Fateful Skies

Memories from a World War II Pilot

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CHAPTER 1

BEGINNINGS

I was born on the 20th July 1918 and christened Jeffrey James Bray. At the time my father was aged 44 and serving in the Royal Engineers and my mother, a tailoress and seamstress, was Irving with her parents. As it was nearing the end of the First World War, the skies over the West Country of England were alive with many aeroplanes and it was said that my first word was *'Epplin'*!

A stepbrother, ten years my senior, and who was being raised by my paternal grandmother, became interested in aircraft at the age of about twenty and started taking the 'Aeroplane' and 'Flight' magazines. These eventually passed onto me and started my interest in the progress of aviation in the 1920's.

In 1928, a young friend, slightly my senior, had joined the Royal Air Force as an aircraft apprentice at Cranwell and used to come home in his uniform and his chequered cap looking very smart and bringing home lovely pieces of equipment that he had made in the workshops. I thought this was the life for me so, at the age of fourteen, I asked my parents if I could join the Royal Air Force as an aircraft apprentice.

At the time I was attending the local council school, the curriculum of which didn't include the entry examination syllabus for aircraft apprentices. The headmaster, being a forward looking man, obtained the syllabus for me and the necessary books and put me in a room on my own, allowing me to study for the next 18 months covering the syllabus. If my studies came to a grinding halt, there was always a master available in a free period to coach me and put me right so that I could continue on my way. At the same time I got a scholarship to the local School of Art to study electricity and magnetism for two years.

Time went by and in 1933; I went in for the nominated aircraft apprentices' examination. At that time, Geddies axe was falling on the services and there were 1700 nominated entries for this examination, of which I was the only one in my area. On the day, I went to the local Education Offices, and sat with the beady eye of the local education officer sitting facing me and went through the examination papers with great trepidation. The majority of the entries were from Grammar and Blue Coat Schools across the country. Eventually, the examination results were published, and out of the 1700 applicants, 250 were accepted of which I was 189th on the list!

My mother, who didn't believe in having small children vaccinated for smallpox, had agreed that if I passed the examination, I could be given a smallpox vaccination, which was a necessity before joining the next course for aircraft apprentices at Halton. I was duly vaccinated, caught vaccine fever and was ill for a couple of months afterward. During this period, I was thinking that it wasn't a good idea to sign my life away for twelve or fourteen years and anyway, would I ever pass out from the apprentices school. I then made the decision to stay at home and take a five-year apprenticeship with the local Gas Company. This lasted four years, the time was 1938, war was looming and I was fed up with my job, so I got my indentures cancelled and joined the Royal Air Force in June 1938 as an Aircraft Hand General Duties.

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C H A P T E R 2

FLYING AMBITION

My one ambition was to fly and I suddenly realized what a task it would be. An Aircraft Hand General Duties at the time was the lowest grade in a Group 5 trade and to become eligible to be a pilot, it was necessary to be a Leading Aircraftsman in a Group 1 or 2 trade. After initial training at Cardington, where the airship sheds were, I applied for a course as a Fitters Mate which meant learning the basics of engine maintenance, how to splice seven stranded wire control cables and mend fabric wings - this was happening in 1938!

The Air Force was just beginning to modernize and having passed this course at Manston in Kent, made me legible to apply for a further course in a Group 2 trade as Flight Mechanic. This I did and was posted to Henlow in Bedfordshire.

After several months at Henlow, the whole course was moved to a new RAF Station that had opened in Locking near Weston super Mare in Somerset. This suited me beautifully because it was my hometown and I could get home to study in the evenings. I worked hard and did additional educational courses, and in September 1939, I was fortunate enough to be the first Leading Aircraftsman Flight Mechanic to pass out from that station. This made me eligible, with my education qualifications to apply for a pilot's course.

At the same time, as the war had just broken out, an Air Ministry Order was issued, preventing tradesmen applying for aircrew and so I was posted to *600 City of London Squadron. An auxiliary squadron with a nucleus of regular airmen. At that time it was stationed at Northolt, we moved to Manson, back to Hornchurch and down again to Manson in the early years of 1940. I was still pursuing my desire to be a

pilot, so frequently, every few weeks, I put in an application for a pilot's course, knowing that it would be thrown out by the Squadron Adjutant but, making my mind up, that if the order was ever rescinded, my name would be the first that he would think of.

The Squadron pilots were from various well-known families and from various professions, and I made my mind up that to want to become a pilot was well within their idea of what a man should do when there was a war on. Even more when, in the spring of 1940 in Manson, I was at an early breakfast at about 0430 with some Orderly Room clerks, who excitedly told me that the previous night they had been working late and an Air Ministry Order had come through which allowed tradesman to apply for aircrew courses. They said that, if I quickly made out my application again, they would put it into the Adjutant's tray so it would be the first thing he would see when he came in. He told me later that he was just about to tear up my application as usual, when they stopped him and pointed out the Air Ministry Order, which they had placed underneath my application. He said, *"oh, that's good timing to make sure that he doesn't bother me again"* and submitted my application to the CO that day. On the following day, I saw the Squadron Commander. He thought I was doing the right thing and recommended my application to the Station Commander at Manston, who saw me two days later.

The application then went forward to the Aircrew Selection Board. Shortly after, I received instructions to report to Uxbridge for aircrew selection and went to stay overnight with an aunt at Hillingdon. I then boarded a local train and with a few excitable young men in the carriage with me who were discussing things and were saying, "Oh, they'll ask you who is the Secretary of State for this and that". I pricked my ears up and thought that this was a good thing to listen to and when I came to the Selection Board, some of the questions I was asked I only learnt

that morning but they were the right answers, and together with the quiz on mathematics and general knowledge, history etc. got me through that part of the Board and then went on to a medical and passed that, returning to my squadron to await posting.

Time went on and the opening stages of the Battle of Britain started and I began to seriously worry whether I'd be alive to be posted as during the first attack by the enemy on the airfield two or three hundred bombs were dropped within the airfield boundaries. The airfield hangers were subjected daily attacks by enemy fighters, and as our aircraft were in sandbagged revetments at the top of the hill at Manston, they were in rather a vulnerable position. I was therefore in the habit of getting up early from sleeping in the underground chalk passages and strolling across to my aircraft to do my servicing before the strafing started.

On one particular sunny morning, I was strolling across the open airfield but stopped to admire a squadron of Hurricanes that were circling the airfield to land. At this time, the fighters based on the airfield used to retire inland to rest at night before retuning early in the morning to start their operations. As they came in for their final approach, they all raised their undercarriages, spread out into line abreast and opened fire and I suddenly realized that they were Meschersmitz 109's! Seeing a wave of chalk dust, sparks and explosions sweeping towards me, I flung myself to the ground and held my breath. The aircraft flew away across the coast and I jumped unharmed. For some unusual reason, I must have been between the guns of two airplanes and although I was covered in chalk dust, I was unhurt which made me think that I was very fortunate and that I was going to need a lot of luck to survive the war. The future was to prove that my luck was going to hold.

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CHAPTER 3

FLIGHT TRAINING

Directly after this episode, my posting came through to be a pilot and I found myself on the way to the initial training wing for aircrew in Torbay. Arriving in Paignton, I found myself amongst about 30 other regular airmen of various trades, some quite senior NCO's but from all trades. Some were armourers, clerks, fitters, riggers, and all sorts of different trades in the Air Force who were keen to become pilots. Some of them had very exciting stories to tell about their escapes from the German Juggernauts and the expeditionary force, which was over run in France. We were billeted in an hotel near the seafront and it was very pleasant to be able to sleep in a bed without having a lot of disruption during the night. Six weeks of basic training in navigation, wireless operation, armaments and various other subjects associated with flying saw me with a group of others on the way for training at the Elementary Flying Training School at Sywell near Northampton.

The Elementary Flying School was the old Brooklands Flying Club, which had been taken over by the RAF. The instructors had been commissioned by the Air Force and moved en bloc to Sywell. I completed my elementary training and soloed on the Tiger Moth in 8 ½ hrs, and with a total of 30hrs flying time behind me, was then posted to 12 advanced Flying School at Spittlegate near Grantham. The elementary course had been cut from 1OOhrs to 30hrs, as it was necessary to train pilots quickly as replacements for the ones being lost at the time. All of us on our course were hoping to be budding fighter pilots, but as will be seen this was not to be so. With a total of 37 flying hours behind me, I found myself flying solo in a twin-engine Anson aircraft, an old aircraft which had been taken over from Coastal

Command with the turrets still in situ. At this period of time, my luck continued to hold as we were billeted in the old married quarters while a new barrack block was being built and after six or eight weeks, we were moved from the married quarters to the barrack block. This was not to our liking as it was rather pleasant to live in a small house and have a room to ourselves. Directly after moving to the barrack block, one night there was a series of explosions, and we found that the married quarters we had been occupying had been blown up by an intruder! The course continued until 31st March 1941 we all passed out as pilots and received the flying badge. For us, no pomp and ceremony, bands playing and presentation by a prominent person, we were told to collect our flying badge from the stores together with a leave pass, our Sergeants Stripes and go on leave for a short time. My Log Book at that time showed that I had 111hrs and 5 minutes flying time and that I had been assessed as being above average as a pilot on that type of aircraft.

Alas, there were no fighter pilots from the course as the majority of the chaps had been sent to be trained in Bomber Command except for five, including myself, who were selected for flying an instructor's course at No2 Central Flying School, which was then domiciled at Cranwell. At Cranwell, my training continued on the Avro Tutor, which was a fabric covered biplane with a radial engine and the Airspeed Oxford, a twin-engine aircraft constructed of wood and a stressed skin. At the time we flew from the north airfield at Cranwell and did our night flying at a grass field at a place called Fulbeck. At this time, the majority of our airfields were grass, very few had runways and when flying at night the field was laid with goose necked paraffin flares in the form of a T. There was vertical line of flares 100 yards apart, four or five, with a fifty-yard gap between the end flare at the end of the line. There were two crossed flares, forming a T. 100 yards apart each side of the flare at the top of

the T. Glidepath indicators and the officer i/c night flying were located at the beginning of the first flare in the T. Communication between the aircraft and the Ground Controller was by Aldis signal lamp, as we had no radio telephone in the aircraft.

