

George Frank Bones. 221224

Leading Air Craftsman. Armourer.

No. 7 Squadron R.N.A.S., 207 Squadron R.A.F. and 214 Squadron R.A.F.



This is an account of George Bone's time with the squadron in World War 1. It was written with the help and support of his grandson, David Bones, who posted George's wartime photo album and his service record from the National Archive on the 214 Squadron Association website. David also generously shared other family photos and information about his grandfather. This account is based around the images found in the album.

Service Record from National Archive in Chronological Order

- 3rd September 1898. George Frank Bones was born in Croydon
- 27th September 1916. Joined the Royal Naval Air Service as an Air Craftsman Second Class. 221224
- 27th September 1916. Started Basic Training at *HMS President*, RNAS Crystal Palace in South London
- 9th November 1916 Posted to No.7 Naval Squadron 5 Wing on based at Coudekerque near Dunkerque.
- 31st December 1916. Commanding Officer's Annual Assessment. Character- *Very Good*, Ability- *Satisfactory*.
- 25th June 1917 to 31st August 1918. At Coudekerque. Second date not clear.
- 3rd August 1917 He was promoted to A.C.M.1, Air Craftsman First Class.
- 31st December 1917. Commanding Officer's Annual Assessment. Character- *Very Good*, Ability- *Satisfactory*.
- 1st February 1918 to 31st March 1918 posted to *H.M.S. Daedalus* at Dunkirk.

- 1st April 1918. 'Unit to which'.... Squadron 7.
- 22nd April 1918. 207 Squadron returns to UK.
- 4th-6th June 1918. George Bones at Coudekerque. Images of bomb damage from German air raids.
- 31st December 1918. Commanding Officer's Annual Assessment. Character- Very Good, Ability- Satisfactory.
- 25th April 1919. George Bones promoted to Leading Air Craftsman.
- July/August 1919. Sailing to Egypt with 214 Squadron groundcrew.
- 20th September 1919. Transferred from Squad. 7 to H.Q. RAF Middle East
- 26th November 1919. Transferred from 214 Squadron to Home Establishment 'for disp'. Dispersal?
- 24th December 1919. RAF Medical and discharged in good health as a 'Category A'
- 24th December 1919. Transferred to the RAF General Reserve

George Bones was born in Croydon on 3rd September 1898. On 27th September 1916 he joined the Royal Naval Air Service as an Air Craftsman Second Class. George signed up for the duration of the hostilities. When he joined up, he was employed as a Grocer's Porter. His next of kin was his father, also called George Frank Bones. They lived at 11 Francis Road, Wallington in Surrey. The eighteen year old George was 5 feet 4 inches tall with a 36 ½ inch chest. He had dark brown hair, grey eyes and he was described as having a dark complexion.



George Bones did his basic training at H.M.S. President at Crystal Palace, starting immediately after joining up on the 27th September 1916. After his basic training at Crystal Palace it seems that George was sent to France. His service record has him transferring to No.7 Naval Squadron on 9th November 1916. At this time the squadron was part of 5 Wing Royal Naval Air Service and was probably based at Coudekerque near Dunkerque. At this time, No. 7 Naval flew a number of different aircraft types.

On the 31st December 1916 George Bone's Squadron Commander completes George's first annual appraisal. He decides that George has a *Very Good* Character and that his Ability is *Satisfactory*.

In April 1917 new Handley Page heavy bombers started arriving at 5th Wing RNAS based at Coudekerque. On 2nd April 1917, the first aircraft arrived. This was H.P. 3116. Three days later, the next batch of four aircraft arrived on the 5th April 1917. These were H.P. O/100s; 1465, 1466, 3115 and 3118. A Handley Page Flight was formed at No. 7 Naval Squadron and started flying joint missions with the squadron's Short Bombers.

On 15th April 1917 there was a night bombing raid on Bruges. One of the aircraft, flown by Lieutenant Sieveking, had to make a forced landing on the beach at La Panne. There are two images of Sieveking's Short Bomber on the beach in George Bones photo album.

Two weeks later a novice pilot, Flight Sub Lieutenant Sands, managed to land his aircraft, Short Bombers, 9491 on top of the Commanding Officer's Office. *'Test flight to show Sands how machine feels, He afterwards took her up and completely wrecked her on landing. Hit top of C.O.'s Office and carried away roof and finished up on Wardroom Mess! Pilot slightly hurt'*. George Bones put two images of the crash in his album.

George's Service Record in the National Archive has an entry dated 25th June 1917 to the effect that he was *'At Coudekerque'* from that date, to a second date that is not clear, but might be 31st August 1918.

