Swinderby in Lincolnshire to fill the same post as at Wildenrath i.e. O.C Personnel Services Squadron. It was No. 9 School of Recruit Training. This unit had been at Bridgnorth when I was there in 1951/2.

At RAF Swinderby, I had done some flying training and instructing during the war in 1943

Now age 45, my RAF service was ending. It was obvious that there would be no more promotion from Squadron Leader to Wing Commander as I had been told that I would not be able to stay on until age 55 so I decided to take retirement, thinking of the future, On the 6th May 1968, with much regret I left the Royal Air Force. I was very sad to leave what had been my chosen career, It had filled my boyhood dreams. I obtained a position in the National Provincial Bank in Lincoln.