In those days there was a black out in force over the whole country and on a dark night with low cloud it was very black indeed, I remember one night I was on a second solo flight, and took off climbed to my circuit height, Down wind, I positioned myself on the flares which were quite bright, turned across wind then turned to final approach when the flares had apparently disappeared. I thought it was intruder problems and that the flares had been put out, in which case we had been instructed to fly to an assembly beacon which was a red beacon flashing certain code signs and fly at a certain height, periodically returning to the area of our airfield to see if our flare path had been relit. While this flashed through my mind, I suddenly noticed that the noise of the air over the aircraft was rising and looking at my instruments I saw that I was in an almost inverted position and in a dive. I automatically took off the bank and pulled back hard on the control column apparently just missing decapitating the officer in charge of night flying, I was that close to the ground!

This shook me rather, so I did one or two circuits of the airfield to get my nerve back, came in and landed, did another landing and then explained what had gone wrong. Flying in Avro Ansons with bank on as you turned into the final approach, it was possible to look through the side window and see the flares. The Oxford, being a smaller aircraft, your head was up in the roof of the transparent canopy, and when the aircraft was banked you had to twist your neck and almost look over your left shoulder and high. This is what happened to me, I was looking through the side window, for the flares and of course they were almost above my head! Bearing this in mind, I had no further problems with the

remainder of the night flying on the course. The 22nd May 1941 with the total of 194 hrs and 20minutes in my log book, saw me qualified to instruct on multi-engined and elementary types of aircraft and assessed as an average Flying Instructor with the good fortune of a posting to No.6 Service Flying Training School at Little Rissington in the Cotswold Hills in Gloucestershire. As the wartime train journey would have been interminable, a pal, Sergeant Robinson, who had not quite completed the course, obtained permission to fly us there. A couple of chaps also came for the ride and another Sergeant, Griff who was also posted to Little Rissington, and myself with all our kit piled into the rear of the Oxford aircraft. Robbie took off from the north airfield towards Cranwell College. Thinking the take off run was rather long; I glanced out of a side window and saw the college clock tower pass dose to starboard. We should have been well clear by that time and Robbie stated that something felt radically wrong with the aircraft as he was finding it very difficult to control. However, we continued on our way, eventually reaching a cruising height of 2,000ft. which was maintained to our destination with much effort by Robbie.

Arriving at the grass airfield, in a thunderstorm, Robbie instructed us to brace ourselves for a rough landing stating that he was going to approach to land well above the recommended speed of 65mph. This he fortunately did, as at about 80mph and at a height of about 30ft the aircraft stalled and fell to the ground with a horrible thump, breaking off the nose of the fuselage and the undercarriage. I have a recollection of shooting forward in a tumble of bodies and kit, being met by a shower of earth and grass coming in the opposite direction.

Thinking of fire, we all extracted ourselves and our kit from the aircraft with alacrity, with no more damage to ourselves than a few cuts and bruises. Fire crew were quickly on the scene and looking at the load of luggage, we thought that the aircraft may have been overloaded so

we persuaded the Fire Crew to transport some it and hide it behind a hanger to be picked up later. Griff and I then went to the Flying Control Tower and reported to the Chief Instructor stating that we had just arrived. He was not amused. On reflection, it was obvious that with most of the aircraft load behind the main spar the centre of gravity was way back aft, making the aircraft longitudinally unstable. Due to our rapid training we were unaware of this with subsequent dire results! Fond memories of the Cotswold's at that time remain, for the weather was perfect and the countryside quiet. A stroll down the hill to Bourton on the Water for a drink or a visit to Stow in the Wold or Evesham in the evening made pleasant interludes from intensive flying. However, one evening when enjoying a row on the River Avon at Evesham, time sped by and hurrying to catch the camp bus I was just in time to see it disappearing in the distance.

As I was on the next mornings flying program without more ado, I set off to walk the 20 odd miles at 10.30pm. All signposts had been removed due to the invasion panic and with only a rough idea of the bearing of Evesham from the airfield, I trudged on my way. It was a clear bright night and the Pole Star was my guide. No traffic passed me on the way, but with only one detour through Moreton in the Marsh, I arrived back at Little Rissington at about 5.30am footsore and weary but paraded for morning flying at 8am. Whether it was the method of our arrival at Little Rissington or not, I never knew, but after five enjoyable and idyllic weeks in perfect weather and after embarkation leave I was posted to Overseas Dispatch Centre at RAF West Kirby. This was to be a momentous journey, as on the crowded local train from Liverpool, I met a darling girl named Jeanne who was to be a lifelong companion. Even at 22, I was shy with the opposite sex but did manage to ask her how many stops before West Kirby. She replied that it was the terminus and that she was alighting there. Thinking there was no future in

pursuing the acquaintance, as I was on my way overseas, I said goodbye. On arriving at the depot, I found that my posting signal had been delayed due to enemy bombing of communications and was told to await further orders. I lost no time in meeting the evening train the next evening from Liverpool where Jeanne worked and we arranged to meet. We met most evenings during the next two weeks and swam in the lake and walked over the heather clad Wirral hills.

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Cardington (Bedford) June 1938

C H A P T E R 4

CANADIAN SKIES

This heavenly time did not last, and my 23rd birthday in 1941 found me aboard the Steamship Hectoria of 16,000 tons a Norwegian Whaling factory ship, which was to be the Convoy Commodore's abode for the next two weeks. Aboard, apart from the Norwegian crew, were contingents of naval ratings that were going to join an armed merchant cruiser, HMS 'Chetrall' refitting in America. This was the first incline to my destination. There were also several Canadian airmen being repatriated and myself occupying bunks in the f'castle, which smelt strongly of whale oil. Being at the height of the U- Boat campaign, our journey lay through the Inner Hebrides toward Iceland and Greenland, then south past Labrador and Nova Scotia. The voyage seemed uneventful, apart from one foggy morning, leaning on the starb'd bulwarks chatting to Leading Seaman Douglas. We watched with bated breath as a loose sea mine floated down the side of the Ship, only being kept clear by the wash of the ship's movement heaving a sigh of relief as it passed out of sight! After a voyage lasting 14 days, we docked in Halifax. N.S. After the frugal wartime diet in England, the variety of food in unlimited quantities was memorable. On landing, three other chaps and myself went to a dockside cafe and ordered T-bone steak. This arrived, sizzling hot on a large oval platter and we commenced to carve into four portions, only to be told that we would be receiving a platter each! After this gargantuan meal, together with a large number of British airmen of varying ranks, I boarded a train of immigrant coaches, which had been resurrected for use by troops. Accommodation was basic, washing water limited, and wooden bunks, which pulled down from the roof, very hard to sleep on. It was normal to wake up in the mornings

covered with a thin layer of dust, Food however was excellent, and the overwhelming hospitality of the Canadians when the train occasionally stopped, was difficult to describe. I remember a stop in Kenora, a town on the shore of the Lake of the Woods about a hundred miles east of the town of Winnipeg, after a hot dusty day of travel. It seemed that most of the population was at the station with cars to whip all of us who wished to swim for half an hour before the train proceeded on it's way. To this day, I can still feel the warmth of the sun and the cool lake water washing away the dust of two days and nights of travel. After another day and night on the train, via Winnipeg, Regina, and Saskatoon, on a sultry summer's night, I alighted at North Battleford, a prairie town of some 8,000 souls. Quite a large place for the prairies. Here, as a part of the Empire Training Scheme, one of about twenty-four airfields had been built. It consisted of a set of wooden buildings and hangers with three sets of runways in the form of a triangle. The next morning, I found that the station had a full compliment of Ground Staff, pupils and flying instructors but only one aircraft - an Airspeed Oxford! Without more ado, six instructors, including myself, climbed aboard the Oxford and flew back to Winnipeg. From Stevenson's Field, we boarded a Lockheed 10 of the R.C.A.F. and after an overnight's stop in Montreal, arrived back in Halifax, Nova Scotia, where our aircraft were being assembled at the airfield of Dartmouth. The next day I was allotted an aircraft, an Airspeed Oxford to air test. After outside checks and making sure the flying controls moved over the full range, I took off only to discover that, when three quarters of the way down the runway, the aircraft had difficulty becoming airborne. It was too late to abort the take-off, and the aircraft staggered into the air with about 2 feet to spare over the trees off the end of the of the runway. Fortunately the ground fell away from the runway and only the tops of the trees on the take-off path were visible. Gaining height with great difficulty and by varying the engine

thrust, I eventually landed with out damage. Inspection revealed that the elevator controls had been incorrectly set and had only about half a degree of upward movement. This was corrected, and after a very careful check, I completed the air test without further incident.

On 30th August 1941, separately and in two flights, one flight of three, with the aircraft equipped with maps and radio, and another flight, which included myself, following the Lockheed 10. Our first leg of our journey back to the prairies was to Enfield on the west coast of the Bay of Funday. After half an hours flying, the cloud gradually lowered until, at 150ft over the water I burst through the cloud bank to discover that the silver Lockheed 1O had disappeared, Fortunately I was carrying LAC Roebuck who was travelling to North Battleford on posting. Being a sharp-eyed lad, he glimpsed over his right shoulder the Lockheed 1O flying in the opposite direction! I immediately turned on a reciprocal heading and managed to follow it back to Dartmouth in deteriorating weather conditions. It appeared that following a silver aircraft in deteriorating weather would be no easy matter, especially as there were mountains over 3000ft high on track to Montreal, as we were to fly through or over the Mountain Range in the state of Maine in the USA, to shorten the flying time.