On 27th June 1917 Dunkerque and Coudekerque Aerodrome came under fire from a new German long-range gun, called Long Max. This gun is the Lugenboom Gun a few miles out of Ostende, 27 miles away. At 8:28 am one of the shells landed on the Coudekerque aerodrome to be quickly followed by a second fifteen minutes later. A third massive shell lands on the aerodrome at 10:37 am. The last shell was then fired by the Germans at 11:00. In the six hours that the massive gun has been firing 47 shells have fallen in and around the town of Dunkerque.

The shelling continued at regular intervals, approximately every seven minutes. The men on the aerodrome sheltered on the steep sides of the deep canal cuttings that runs along the edge of the airfield. Eventually the French authorities had a spotter who pressed a button when he saw the flash of the gun firing. This then sets off the warning siren, *'Mournful Mary'*. The shell is in flight for a whole minute, rising to 33,000 feet before crashing down again. The Commanding Officer organised a similar system on the airfield, with an officer with a stop watch and whistle.

George Bones' photo album has a group image of 7 men standing in one of the craters created by Long Max. It also has images of the steep, deep canal cuttings where the men of No 7 and 7A Naval Squadrons sheltered during bombardments and air raids.

On 3rd August 1917 George was promoted to A.C.M.1, Air Craftsman First Class.

11th December 1917. Target Bruges. Flight Commander Darley crashed at 80 mph. *'The Wing Commander's head was under the other engine'*. George Bones' photo album contains four different images of a crashed Handley Page O/100, upside down and almost completely turned over. The aircraft has the identification code A-3. The aircraft, H.P. 3121 was being flown by Flight Commander Darley, who was a very experienced pilot. The crash happened in very thick fog about a mile short of the aerodrome at Coudekerque.

Major Brackley's *'Rough history of 214 Squadron'* that was *'written in the field'* on the 19th January 1919 described what happened next. *'December 11th 1917. Target Bruges Docks. After making a successful attack on Bruges Docks in very unfavourable weather, Pilot was returning through rain storms and on nearing the Aerodrome could not see the ground. Machine struck ground at speed of 80 miles per hour, knocked over three small trees and turned completely over, pinning the pilot and observer under the wreckage. Help could not arrive for half an hour owing to the uncertainty of the wrecked machine's position. Several men swam across Canal but on arrival could do nothing, The Pilot and Observer could only be extricated when a large number of Officers and men arrived to lift the machine. Pilot's head was held to the ground by the weight of one of the engines. By careful handling the two were successfully got out after being saturated in Petrol for nearly an hour. Apart from a shaking up and slight injuries.'*

At 16:00 on 15th December 1917, Flight Lieutenant V. E. Seiking DSC landed in BE2c 9970 at Coudekerque, after a 45 minute flight from Dover. B.E.2c 9970 was used as a squadron hack or runaround. Major Brackley, Commanding Officer of 214 Squadron flew it regularly until the German Air Force turn it into a pile of matchsticks at the start of June 1918. George had a photo of this aircraft in his album.

25th December. Christmas Day 1917. Very important business to attend to. *'Afterwards a football match was played between 7 and 14 Squadron. Goals being 1:1. Supporters kicked up an awful noise, being already a few sheets to the wind. After this a church service was held.'* George Bones was probably cheering on the boys from 7 Naval that morning.

It began to snow quite heavily on Christmas Morning. George Bones photo album contains a number of images of winter scenes around Coudekerque Aerodrome. In some of these the snow appears quite deep. On 7th January 1918, Ollie Wilkins of 14 Naval would write in his diary, *'Snow has been over the ground since December 25th and it has been unfit for raiding'*

26th December. Boxing Day. Ollie Wilkins diary entry for Boxing Day described another important clash between the two squadrons. *'In the evening No.7 Squadron was over and challenged 14 to a snowball battle.... so the lads saw No. 7 off though for nearly an hour..... When they had had enough they united and went to No. 7. A good battle was fought again and then the troops came back to bed'*. I think that George Bones was fully involved in the snowball fight. In the album there is a photo of a group of men in deep snow with at least two of them with snowballs in their hands .

On 31st December 1917, Squadron Commander Babbington of 7 Naval Squadron decided that Armourer First Class George Bones's Character was *Very Good* and his Ability was *Satisfactory*. Exactly the same as last year.