The following day the start of our long journey was successful and after a refuelling stop and a meal at the RCAF airfield of Penfield Ridge near St. Johns, New Brunswick, we pressed on in deteriorating weather across the corner of the USA to Montreal. On reaching the mountainous part of the route, we flew up valleys with the clouds sometimes reaching ground level. As the Lockheed 10 was flying with a radio range, I assumed that the course would not change and soring in and out of cloud with occasional glimpses of our guide aircraft passed through the high ground and landed at St. Hubert airfield, Montreal. On the first of September, which was the next day, it was decided to reach Winnipeg

by nightfall, about 11 hours flying time with refuelling stops at North Bay, Capuscasing and Armstrong in Ontario over very sparsely populated country. We arrived at Armstrong in the evening, and to the west, on track, I saw a vast line of storm clouds with the setting sun glinting a bright copper on the anvil heads of many cumuli nimbus thunderstorms. Having only eight hours total night flying experience to my credit, I expressed a wish to stop overnight at Armstrong. But being the only NCO pilot of the four aircraft, I was told to continue with the flight. This I did with some trepidation and as darkness fell kept the red port navigation fights of the other three aircraft in view without any problems until about an hour later when we hit the line squalls and encountered lightening, hail and heavy rain and very turbulent air. Suddenly, without warning, it felt as if a gigantic hand tossed the aircraft upward and in seconds I was at 6,000 ft. fighting to maintain control of the airplane. The natural tendency is to dive to regain the cruising altitude of 2,000 ft. but for some reason unknown, I throttled back the engines and sank at a nominal cruising speed of about 140mph until breaking cloud in heavy rain at about 1,500 ft.

There was no sign of the other aircraft, so I continued on the course we had been flying having an idea that we were more or less on the Trans Canada airway and thinking that it would be difficult to miss a well-lit city the size of Winnipeg. There were very few small towns in this area of Ontario and the flying was similar to the blackout in England so when what appeared to be runway lights loomed through the murk, I decided to land and wait for daylight to continue my journey. On my approach to the runway, I suddenly saw car headlights and realized that what I thought was an airfield, was in fact a small town with one lit main street! Climbing away, I flew on my turbulent way finding the aircraft more difficult to control as time went by until with little fuel remaining and only trees, lakes and swamp to be seen in the lightening flashes, I

decided to Climb as high as possible with the remaining fuel and bail out. With this in mind, I instructed LAC Roebuck to jettison the aircraft door and to bail out when I gave him the signal. Then on landing, to head south as, to the north of our track was nothing but hundreds of miles of wilderness. Then just before entering cloud, I saw the glow of lights ahead, which could be nothing but Winnipeg. Recalling Roebuck and flying with the engines set as economically as possible, I headed for the welcoming light. Thinking that if I did not get the aircraft down safely, I would not be seeing Jeanne again.

As I approached the city, wondering how I would find the airfield, I saw a flashing light of high intensity and keeping my fingers crossed, headed towards it. Thankfully, it was Stevenson's Field, on the western outskirts of the city of Winnipeg but all the runways were lit, a most unusual sight, as normally, only the 'into wind' runway would be illuminated. There was no time to waste, so I headed for the nearest runway only to find a strong drift to starboard. This at least indicated the wind direction and I adjusted my approach path accordingly. Not knowing the barometric pressure to set on my altimeter, I depressed the landing light fully and, on the last remaining fuel, followed the ground to the end of the runway having to use full aileron control to maintain lateral stability. It was a poor landing on the left hand edge of the runway, which was fortunate as we only missed a crashed Oxford aircraft by a couple of feet. This was one of the aircraft I had been following, which had had to make an emergency landing. Apparently the Flying Control Tower had been firing red lights to warn me of the danger but with the heavy rain and my own problems, I did not see them. In the morning, on inspecting the aileron cables, they could be pulled out and must have become disconnected during the landing! It was then discovered that all the turnbuckles which tension the flying control cables, had not been wire locked and so unwound in the rough weather

through which we had been flying. This was rectified, and the aircraft refuelled and the next day we took the aircraft on its way, following the railway to Regina in Saskatchewan. After an overnights stop, still without air maps, I managed to get an old road map, and eventually arrived at North Battleford with one serviceable aeroplane.

The two pilots flying the other aircraft with me, were detained in Winnipeg for a court of enquiry into the aircraft accident and the other Oxford aircraft which took off from Dartmouth on the 30th August were forced down by bad weather and had to land in Maine. This was before the USA declared war so were several days late arriving at North Battleford. In the mean time, more aircraft had arrived from other sources and works began in earnest at 35 Service Flying Training School and I worked at 'A' Flight under Flight Lieutenant Fitch along with other instructors of which Flying Officer Chuck Owen and F/O Beaky Dallen had already survived operational tours. It soon became evident why the Empire Air Training Schemes had evolved. A lovely Indian summer lasted through September, October and well into November 1941. Flying took place every day under clear skies, occasionally interrupted by a dust storm. Nights were balmy and clear with well lit runways uninterrupted by enemy action and by the third week in November, the first course graduated. The local towns people were very hospitable and I was befriended by the Lewis family who lived at 1472 Frederick Street. At home at the time were Mr and Mrs Lewis Audrey 18, Miller 17 and Anne Louise 12. Jeanne and I still write to Ann Louise who is now 70 years old. In our time off which was limited, there were football matches against Indians, Black Feet I think from the local Sweet Grass Reservation, who were fleet of foot but with little skill. A Medicine Man used to attend in case of injury. Swimming in Jack Fish Lake, a small lake of about two square miles, and pleasant evenings with the Lewis's, Trips to the lake were in Miller's Model T Ford Tourer of about

1926 vintage.

In the middle of November, the snow came and with it, temperatures down to minus 40 degrees Farenheight at times, so there was plenty to write to Jan about each day with out mentioning military matters. The cold made operating the aircraft difficult as no winterization kits had arrived. In the mornings, before the aircraft left the heated hangers, a mechanic was positioned on each wing root, with starting handles connected, and the engines primed, with a pilot in the cockpit. As soon as the aircraft were pushed out of the hangers, the engine would be started and kept running all day, except for refuelling. Non-starters would be returned to the hangers to be warmed up before trying again. It was worrying for the pupils as, initially when judging distances on approaching to land, they would either overshoot, undershoot or both. This meant using the engines to modify the approach path and having two engines, if one got too cold and cut out, the good engine would pull the aircraft into an incipient spin and being near the ground, there was no height to take recovery action. This happened one night when I was duty pilot and the aircraft crashed into a snowdrift about 300 yards from the end of the runway. Due to the snow, it was difficult to get to the scene, but eventually help arrived to find the pupil entangled in a mass of electrical wiring, concussed and suffering from a broken jaw. He eventually recovered and progressed to operations where he was awarded a decoration for bravery. The Canadians were skilled in dealing with snow and as there were no Archimedes screw blowers available to clear the runways were rolled with corrugated rollers to provide contrasting shadow to aid height judgment when landing and the runways marked with small fir branches for daytime use. Runway lights were covered and provided with extension leads, terminating in rubber lamp holders, which were adjusted as the snow fell, to lie on the surface of the snow. As winter progressed, skating and ice hockey

replaced football and swimming and I was promoted to Flight Sergeant in April of 1942. Wing Commander Lunn the Chief Flying Instructor, told me that I had been granted a Commission as Pilot Officer and posted to 33 Service Training Flying School in Carberry Manitoba, about 100 miles west of Winnipeg.

N.Battleford Groundcrew 1941

36 FTS N.Battleford

Battle River Sask Canada 1942

CHAPTER 5

TRAINING DAYS

The unit was equipped with operationally time expired Anson Mk1 Aircraft. It was a good station and within reach of Winnipeg for the once in a month 48hr pass when I used to visit Eatons Stores and send food parcels of tinned bacon, butter, fruit etc. to Jan and my own family, hoping that they would arrive safely to enhance the wartime diet. As I was a Pilot Officer I was treated as an inexperienced instructor and used to collect the odd jobs such as laying the flare paths at the relief landing ground at Petrel and in charge of flying, standing by the first flare at night with an Aldis Lamp muffled up against the incursions of mosquitoes which were a great trial in the prairie summers.

Feeling put upon, I used to arise early, go to the Flight Office and purloin the best aircraft, load up with my pupils and depart to the relief landing ground for the morning. I was aided and abetted by the ground crews who used to advise me on the most serviceable aircraft in return for a flight, which I called an air test, around the airfield in the early morning. On the morning of June 26th 1942, I followed this routine, and after taking a pupil LAC King, who had joined the RAF from the Norwich Police Force and a couple of ground crew. I thought the weather looked rather murky so decided to check before departing for the relief landing ground. Taking off, I flew into a bank of rolling fog and in spite of the steep turn to land quickly, missed the airfield. This phenomenon was unusual for the prairies in the summer. Deciding that the sun would lift the mist after an hour of two, I climbed through the cloud and endeavouring to allow for drift, stay in the vicinity of the airfield, flew various patterns to give LAC King instrument flying practice which, at the time, he needed. We were not equipped with radio so I had no

means of knowing quite where we were and no idea of the upper wind strength, so when the time came, with low fuel indication, to let down, I weighed up the situation. Some miles to the North East of Carberry was Riding Mountain National Park with ground rising to 2,500 to 3,000 feet and adjoining it, quite a large Lake Manetoba. I decided that it would be dangerous to tell my passengers to bailout if the weather was still poor, so told everyone to brace themselves for a crash landing and started to let down on instruments into what had been the wind direction when I took off.

Warning everyone to keep a sharp eye out for obstacles from 3,000 feet down. The Anson was a very forgiving aircraft to fly and with full flap down and plenty of engine power it was possible to descend gently at 50 to 55mph. This I did heading south west until at 2,000 feet, a sudden shout caused me to look up to see treetops flashing past the port wing. Feeling that it appeared a bit fast for 55mph, I climbed slightly and turned on a reciprocal heading. On the prairies, most of the land section borders followed a North South, East West directions so, hoping that the fields in the hilly country followed the similar lines, and heading North East, I reckoned that if I caught a glimpse of a field corner I would be heading across a long diagonal and decided to land more or less blind. This happened and I landed in three month wheat with a visibility of about 75 yards and the wheels down, bounced in and out of the sunken track and slithered to a halt about 10 feet from the field boundary without damaging the aircraft! Heaving a sigh of relief, I then had to locate my position, which took some time in the reduced visibility. I eventually found that we were about a mile from a small town named Rapid City. Using the local Police telephone, I contacted the base and told them the situation. Apparently, things were humming at the station as I was the only pilot airborne and had been missing for three to four hours. A party was sent from the nearest station R.C.A.F. Station Rivers

to recover the aircraft and I was returned to Carberry. In trepidation of my reception, which was first, a rollicking from the Flight Commander, then having a wigging from the Squadron Commander, Sqn. Ldr. McGlinn (of whom more later) then dispatched to the Station Commander, Group Captain 'Farmer' Brill to await my fate.

Arriving at the C.O.'s office and escorted in by the Station Adjutant, I explained what had happened and was told that I had done well, the aircraft was not damaged and with a little more experience, I would not get into similar scrapes. I lost no time in leaving his office and was not popular with the Squadron Commander and the Flight Commander for a while as they had received a blasting for not being on duty early enough that morning to stop me taking off!

1942 continued with training at high pressure interrupted only by the occasional storm, one containing hailstones the size of walnuts which damaged quite a few aircraft caught on the parking areas - these consisted of octagonal concrete strips with an aircraft parked on each side with the tails facing towards the center of the octagonal.

At this time, I was suffering from intense hay fever and receiving medication to combat it, unsuccessfully. One morning after a particularly poor flight with a pupil who had forgotten most of the previous lesson, sneezing and sniffing with a thick head, I was berating him for his forgetfulness, at the same time swinging the aircraft into its parking space when there was a horrible crunch and looking back through the cockpit, I was just in time to see wood splinters and pieces of canvas settling down from two interlocked tailplanes! I should have been aware of the difficulty in parking and wondered how to mitigate the repercussions from this error of judgment and decided that the best form of defence was to attack. So, when brought before the 'B' Squadron Commander - you guessed correctly – S/L McGlinn! I commenced to criticize whoever had written the S.O.'s (Flying) regarding A/C parking

arrangements only to discover that they had been written by no other than S/L McGlinn!! I think he was so incensed by being criticized by a lowly P/0 that my misdemeanour paled into insignificance and I do not remember that there were any repercussions from incident of a/c damage.

October 1942 saw the commencement of re-equipment with Canadian built Jacobs engined MkII Ansons, modified to dispense with the dorsal gun turret and able to cope with the Canadian winters. A good heating system was backed up by hydraulic flaps, undercarriage and brakes which dispensed with having to frequently to return to pneumatic points at the hangers to top up with compressed air for the brakes, hand pump the flaps up and down and wind the u/c up and down 132 times in each direction I seem to remember. The new aircraft had plenty of power, a good heating system and was a joy to fly, especially at low level.

Correspondence with Jeanne led to us deciding to become engaged by post, so without more ado, on my next visit to Winnipeg, I bought a solitaire blue diamond engagement ring at a jewellers in Portage Avenue and posted it, hoping that it would arrive safely which it did. Having Jeanne's measurements, I set about collecting her trousseaux as the dearth of clothing coupons in England would have made it impossible to buy new clothes for the wedding, which we decided would take place the week I arrived back in UK - a date unknown at the time. Training proceeded uneventfully until 1943. As another winter was drawing to a close, I was promoted to Flying Officer and posted to the Personnel Dispatch Centre (the P.O.C.) at Moncton New Brunswick. The return train journey to Moncton was much more comfortable than the outward one nearly two years previously. First Class with private sleeping accommodation, food and use of the observation platform at the back of the train with its upholstered

furniture. After a day or two at the P.D.C., I found myself embarking on the Queen Elizabeth at Halifax N.S. The Queen Elizabeth used to make her Trans Atlantic voyages unescorted and at high speed (about 30 knots I think) with frequent course changes to outwit the U-Boat packs operating at that time. The ship was very full (17,000 seems to stick in my mind, but was probably more like 1,700) First Class cabins contained 12 bunks each. Because of the numbers involved, it was only possible to have two meals per day and there was little furniture to provide seating in the lounge, most of us used to sit on the floor during the day - fortunately the luxurious carpet was still on the floor. I remember one wall of this room covered with a magnificent mural of Canterbury Tales made in marquetry. The ship produced a daily news sheet (of which I still have 4) called 'The Elizabethan' which reminded us that the war was not yet over.

Three and a half days after embarking, the ship sailed up the River Clyde to Greenock - and I could not believe my luck as a dozen or so us out of the thousands on board were the first to disembark and offloaded on to a pinnacle and then on to a train enroute to the RAF Station at West Kirby in the Wirral, Cheshire - so, within six or seven hours of disembarking, I was knocking on the door of Jeanne's home. Her mother opened the door closely followed by a sleepy Jeanne in her dungarees after a hard day on Larton Woods Farm. It was a wonderful reunion and having two weeks dis-embarkation leave, we married a week later by Special License on 10th April 1943 and spent our honeymoon in Weston super Mare so that I could introduce her to the family.

CHAPTER 6

AIRCREW

The two weeks passed far too quickly and I soon found myself at the Cranwell College S.F.T.S getting acclimatized to the English weather for a couple of weeks then off again to No. 12 Operational Training Unit at Chipping Warden near Banbury where I arrived on a lovely summers evening to find the mess empty except for a short square set R.C.A.F. Bomb Aimer. On enquiring where everyone was, he informed me that our course had that day been 'crewing up' - the pilots choosing a Navigator, Bomb Aimer , Rear Gunner and wireless operator but that no one seemed to like his 'fizzog'! I immediately took a liking to his style and suggested that we formed the nucleus of our crew – and commenced a lifelong friendship with a very fine 30yr old Nova Scotian named Lawrence Murphy. We promptly went off to the local pub to join the other airmen who were celebrating getting together. At that pub, beer was being dispensed in jam jars, as beer glasses were unobtainable at that time.

The next day we met our wireless operator Sgt. Tommy Roberts aged 33yrs, a Londoner from Hampton Court, Navigator P/O Harry Blyth from Wood Green, London and Sgt. Boucher early 20's R.C.A.F. French Canadian from Quebec. The first part of the course was at Edgehill Airfield Warwickshire, the site of the first general engagement of the English Civil war in 1642. Around the base of the hill were picturesque villages in which it was possible to enjoy marvellous suppers at various farmhouses. In Lower Tysoe I met Peter Frost – gardener at the Manor House - a time serving soldier who had been Batman to the Colonel of the Regiment, now residing at the Manor. Pete was a marvellous

gardener and he and his wife agreed to board Jeanne and I for a couple of weeks so that we could continue our honeymoon. This was called 'unofficial living out' and I could not get a Ration Card to cover the period, so lived off the bounty of Peter's garden – new potatoes, tomatoes, butter crunch lettuce, cucumbers and eggs for evening meals.

On converting to Wellington III aircraft, we continued training, bombing, gunnery and navigation day and night. We used to take off over Lower Tysoe and if Jeanne was in the garden, I would waggle the wings of the aircraft to let her know that I would be home in the evening and not night flying. The happy two weeks spent at Peter Frost's was over all too soon and our crew returned to Chipping Warden to complete the course. The next stop was Stradishaw, Suffolk to 1657 Heavy Conversion Unit to convert to Mk I and II Stirling Heavy Bombers in No. 3 Group Bomber Command in August 1943. Here we were joined by Sgts. Reg Sainsbury, Cornish, a Flight Engineer and Doug McGarvin, from Liverpool, Mid Upper Gunner to complete a heavy bomber crew.

The aircraft had had a chequered career at the design stage and finally went into service with a reduced wingspan, which affected the height at which it could fly with a full load of fuel and bombs. I quite liked the old lady in spite of the height limitations, as she was very strong and manoeuvrable. During training, enemy night fighters were still a problem and P/O Smith with whom I shared a room, was shot down in the circuit one night and killed. This was ironic as the poor chap had just finished an operational tour and was starting a rest period as an instructor. He had an animal feed business in Leighton Buzzard and left a wife and family.

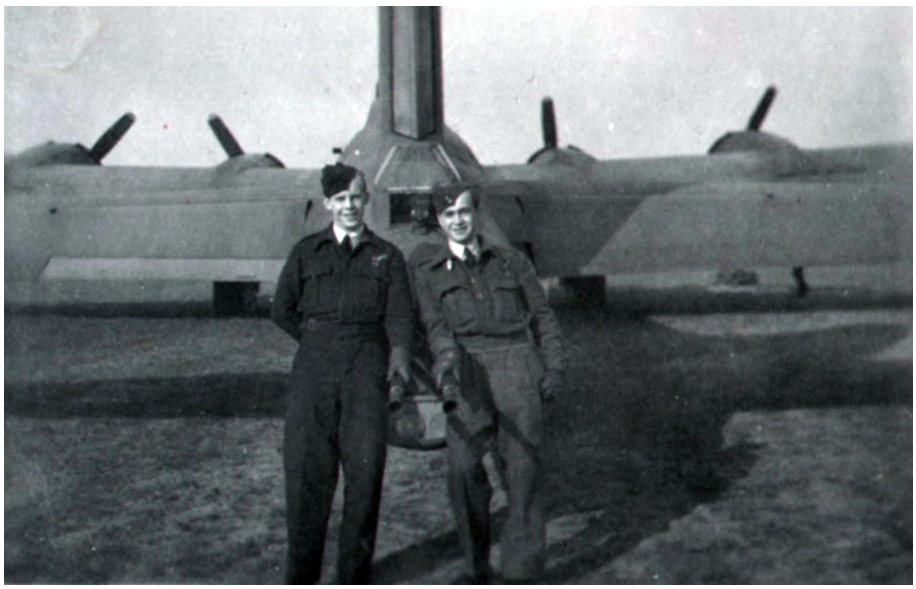
We completed the conversion course at the end of August and commenced a special navigation course on the use of GE and H2S equipment. Here I shed Sgt. Boucher, as on completion of one night

flight, I found him asleep in his rear turret and considered him a liability to the safety of the aircraft and crew. Sgt. John Lyall replaced him, 20, an R.A.A.F. Gunner from Westem Australia.