26th January 1918. George has three images of a downed Gotha which were probably taken around this time. Ollie Wilkin's diary. *'Liberty tell tale of Gotha being in Jean Bart Square (in Dunkirk) for inspection. Brought down last night and 2 others downed by Allied Aircraft.*

27th January 1918. Once again George was probably cheering the 7 Naval team along. *'No. 14 playing off the Xmas draw with No. 7. 14 scored 1st goal in 10 mins. 7's L.B. kept fouling so ordered off field. 7 packed up but after Captain was chewed off up by C.O. they played on and finished up at 4:0 for 14.'*

1st February 1918 to 31st March 1918 posted to H.M.S. Daedalus at Dunkirk. George Bones was to spend his last two months as a member of the Royal Naval Air Service at HMS Daedalus in Dunkirk. Daedalus was the RNAS shore establishment at Dunkirk. This suggests that he was posted away from 7 Naval Squadron for a period of 2 months.

1st April 1918. 'Unit to which'.... Squadron 7. The Service Record for George becomes a bit confusing at this point. There is a short entry in the unit to which column saying *'Squadron 7'*. This suggests that his temporary posting to HMS Daedalus was over and he was going back to No.7 Naval Squadron. However, there was no such unit. It had ceased to exist. 7 Naval was now 207 Squadron RAF. The squadron would be leaving France in three weeks.

22nd April 1918. 207 Squadron return to England. George Bones posted to 214 Squadron around this time. We know that Armourer George Bones was posted to No. 7 Naval Squadron at Coudekerque on 9th November 1916. At some point he joined 7 Naval's sister squadron in one of its iterations; 7A, 14 Naval or 214 Squadron. His service records are unclear as to the exact date that this happened. 207 Squadron, which was 7 Naval before 1st April 1918, returned to England on 22nd April.

207 Squadron left behind several aircraft and some personnel too. Pilot Lieutenant D.R. Tullis transferred to 214, so did their highly regarded Ground Officer, Captain Tyrer, who was in charge of sending the aircraft off on missions from his bandstand and seeing them safely landed again. It is most likely that George Bones moved to 214 Squadron at this time.

On the 1st June 1918, No. 214 Squadron was visited by an Official Photographer, a Lieutenant Thomas Keith Aitken. He took a series of remarkably clear and sharp images of the squadron's aircraft undergoing maintenance, fuelling and bombing-up. Twenty nine images taken that day, are in the archive at the Imperial War Museum in London.



One image shows a 250lb bomb on a cart with a group of 10 ground crew posing. IWM (Q 12195) George Bones may be in this image, the person at the back, on the right, is believed to be him.

The first week of June saw several German air raids on Coudekerque and other British and French Aerodromes in the Dunkerque area causing a great deal of damage and loss of life. There are a number of images of blown-up hangars and buildings with shrapnel holes in George Bones' photo album which probably date from this time.

4th June 1918. Targets Bruges Docks, Zeebrugge and Thourout. Two ground crew killed in German air raid. After the Handley Page bombers set off for their targets, Coudekerque Aerodrome was attacked by German aircraft. Two single engine planes dropped 11x11kg bombs. 6 men were killed, including two Air Mechanics from No. 214 Squadron *'Enemy aircraft attacked aerodrome as Handley Pages were starting out for the night on 4/5th. 6 men were killed and 6 wounded. No material damage was done.'*

5th June 1918. George Bones flew as the rear gunner/Gun Layer on a raid on Bruges. Nine Handley Pages of 214 Squadron flew on raids on the night of the 5th June 1918.. 214 Squadron dropped six and a half tons of bombs, including five 550lb bombs on the Zeebrugge lock gates. Other targets were Bruges Docks, Bruges Canals, La Brugeoise Works and two enemy airfields at Ghistelles and Maria Aalter. The airfields were bases for Gothas and Zeppelin Staaken R class 'Giants' attacking London and the South East of England.

214 Squadron, R.A.F.		RAID ORDERS		5th. June 1918	
<u>MACHINE.</u>	<u>PILOT.</u>	<u>OBSERVER.</u>	<u>GUNLAYER.</u>	<u>LOAD.</u>	
HP.9644	Capt. Studd	Sergt. Doll	Lt. Fraser.	3/550	11
HP.3125	Lt. McCormick	Corpl. Howe	1/Pte. Williamsen	14/112	11
HP.3488	Lt. Lewtas	Corpl. Wardrop.	1/Pte. Thomas	16/112	11
HP.3489	Lt. Cosgrave	Sergt. Kimberley	1/Pte. Bones	16/112	11
HP.9645	Lt. Ellison	2/Lt. Porter	1/AM. Wingrove	4/250	11
				6/112	11
HP.9648	Lt. Vance	Corpl. Conley	1/Pte. Mitchell	16/112	11
HP.9402	Lt. Tullis	Corpl. Whittaker	2/Pte. Silvester	16/112	11
HP.9402	Lt. McIlraith	Corpl. Parker	Lt. Nichol	16/112	11
HP.3126	Lt. Russell	2/Lt. Young	Corpl. Barber	3/550	11

Ref: Copy of 214 Squadron Raid Order 5th June 1918 Ref: Leeds University. Liddle Collection/
Air/ LA Dell

According to the Raid Order, George Bones flew as the rear gunner on Handley Page O/400 bomber, C3489. Although, this might have been George's first raid he was in safe hands. Both his pilot, Lieutenant Cosgrave, and the Observer, Sergeant Kimberley were very experienced. The aircraft carried 16 x 112lb bombs which was the standard bomb load for a Handley Page O/400. It is highly likely, that the aircraft George Bones was rear gunner on, was one of the six aircraft that bombed the docks and canal at Bruges.

The next day's, No.5 Group Dunkirk Daily Report of Operations, described the raids. '214 Squadron dropped 6 ½ tons of bombs during the night of the 5th/6th, distributed as follows:- Zeebrugge Lock Gates 5-550lb, Brugeoise Works 4-250lb and 6- 112 lb, Bruges Docks 76-112lb, Bruges Canal 14 – 112lb, Ghisteltes Aerodrome 2-112lb and Maria Aalter Aerodrome 2-112lb. Fires were started at Bruges Docks and Marialtar Aerodrome. Machines experienced exceptionally heavy AA fire at Bruges and were attacked by enemy aircraft which were driven off'.

'Some 20 E. A. attacked our aerodromes last night. Details as regards casualties and damage will be forwarded by tomorrow's Destroyer'.

On the same night of 5th-6th June 1918, three waves of enemy bombers, around twenty in total, attacked the RNAS bases around Dunkirk. Bergues, Coudekerque, Petite Synthe and Capelle are all attacked with devastating effect. 200 bombs were dropped. At Coudekerque, No 214 Squadron had Air Mechanic First Class, Edgar Baigent 230958 was killed and two hangers were burnt down. Other squadrons lost aircraft and men too.

The attack on Coudekerque and No. 214 Squadron was described in the Short History of No. 14 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service and No. 214 Squadron Royal Air Force 1914-18. *'On the evening of the 5th June, 1918, just after the machines had left on a raid, a solitary machine circled the aerodrome, suddenly dropped a line of bombs and opened machine-gun fire, causing casualties, several fatal, in the surprise attack.'*

6th June 1918. Double Raid. Targets Bruges, St Denis Westrem and Oostacker Aerodromes. German bombers again attack Coudekerque. Shortly after the 214 Squadron aircraft had left on their first raid, a wave of enemy bombers arrived over Coudekerque. Between 22:00-01:30, thirty enemy aircraft, Gothas and Zeppelin Staaken '*Giants*' dropped over 100 bombs. 3 men were killed, including two from 214 Squadron, one BE2c was wrecked and hangers burnt out. It appears that the BE2c that was wrecked was Major Brackley's favourite personal runaround BE2c 9970. This was the aircraft in George Bone's photo album.

The '*Short History of No. 14 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service and No. 214 Squadron Royal Air Force 1914-18*' describes '*a mass attack of heavy German bombers against the aerodrome, which was a grim and unforgettable experience for those who were there. Altogether in the raids no fewer than 740 bombs were dropped from 40 machines*' in this concentrated raid which caused a number of casualties and much damage'. The Daily Summary of RAF Naval Operations dated the next day, 7th June 1918.... '*30 GOTHAS and "GIANTS" dropped a very large number of bombs on DUNKIRK and neighbouring aerodromes. COUDERKERKE suffered most and had to be abandoned the next day.*'

The Official History described the raid. '*On the night of the 6th/7th, when Coudekerque was attacked by about thirty aeroplanes, it happened that all the serviceable Handley Pages had left for a raid, and that three unserviceable aeroplanes had been moved to safer quarters. Although no aeroplanes were therefore bombed, two hangers were destroyed and six were damaged with various aerodrome buildings. The general damage was such that Coudekerque was forthwith abandoned, except as a landing ground. German bombing on three nights had put forty two aeroplanes out of action.*' The War in the Air Volume 6.

26th June 1918. No Raids. No. 214 Squadron prepares to move to a location less popular with German air travellers. On the 26th June 1918 all operations were halted for No. 214 Squadron as they prepared to move 30 miles south west, from Dunkerque to St Inglevert, on the other side of Calais. The new aerodrome was located on a chalk upland near the coast. The Long Max gun crew sent the squadron a few leaving presents.