The GE system consisted of an aerial and receiver in the aircraft and transmitter and two slave stations on the ground at different distances from the transmitters whose signals would trigger off the slaves. The a/c receiver would then electronically measure the time difference between receptions of these signals, the time difference being represented on a chart by parabolic curves. It was a very accurate method of fixing positions over the earth's surface and its range extended over Europe. Its disadvantage was that the enemy could jam it over their territory. The H2S consisted of the scanner mounted in a streamlined dome beneath the a/c fuselage behind the bomb doors. Signals transmitted from the a/c bounced back from the ground and recorded on a circular screen at varying intensities depending on the reflective surfaces on the ground. The towns and cities showed up brightly, with different shades for land and water. This was especially useful for mine laying. The navigator used both equipment and various air exercises were carried out to enable him to get used to the equipment. Completing the course successfully by the middle of September 1943, we were then posted to No.214 Squadron at Chedborough near Bury St. Edmonds in Suffolk.

Arriving on the 15th at an airfield that was a sea of mud apart from the runways and taxi tracks as it had only recently been built. Accommodation was basic, in Nissen huts, which were cold, damp and cheerless. Each hut held about 10 people and we were allotted our billets and after dropping off our kit, told to report to the C.O. As Murph, Harry and I entered our hut, we were greeted by a very pale young P/O who stated that this was an unlucky hut as our beds had been emptied four times in the last ten days! I duly reported to the C.O. who was none

other than W/C McGlinn. He welcomed me to the Squadron and told me to report to 'A' Flight, as I would be on Battle Order that night Stirling losses at that time were high. So, within a few hours of arriving on the Squadron, we found ourselves bound for Montlucon in Central France after air testing the aircraft and its equipment, having a flying breakfast of bacon and eggs, briefing in the Intelligence Section where we saw the route to the target and briefed on signals, timings, bomb loads and bombing heights, emptied our pockets and picked up our escape kits.



CHAPTER 7

FIRST OPERATIONS

Over the English Channel, we approached the enemy coast in the Base de La Seine, where ten months later the invasion was to take place. Having had it impressed upon us at the briefing that timing was essential as, by entering enemy airspace en masse, it was possible to swamp the radar defences, a time check revealed that we would be one minute early at the enemy coast, I decided to do a 360 degree rate 1 turn to lose the minute. Half way into the tum, dark shapes were flashing past above, below and either side. Realizing that I'd met the bomber stream (about 150 bombers) head on, I lost no time in doing the steepest turn of my life to regain course and met our first taste of flack which was sporadic. The target was a Dunlop Rubber factory where some thousands of tyres were awaiting shipment. We identified the targets by decoy fires and dropped our bombs. There were no searchlights and little flack. If there were night fighters about we did not see them and arrived back at base unscathed, thinking that ops were not too bad.

One week later I was sadly disillusioned when I went to Hanover as second pilot to a very young (20yrs) experienced F/Sgt pilot named Sellers, to experience action over Germany. There were many searchlight belts and much heavy flack to contend with and attacks by night fighters, we bombed the target and headed for home. Fuel was limited, as to carry maximum bomb load, fuel for the flight was estimated plus 1/2 hr. to spare for emergencies. As there were about 24 aircraft from the station and everyone arrived back at about the same time, the

last aircraft to land would be very short of fuel. So the tendency was to increase speed on the homeward run - which used more fuel, in the hope of getting back early and be the first to obtain landing Clearance. On arriving back at base we were the third to land but on our approach, a night fighter, which had infiltrated the bomber stream, shot up the aircraft, which had just landed and scattered anti personnel bombs about. This meant a diversion to Newmarket Heath, a grass strip next to the racecourse. The aircraft stacked above us put their noses and raced ahead and we found that we were 12th to land with the flight engineer worried that our fuel would run out and urging the skipper to request an emergency landing. This he reluctantly did and the air was blue for a few minutes as most of the other aircraft were in the same boat. We however got permission to land and all four engines stopped as we cleared the landing path! I had learned a lot that night as Sellers and his crew had shown me how a well-trained team could survive - with luck.

The next night I had a completely different experience going to Mannheim with another experienced crew. On their previous op. their bomb aimer had his leg shot off in the nose of the aircraft and on the return trip the navigator lay beside him giving him morphine and controlling a tourniquet, the aircraft making a belly landing on return. Fortunately the whole crew survived but were very badly shaken, as on several of their last ops they were lucky to survive. Apparently, before the trip to Mannheim, the skipper had asked for an interview with the C.O. to ask if their tour could finish at 25 ops instead of 30 and was accused of being LMF (Low Moral Fibre) and sent on his way. So I was doing this trip with experienced but nervy and disgruntled crew.

Tactics at that time were to fly directly to the target from a departure point on the English coast and to gain height over base before setting course. This meant that the enemy defence system could with their early warning FREYA Radar pick up a/c over England and early in the

plot, extend the track being followed and have a very good guess at the target. Their action would be to alert the whole of the N/F organization and move it to the vicinity of the likely target. The first obstacle would be 50Km square fighter boxes, which extended in a 100Km belt from Denmark to the middle of France- in each box would be two fighters controlled by giant Wurtzburg radar. As soon as the target had been identified enemy heavy bombers loaded with flares would lay lines of flares each side of our flight path into and out the target to supplement the illumination from search light belts about the target working in conjunction with flak batteries and cats eye fighters (fighters without any radar).

On this trip, we negotiated the Karnhauber line of fighter boxes successfully and the attack was in full swing as we approached Manheim. Being the second pilot, I had time to observe what was happening - Dante's Inferno would have been mild by comparison! On the way to the bombing run I counted 24 aircraft falling in flames, cannon and machine gun fire was being exchanged in various parts of the sky and heavy flak was exploding over the whole of the area. On the bombing run a Stirling on fire narrowly missed us. It was diving and was still being pursued by a ME109 and exchanging fire with the Stirling Rear Gunner. The words 'Bombs Gone' was a very welcome sound in my earphone, the skipper said "you have her ' and pulled out a packet of cigs. and filled the aircraft with smoke. A further 30 seconds of straight and level flying was needed so that we could procure a photograph of our bomb bursts before diving for the welcoming blackness of the night. The return journey to the enemy coast was uneventful and we were breaking out the sandwiches and coffee over the channel when the Rear Gunner reported a night fighter closing in from dead astern saying 'Hold her steady skip, we'll show the C.O. if we're LMF' and called the range down - 600, 500, 400, 200yds. By this time I was crouched

behind my armour plated seat fully expecting a burst of cannon shells to rake the aircraft. At 150 yards, the gunner opened up with his four 303 Browning machine guns and shot the fighter down. Other aircraft in the vicinity later confirmed this.

So ended my initial experiences and a few lessons learned:

1. Read all I could from the intelligence reports on enemy tactics.
2. Absorb info on predicted and barrage flak from lectures by an Artillery Officer.
3. Practice evasive action with the gunners so I could rely on them better to form a mental picture of how we were being attacked so that I could take the appropriate avoiding action.
4. Practice abandoning aircraft drill as I had already seen it would be more than likely necessary to do this very, very quickly.

Air Tests could occasionally be tricky. One day we were airborne on a test and the elevator controls became difficult to use, there being considerable movement necessary to control the longitudinal stability resulting in a porpoising motion, which made the landing very difficult. Examination revealed that large pulleys in the tail section over which the control cables ran, had crumbled. These were renewed but the same thing happened the second time but again I managed to land without damage. Twice in one day was enough and I requested that the whole aircraft be checked to see if it was misaligned due to some heavy landing in the past which was causing side loads on the pulleys.

In 1943, Stirling losses were high compared with the other Bomber Groups, so operations were curtailed whilst the Group were equipped with Lancasters. Stirlings were employed on the odd bombing operation and were well suited to laying magnetic mines in the Gironde Estuary,

behind the Fresian Islands and in the Kattegat each mine weighed 15001bs and the numbers carried depended on fuel loads. On 3rd October 1943, we laid 6 mines behind the Fresian Islands without encountering much opposition, noted the positions with GEE and the Naval Liasor, Officer attached to the station, duly recorded these. On the 4th, the target was Frankfurt, which was quite heavily defended, and on the bombing run, encountered turbulence which only lasted seconds. On landing at Chedburgh, found damage and holes in the wings, one of which had passed through a fuel tank, which was fortunately empty at the time. From the shape of the holes, we concluded that we had flown through a shower of 4lb incendiary bombs dropped from aircraft flying well above us, luckily none had lodged in the aircraft. This must have happened often to Stirlings flying below Lancasters and Halifaxes, even though the Stirlings were allocated a time over target separate from other aircraft. As the timing meant that several hundred aircraft dropped their bombs in five or six minutes, it was quite possible for aircraft to be slightly early or late and so accidents happened. Our next mining trip on the 4th November was to be the Kattagat, a round trip of almost eight hours. The day was warm for November with no wind to speak of and the main runway was being repaired. My aircraft was old with exactor hydraulic controls for the engine throttles. These were notoriously spongy which meant that to keep the aircraft straight on take-off and prevent it swinging and writing off the aircraft, each throttle had to be adjusted individually and took a little longer than usual to apply T.O. power. With these conditions prevailing, we commenced our run on a short runway. Three quarters of the way down the runway I realized that it would be touch and go whether or not we would get airborne and with three 1500lb mines on board there was likely to be a big bang! The wheels were still on the ground when we hit the end of the runway with a jolt, which flung the aircraft about 30ft into the air, and we wallowed

away across the Suffolk countryside, neither climbing away nor descending! The reason for this was that we were in a condition where the maximum thrust for the engines was balanced by the parasitic and aerodynamic drag produced by the high angle of attack of the wings, which prevented the aircraft from gaining speed and therefore lift to climb away. The only way out of this dilemma would be when we had used enough fuel or could ease the aircraft nose down to increase lift. Our shaky flight continued until the ground fell away near the coast and I could lower the nose to increase speed and lift. We left Southwold at 100 - 200ft and maintained this height over the North sea to keep below enemy radar coverage until we approached the coast of Denmark. We were surprised to see three Stirlings, on our track but 8 to 9,000 feet above us. They must have been visible on German radar for a good one and a half hours and one after the other; they were shot down in the deepening dusk. Somehow they had been wrongly briefed, which was confirmed several years later when the Navigator in one of these aircraft flew with me on a trunk route to India after spending a couple of years as a prisoner of war.

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CHAPTER 8

ROYAL ENCOUNTER

During my time on the Squadron, my association with the C.O. whilst not exactly cordial, was comfortable and for some reason he seemed to treat me as an asset to the Squadron and on the 9th November said, "Come along Bray, today we are going to meet the King and Queen". At that time the Squadron had a flight attached to RAF Tempsford as the Stirling was ideal for dropping supplies at low level and on moonlit nights to the underground movements on the Continent. So with my Fight Engineer Reg Sainsbury and some of the Section Leaders (i.e. Gunnery, Engineering and Navigation) we flew to Tempsford where that day the King was investing a past Captain of the Kings Flight, and now Station Commander, Group Captain Mouse Fielden with a D.F.C. The impromptu investestiture in the mess was preceded by an inspection of our aircraft by their Majesties who shook hands and chatted to us. It was followed by a special afternoon tea enjoyed by everyone - then back to Chedburgh and the war.

Wing Commander Dennis McGlinn was a great C.O. believing in plenty of training, firm, fair and a leader of men. Leading from the front, he was always the first to try out new techniques on difficult targets. So, between operations, training continued apace. Bombing, Gunnery over the Wash, Fighter Affiliation and abandoning aircraft. Our fastest time to do this on the ground was fifteen seconds, a comforting thought on the 18th November when we were briefed to attack Ludwigshaven - (Farbens Chemical Works).

It was a fine night and we had a good aircraft which was just as well as, far into enemy territory, we were continually attacked by a persistent night fighter to such an extent that Johnny Lyall used up all the

ammunition in the rear 4 gun turret. This left only the 2 gun dorsel turret for rearward defence and the gunners patter to give me a word picture as to what was happening in the rear so that I could take avoiding action at the right moment. The fighter eventually broke off to find easier prey and I decided to continue to the target with a 2000lb H.E. Bomb and cans of incendiary bombs in the fuselage and wing cells. We arrived over a very well defended target lit up with numerous flares searchlights and heavy flak barrage and commenced our bombing run. The Rhine storage tanks and buildings stood out clearly. When almost at the aiming point, the gunners reported a section of 4 FW190's about to attack. They split into two pairs and attacked from both quarters. Doug McGurvey, the M/U Gunner scored on one which exploded as Murph commenced to shout *"Bombs gone",* he managed *"Bombs"* and there was an almighty bang and the aircraft lurched upwards and filled with cordite fumes from a flack shell which had burst close below us.

My second pilot, a Squadron Leader who was sent with me for experience on the latest tactics and German defences, disappeared from my side as I dived the aircraft out of the target area. When reaching the welcoming darkness, we took stock of the damage, first an intercom check elected a reply from all members of the crew except Murph and the second pilot and I feared the worst as the aircraft had become very draughty as if a part of the nose had been blown off. A few seconds later however, the strangled voice of Murph came over the intercom saying that he was OK after the second pilot had fallen and knocked the wind out of him. The aircraft had sustained considerable damage but miraculously, all the systems appeared to be working. Reg, the Flight Engineer, reported that all fuel tanks (14 in a Stirling) appeared to be leaking to various degrees and that the fuel was running from the wings into the fuselage. He said he would switch to the tanks leaking most badly; gradually working back to the least damaged ones. I

decided to continue on the homeward course, heading for the coast, some 400 miles away, and preparing the crew to abandon the aircraft should fire occur. All went well, with no further attacks and apart from engine oil pressures lowering, we approached the coast. Reg stated that he doubted that we had enough fuel to cross the channel to Beachy Head, our point of entry to England. I then gave the crew the option of baling out - who then asked me what I proposed doing. I said that I had no intention of risking capture and would take a chance and carry on until our engines failed, ditching if necessary. To a man, they decided to take their chances with me, so we continued out over the sea. I called on the distress frequency with the standard message *"DARKY, DARKY, DARKY"* followed by the aircraft call sign, repeated three times and stating the emergency - short of fuel, badly damaged, request emergency landing at the nearest suitable airfield. The only reply was a lot of unintelligible whistles and squeaks. So I replied to the effect that, if they could hear me, help was urgent.

With that message all the searchlights on the coast lit and waved in one direction, which I followed, and in the distance saw three stationary lights in the form of a cone above an airfield. On our approach I checked the flaps, which seemed to be working and the crew plugged in the Aldis Signalling Lamp to check the state of the tyres. This was difficult as, being about a man's height in diameter and made of thick rubber, they could appear inflated even if punctured. However.as there was no apparent damage to the surface of the tyres visible from the side of the aircraft, I decided to make a wheels down landing straight ahead without first surveying the airfield layout. The airfield was RAF West Malling in Kent, occupied by night fighter squadrons, its grass surface reinforced by pierced steel planking. Parking the Stirling, which was dripping with fuel, well away from other aircraft and buildings, we made our way to the Station Intelligence Section to be de-briefed. On the way, Doug

McGurvey who was not known for passing cigarettes around, thought that our survival was an auspicious occasion to do this, but found that a bullet had slashed across his breast pocket, leaving a packet of 20 Players cigarettes in tatters - a lucky escape!

The Station Commander, Group Captain Haines, attended the de-briefing session and I renewed my acquaintance with him as he was an officer in No.600 Squadron at Manston in 1940 when I last saw him. De-briefing over and thinking that a fighter station would provide us with comfortable beds and good suppers, we started off for the Officers and Sergeants Mess but were sadly disillusioned as seeing an illuminated airfield About 40 or 50 Lancasters returning from another target and short of fuel, decided to land. The additional 350 bodies stretched the station organization to its limit and the rest of the night was spent on a passage floor. In the morning, the crew and I wandered over to our aircraft to inspect the damage and stopped counting holes on reaching 250! A sudden shout from Murph calling "Run like hell boys, they're all there" sent us running from the aircraft. It turned out that the 20001b HE bomb and six or seven cans of incendiary bombs were hung up in the bomb bay!! Apparently the A.A. shell burst had bent the bomb doors, preventing the bombing circuit to be made, though all the bombs in the wing cells had dropped. Later in the day an aircraft from our squadron picked us up, returning too late to be on the battle order for that night.

In December 1943, Stirling operations were still being scaled down and we only flew one operation- again to Kattegut on the 1st. As supernumerary, I carried F/Lt Jimmy Sharpe our Gunnery Leader. He had been badly burnt in a Wellington crash, returned to his squadron still in bandages - to be sent on sick leave, but due to a misunderstanding, was sent on operation the same day. He did not want to object - so went and was sent on sick leave the following day when the mistake was discovered. When completely healed, he was

posted to 214 Squadron and the mining op with me was his first op. The weather, as usual for mining, was poor and on the way over to Denmark, we dropped many leaflets in Danish sending Christmas Greetings and informing them of the progress of the war. We laid our mines without incident and rounding the northern tip of Denmark, set a course for base. During the return flight, Tommy Roberts was receiving messages diverting us, first to SW England, then to Anglesey, then Cumberland and it was obvious that most of England was going out in fog. Eventually we ended up heading for a small fighter airfield at Aclington in Northumberland and arrived to be stacked up with forty or fifty other Stirlings. Whilst circling for our turn to land, we could see the mist gradually encroaching over the Drem lighting system and kept hoping that when our turn came to land, visibility would be reasonable. The aircraft were being landed as quickly as possible by Flying Control and on the approach path I could see the aircraft in front almost at the touch down point. It was, however, undershooting and hit a farmhouse, blowing up and sending flames and smoke high into the air. Time was of the essence and we continued our letdown flying through the flames and smoke to land. I spared a thought for Jimmy Sharp. For the situation must have brought back memories of his previous crash. The remainder of the aircraft landed safely. We spent the rest of the night in an uncomfortably crowded flight mess. It was quite sight at Aclington the following morning to see all the bombers parked up nose to tail all around the perimeter track before we flew back to Chedborough.

December saw promotion to F/Lt and a move to RAF Downham Market with No operations until the 31st when a few aircraft were briefed to lay mines behind the island of Texel, one of the Frisian Islands in an anchorage favoured by German coastal convoys. As flak ships usually accompanied these convoys, none of us were looking forward to the flight. The weather was atrocious with heavy rain and mist and the cloud

base at 100ft. After briefing, the flights were postponed and we returned to our billets on standby, passing the sounds of New Year revelling in the N.A.A.F.I only to be recalled twice more before taking off at about 4am on New Years Day 1944. Taking our place in a cold aircraft running with condensation and with the rain beating on the fuselage did not improve our spirits. I took of on instruments and entered cloud almost immediately and headed for Holland at low level. Arriving over

the dropping zone (some bright wag had coded mine laying as gardening) . We sowed our mines using GEE to find our position as we were still in cloud at 600ft. Opposition was negligible and we assumed that if there were ships below us, the crews must have been celebrating the New Year too well. Turning homeward, the weather improved and we an landed safely as dawn was breaking. As it turned out, this was our last operation with Stirlings. Most of the other 3 Group Squadrons had now been supplied with Lancasters and we wondered why we had not received these lovely aeroplanes.