29th June 1918. The squadron relocates to St. Inglevert. The squadron moved bases from Coudekerque to St. Inglevert. The squadron flew in formation, with Major Brackley leading in H.P C9643, with Lieutenant Ellison and three mechanics. '*Flew down in squadron formation. Very bumpy. Kept very good formation.*' The flight took Brackley 65 minutes. Once all the aircraft had landed the groundcrews were very busy preparing the aircraft as there was a raid on an ammunition dump at Stahillebrugge that night.

10th November 1918. Target Louvain Railway Junction and Station. *'Nearly 6 tons of bombs dropped, causing fires and explosions'* – Major Brackley's *'Rough History of 214 Squadron'* The squadron's last mission of the war was on the night of November 10th/11th 1918 when seven aircraft visited Louvain and other machines went to Namur in appalling weather. The seven aircraft that raided Louvain found the Germans in a rush to get away from the advancing allied troops. The town was well-lit and there was hardly any opposition. The squadron dropped almost six tons of bombs on the railway station and junctions causing fires and explosions.

31st December 1918. Commanding Officer's Annual Assessment. For the third year running the Commanding Officer decides that Armourer Frank Bones' Character is Very Good and his Ability is Satisfactory.

31st March 1919. 214 Squadron get a new C.O. 214 Squadron's new Commanding Officer is Major William Laurie Welsh DSC.

25th April 1919. George Bones promoted to Leading Air Craftsman.

After the war the squadron continued to operate from its base at Champlin near Chemy where it had moved to just before the Armistice. In the six months up to mid 1919 the squadron did very little flying. They did some air mail work flying to Cologne and back supporting the allied forces of occupation. At the start of July 1919, 214 Squadron was one of three Handley Page squadrons sent to Cairo in response to anti-British unrest and rioting. The aircraft flew the 3,000 miles from Buc Aerodrome outside Paris to Abu-Sueir in Egypt. Four of the squadron's twelve aircraft that flew to Egypt, either crashed or were so badly damaged, that they were unflyable and had to be written off. The other two squadrons suffered even worse losses in this episode known as the *Blazing Trails Scandal*.

July and August 1919. George was off to Egypt. There are three photos of George Bones on board a ship. Two of these show George sitting on the deck with three other men happily playing cards. The last has him standing at the ship's rails. It is probable that these photos were taken on the ship taking 214 Squadron groundcrew and equipment from France to Egypt. This probably happened any time from the end of the first week of July 1919 up to the end of August.

20th September 1919. George Bones's Service Record has him transferring from Squadron 7 to H.Q. RAF Middle East. This probably did not involve a physical move but was possibly someone catching up on some long awaited admin.

26th November 1919. Transferred from 214 Squadron to Home Establishment *'for disp'*. Dispersal?

24th December 1919. George has an RAF Medical and discharged in good health as a *'Category A'*. He is transferred to the RAF General Reserve. Happy Christmas George. You are now a civilian again.

214 Squadron was officially disbanded on the 1st February 1920. Remaining personnel and aircraft were transferred to 216 Squadron at Kantara, which was remaining in Egypt.

30th August 1930. George Bones ties the knot. George Bones married his fiancée, Dorothy, at the end of August 1930. George was 31 years old.

George was an Air Raid Warden during the Second World War. Once the war ended, he became a Milkman.

12th April 1947. No. 14 Squadron Royal Naval Air Service Reunion Dinner. After the War, the members of the squadron held regular reunion dinners. In April 1947 there was another reunion. There is a wonderful image of George Bones giving a speech before the start of the meal. George appears to be in his element, and it looks like the speech went down well. He is sat on the top table with the great and the good of the squadron. Immediately to his right is Wing Commander Gibbs, one of the original pilots at No. 7 Naval, who flew Short Bombers and Handley Pages. Next to Gibbs is Lieutenant D. R. 'Doc' Tullis. Doc was a pilot with No. 7 Naval who probably transferred to 214 at the same time as George. In the middle, at the head of the table, is Major H. G. Brackley, 214 Squadron's Commanding Officer. By 1947, Brackley was an Air Commodore.



There is a wonderful easy camaraderie in this image. These men have been through two World Wars and are relaxed in each others' company, and the wine has yet to be served! The fact that George is sat on the top table, with an Air Commodore and a Wing Commander and giving a speech, is a wonderful indication of the high regard that George was still held by his former colleagues almost 30 years after leaving the squadron.

3rd April 1956 George Frank Bones. Rest in Peace. Unfortunately, George Bones died aged 57, working on his milk round, in April 1956.