CHAPTER 9

NEW WINGS

Still wondering about our future, the Squadron moved to Sculthorpe near Fakenham early in January 1944 where three MK1 Fortresses appeared Ostensibly to be used for taxying practice and familiarization with the cockpit layout. The C.O. then sent me to 413 Squadron U.S.A.F. to obtain as much knowledge quickly on the Fortress Mk2- aircraft with which 214 Squadron was to be equipped. Arriving at Snetterton Heath in a Stirling caused a bit of a stir as it towered above the Fortresses! A couple of weeks with 413 Squadron and then 422 squadron at Chelverston, saw a return to Sculthorpe where several Mk2 a/c were engaged in converting the Squadron to these aircraft instructed by U.S.A.A.F. pilots. After a I hour dual with 1Lt Gregware U.S.AA.F. I soloed finding the aircraft easy to fly and almost devoid of unpleasant characteristics. If there was a criticism, it was that the turbo superchargers in the Pratt and Whiting engines were rather difficult to synchronise manually and the aircraft controls were very heavy at low altitudes but became light and responsive at the high altitudes we were to operate at. It was good to be reunited with my crew whose number had now swelled to nine due to acquiring an RCAF W/op.ag by the name of Rudy Lang who as fluent in the German language and additional two gunners, each of them characters 1, a waist gunner named Ken Bryant from Birmingham on his 2nd operational tour having survived 30 flights to the Ruhr and a crash during which time his Squadron of Wellingtons bombers was twice decimated. He seemed to have a calm temperament and his experience would be most useful. The second gunner was an Irish man from Dublin, W/0 Paddy Moore, also very experienced having survived in flying boats an only survivor

from an attack by Vichy French fighters in the Mediterranean and wounded by a JU 88 in the Bay of Biscay. He was a jolly effervescent chap who used to get very excited when a battle was imminent, very cool in action with acute night vision.

Our aircraft were being heavily modified having the chin turret removed and replaced by an H2S blister. The Navigators gun and the W/OP AG guns and the ball turret guns were also removed which left 6 .5 Browning machine guns for defence. 2 in the top turret operated by Doug McGarvey, 1 at each waist position served by John Lyle and Ken Bryant. And 2 .5 guns in the tail operated by Paddy Moore. Rudy Lang shared the wireless cabin with Tommy Roberts and operated jamming equipment and a rearward facing airborne interception radar to pickup any enemy fighters homing in on us from astern. The idea being that he would talk attacking fighters to within 600 yards then hand over to the gunners. On the 3rd March 1944 I was allocated an aircraft and we were attached to the Bomber Development Unit then operating from Newmarket Heath- a bumpy grass strip next to the race course - to carry out various tests on oxygen systems, flying clothing, a ball turret deflector, an intercommunication system and modifications to cool and shield the engine turbo superchargers which were fitted in the engine exhaust pipes and glowed like four white hot eyes at night. The development flight operated various aircraft including a Lancaster, Beaufighter and Proctor, which I flew at times. The Proctor, a small single cabin aircraft used for communications, was easy to master, so was the Lancaster as there was no dual control I had a flight as passenger in the Lancaster and then after being tested by the Flight Commander, Squadron Leader Sutton, on emergency drills and the fuel and hydraulic systems, was authorized to fly on several test flights. The Beaufighter, a twin engined night fighter, was a different proposition altogether.

After being tested on the different aircraft systems and flying a circuit of the airfield standing behind the pilot, F/O Walker, the Flight Commander allowing for my experience as a flying instructor, considered it safe enough to authorize me to fly it. On my initial flight, Reg Sainsbury always looking for a new experience came with me standing on the entry hatch and peering over my shoulder. Taking off was smooth enough until I reduced engine power for the climb when the aircraft became very nose heavy, (of which I had not been warned) and dived ground wards. The fore and aft trimming wheel easily corrected this but by the time we had reached cruising height I'd flown off the map. Turning on a reciprocal heading, I eventually found the airfield and cruised around for a while, getting used to the speed and flying attitude, then decided to try a landing. Being unused to the aircraft's Characteristics, I decided to fly it onto the ground just above the point of stall then close the throttles when the wheels were firmly on the ground. All went well, the wheels kissed the grass traveling fairly fast, I closed the throttles to ease the tail down but then hit bump, which threw the aircraft about 40ft into the air, and the starboard wing dropped what seemed like 5 degree from the horizontal, the start of an incipient spin. It must have been instinctive reaction from my instructing days because I applied full power and full port rudder. The aircraft just clearing the ground and climbed away and at an angle of about 130 degrees from the direction of the landing run. Circling the airfield to regain composure I could see many faces gazing skywards waiting to see what the next attempt at landing would be like. Learning from the previous mistake, the next landing was normal and I flew the Beaufighter several times after that without any problems.

Flying Fortress II G

CHAPTER 10

CONFOUND & DESTROY

Exhaust trials from RAF Witering were abandoned when the Mosquito fighters we were liaising with were vectored onto several German intruder aircraft and we returned to Sculthorpe finding the squadron now allocated to No.100 Group Bomber Command. Our aircraft were now fitted with many radio and radar jamming devices as 100 Group was expanded to combat German night fighter defences. The group was equipped with several types of aircraft Stirlings, Halifax, Wellington and several squadrons of Mosquito night fighters in addition to our Fortresses. Stirlings were equipped with MANDRELL equipment to jam the German FREYA long-range radar to deny the enemy early warning of impending attacks. The Halifax and Wellingtons were used to interrogate enemy radio and radar transmissions, the Fortresses to jam these equipment's and the Mosquitos to attack enemy night fighter airfields and to intercept enemy fighters over their assembly beacons. By this means it was hoped to reduce Bomber Command casualties and turned out to be very successful!

214 Squadron had several roles to play during the next 12 months, Jamming early warning radar, German W/F radar, R/T transmissions, searchlight and anti aircraft flack. Mounting spoof attacks to draw the enemy fighters away from the main bomber force and attempting to jam V2 rocket guidance systems. Carrying out these duties saw operational flights mounted - MONTZEN, SOMAIN and GENVILLIERS, the Renault works near Paris. Then early In May came another move of the squadron to the airfield of Culton near the town of Aylsham and about

12 miles north of Norwich. Our Mess and billets were in and around the grounds of SICKLING HALL, a beautiful old mansion surrounded by a dry moat now full of roses, with a lake and fine gardens - by far the most pleasant place we had lived in for the past nine months. Reg, Paddy Moore, Doug McGarvey, Tommy Roberts and Johny Ryall, the NCO's in the crew had, over the past few months, been commissioned in the rank of Pilot Officers, so we were an unusual crew - all commissioned officers and on the move to Oulton. George Wright the elder (there was another George Wright pilot!) allocated us a nissan hut in which we all shared and which I found very useful in keeping an eye over the health and general well being of the crew. Murph promptly named the hut NIGUNAK, which he assured us was 'Happy Home' in the MICMAC Indian language, and we shared it amicably over the next seven months.

It was a strange life to lead- swimming in the lake on sunny afternoons, cross country running for exercise, searchlight affiliation gunnery practice in the Wash and fighter affiliation with the Group's Mosquitos to practice the gunner's patter. And practice evasive action, then be precipitated into nightmarish nights of flack and fighters returning in the dawn unscathed where the grass seemed greener, birds singing more sweetly and the smell of the countryside intense. I found that the best way to cope was to almost live two lives- one with the squadron except for an hour to write to and think of Jeanne and then endeavour to forget it for one week in six at Jeanne's home that, because of the precarious existence, bomber crews were allowed.

Operational flights continued to mount – BRUNSWICK, VELENCIENNES, D'JON, then on the beginning of a weeks leave on the 8th July 1944, Jeanne gave birth to our first daughter, named Jeanne and we were fortunate to have one week together after the birth, we always squeezed the last minute of leave together and once

narrowly caught the train at Liverpool Lime Street, kissing Jeanne goodbye on the run, squeezing through the platform gates as they clanged shut, and sprinting after the guards van as the train was pulling out, to the encouraging shouts of some soldiers and sailors hanging out of the vans windows. I slung my parachute bag through the last window, grabbed a couple of helping hands and was dragged aboard to accompanying cheers.

Back at the airfield, life continued as our operations mounted - GELSENKIRCHEN, COURTRAI, SCHOWEN, FERNFEY (V1launch sites) CONTER MEASURES WITH THE MANDREL SCREEN, STER IDE, RUSSELHEIM, A WINDOW DECOY ATTACK ON HELIOGPLAND and on September 10" a Big Ben patrol to endeavour to jam guidance systems after the first V2 had landed in London. In September 1944, the first V2 Rocket hit London. Earlier in the year, a test rocket fired from Peenamunde on the Baltic Coast went astray and landed in Sweden. The remains were obtained by Great Britain and sent to the Royal Radar Establishment in Great Malvern. From examination of the parts the Boffins decided that it was electronically controlled and devised jamming equipment to foil the guidance system. The equipment was hand built and installed in five of the Squadrons aircraft as it became available. This action took place several weeks before September 1944 and aircrews placed on 24hrs standby. I believe I was on standby when the first rocket fell and we were ordered to a patrol line off the Hague at 25,000' for a four hour patrol, endeavoring to interrogate V2 guidance signals and jam them. As this area was in enemy controlled airspace, we were informed that two Mosquito fighters would rendezvous with us at first light to give us top cover in case of air attack. Dawn broke and we seemed suspended in a clear blue sky in full view of the enemy coast with no sign of the Mosquito &, or fortunately, enemy aircraft. We continued with the patrol unmolested until relieved by the next patrol

aircraft. Our efforts to jam the rockets were fruitless as the guidance system had probably been changed and it was not until several years after the war in the bar of the Officers Mess and listening to a chap telling the story about how one morning during the war he was sent out to provide an escort for a Fortress patrolling the enemy coast and that he and a companion were sent to the wrong co-ordinates for the rendezvous, that the mystery of the missing protection was solved. The chap telling the story was most amused wondering what the reaction of the Fortress crews had been when the protection failed to turn up. I enlightened him and took the smile off his face.

It was then back to crew training and operations supporting the main bomber force i.e. acting as decoys to draw off the enemy fighters from the main force. Five or six aircraft loaded with window strips taking off before the main force accomplished this. At a given time, we would commence dropping window and an organized breakdown would occur as part of the MANDRELL jamming screen. This allowed the enemy to take several plots from their long range FREYA system before jamming recommenced.

Some of the aircraft would be spaced out in the main bomber streams jamming enemy searchlight and gun laying radar, en route to, in the target areas and on the homeward journey, forming a screen behind the retreating bombers and endeavoring to protect stragglers and damaged aircraft by jamming the German night fighter radar, others would join the MANDREL aircraft, jamming the German long range FREY System. Our activities lowered the bomber casualty rate to such an extent that in 1945, the majority of the enemy night fighter force who had infiltrated the main bomber streams attacked our Group Area in Norfolk. Continuing these duties, we flew to KARLSRUHR, NUREMBURG, FRANKFURT, COLOGNE (twice) BOCHAM. KOBLENZ, DUISBERG and MUNICH.

Thinking that they had a stroke of luck, the German fighter controllers would commence moving their aircraft towards the threatened area as, because of the window dropping, our five aircraft would be plotted as several hundred. We would continue toward a likely target and sometimes a couple of target marking flares would be dropped to heighten the deception. In the meantime, the main bomber force would break through the jamming, heading to a completely different area to out decoy raid. By this means it was hoped the enemy fighters, being committed to the decoys, would have to land and refuel before they could intercept the main bomber force. By the time this had occurred, the main raids would have taken place and the bombers would be well on their way home. By this time we were very experienced and working like a well-oiled machine. If we were attacked by fighters I always had a mental picture from the gunners patter of what was happening astern and could take appropriate avoiding action.

Our .5 Browning machine guns also acting as a useful deterrent to attack. The gunners lot was not an envious one and, as Perspex windows in the gun positions were removed to aid night vision, they would be subjected to a 200knot slipstream at temperatures of -40 degrees. This could be eased to a certain extent by heated clothing, including slippers, gloves and oxygen mask and they would treat cheeks, noses, chins and hands with daily doses of lanolin-consequently, no-one suffered from frostbite.

On one flight to Cologne, over the target, I was engaged in showing a new arrival to the Squadron how the raid was developing and how target markers were being used when the top gunner, Doug McGarvie called *'Hi Skip, look up above'*. There about 30 feet overhead was a Lancaster with its bomb doors open and as I slid our aircraft to one side, an 8,000lb bomb tumbled from the Lanc, narrowly missing our starboard wingtip!

With winter approaching Murph came into his own as being at one time a lumberjack, he was most useful during our forays into a nearby wood and collecting logs to back up our meagre coal ration to heat the hut. He also at this time bought the complete works of Shakespeare and spent many off duty hours absorbed in his enjoyment of the book and sometimes laughing aloud, shaking his head and exclaiming, *'Golly Skip, old Shakespeare must have been quite a boy, quite a boy'* At this time, Murph was suffering from stomach ulcers but insisted on staying with us until our operational tour was completed.

CHAPTER 11

FINAL OPERATION

Our last operation arrived on the 26th November 1944. I had been promoted to Squadron Leader in September as Officer Commanding A Flight and as such, was briefing officer on the night of the 26th. This entailed duty in the intelligence section in the morning when the targets for the night and the routes came through. I was then responsible for making out the battle order and allocating crews to support the various targets. On the 26th, there were several targets to support with an endurance of about 3½ to 4hrs. The squadron was fortunate in supporting all the targets as the crews could be allocated according to their experience. To our crew, I allocated a target in the RHUR. Secrecy was always paramount before an operation and targets were never disclosed until operational briefings and the station was closed to outgoing traffic.

Being our last trip, the crew wanted to know where we were going that night and all I could tell them was that we should be in bed AM on the 27th. Then just before briefing was due, the target was changed to Munich - about a ten-hour flight on which I had to appoint the most experienced crews, including mine! Some days previously, Munich had been unsuccessfully attacked by the Middle East Air Force. On the 25th, 5GP of Bomber Command were allocated to this target. 200 aircraft accompanied by aircraft from100GP. Following my briefing of the Battle Order Crews, my crew and I took off in support of SGP. Our route lay across France around to the south of Switzerland to northern Italy with a turning point on Lake Como then north across the Bremer Pass to Munich, then west back to England. By this means it was hoped that the enemy would think that it was another attack by the Middle East Air

Force and vector the night fighters south of Munich to intercept. The ploy worked admirably and the raid was completed without loss. Flying round the Alps was a wonderful sight in the moonlight and seeing all the Swiss towns and villages sparkling with lights after years of the blackout in England. It reminded me of Christmases gone by.

December 1944 - two weeks end of tour leave and the first Christmas spent with family in five years of war, endeavouring to relax and think of the future with hope of living with Jeanne and baby Jeanne - which would depend on my next posting. On returning to the squadron, a signal awaited posting me to HQ 100 Group Bomber Command as Squadron Leader 'Ops", on the planning staff at Bytaugh Hall, a country house taken over by the RAF. It was situated near the Norfolk village of Bawdeswell and Swannington Airfield where the Groups communication aircraft were housed. Under my Command were Watch Keepers, Flying Control Officers and a Telephone Exchange. My duties included attending operational briefings, dissemination of operational information to Group Airfields, maintaining an up to date wall map including inner artillery zones which were continually springing up as the allies advanced in Europe, compiling a summary before each bomber raid of 100 Group Support to the Bomber Groups and transmitting this information to the various groups (Nos. 1,3,4,5,6 and 8) in time for crew briefings. Also liaising with Command HQ regarding sudden diversions of aircraft to 100 Group Area when operations were taking place and liaising with the Air Sea Rescue Organization.

My immediate CO was W/C Willy TATE who led the formation, which sank the 'Tirpitz'. The Accidents Officer was one of the Dam Busters, S/L. Micky MARTIN. Life was hectic but in my free time I found a billet near the HQ to live out (unofficially). It was on a smallholding of about 25 acres owned and managed by a very large lady named Miss Eglington. She was a member of a family who fanned a large acreage in

the local area. Single handily she kept a herd of milking goats, about 600 White Wyandot hens, grew a field of sugar beet and all her own vegetables. We lived as family with Miss Eglington and a little Uruguayan widow and her small daughter. The widow's husband, a member of the Libby family, had come over to England, joined the RAF and was killed flying in Blenheim bombers with No 2 Group which operated in the Norfolk area for a while.

The winter of 1944/1945 was very cold with a lot of snow and my journey from the Wirral to Bawdeswell with the family was a typical wartime one. It should have started with a taxi ride to West Kirby railway station. The taxi did not turn up. So it was a rush on foot with luggage and a loaded pram topped by Jeanne in a carrycot. The local train ran to Liverpool Central station, a quarter a mile walk saw us theat Liverpool Street Station. The next part of the journey to Foulshan Norfolk was by changing trains at Rugby and Peterborough. The first hiccough was to find that a further timetable alteration had been made by inserting a change at Stafford. Having experienced the chaotic rail system for a year and a half, I had plastered the pram (which contained most of the baby's gear) with many prominent labels to ensure that no mistake in offloading the pram at Rugby and Peterborough occurred. The change at Safford appeared to go smoothly and there was no sign of the pram being offloaded. On arriving at Rugby I rushed to the guards van to possess the pram, which was nowhere to be found. Enquiries at the Lost Property Office caused us to miss our connection to Peterborough but with little cause to concern as the Peterborough connection started its journey around Norfolk from a siding and was always an hour to one and a half hours late when I had used it several times over the past year. Arriving at Peterborough we went to the siding only to be confronted by a set of empty rails! For the first time in 18 months, our connection had departed on time.

It was snowing, dark and very cold, we were in a strange town where all the hotels were full to overflowing and we were running out of nappies for the baby. In desperation we approached a Rail Traffic Foreman for information on local accommodation. He was a delightful chap and took us into the Traffic Foremans Office where a roaring fire was burning; one of the other railway men present dusted off the only chair with a piece of old sacking and settled Jeanne and the baby by the fire with a steaming mug of tea. The Forman said that it was unlikely that there would be any accommodation left in Peterborough but a spare bedroom was available at his home and that if I went to the Railway men's Club where his wife had organized a whist Drive, we could have the room for the night if she agreed. I did and the charming lady that I met acquiesced. I cannot remember how we all arrived at the little terraced house but the front door opened directly onto the living room where everything seemed to sparkle. A glowing fire was burning in the grate and a black and white spaniel dog was stretched out on the rug in front of it. We were made more than welcome, provided with supper and breakfast in the morning (out of their wartime rations) and the baby's nappies were washed and dried - this by a couple whose only son was a prisoner of war in Japanese hands. Our journey continued in the morning to Foulsham where we were met by a colleague with a car and so to Miss Eglingtons farmhouse.

END

Berlin Airlift – Avro York 1c

CHAPTER 12

INCIDENT SUMMARIES

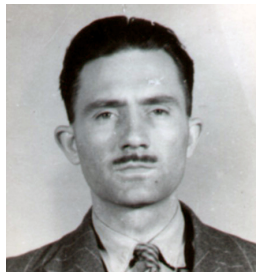
YEAR	LOCATION / AREA	DETAIL	A/C | ROLE
1940	MANSTON KENT - 600 CITY OF LONDON SQD.	Following initial strike (over 200 bombs on A/F). Early morning strafe by at least 2 SQDNs of ME 109's - Caught on open A/F.	L.A.C / MECH
1940	SPITTLEGATE (GRANTHAM) LINCS - PILOT TRAINING.	Destruction of living quarters by JU88 Intruder. 2 days after moving into new accommodation. F.T.S	ANSON I's. LAC PILOT
1941	SPITTLEGATE (GRANTHAM) LINCS - PILOT TRAINING.	German intruder problems when learning to fly by night in black out. F.T.S	ANSON I's. LAC PILOT
1941	NO.2 C.F.S CRANWELL (FULBECK)	Disorientation in blackout when N/F Training.	AIRSPEED OXFORD SGT/PILOT
1941	NO.6 S.F.T.S LITTLE RISSINGTON	Crash when being transported by SGT Robinson (Robby) in an unstable A/C in heavy rain.	AIRSPEED OXFORD SGT/PILOT FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1941	S.S HEKTORIA (NORWEGIAN WHALING FACTORY)	14 days in the north Atlantic. Loose sea mine drifts by vessel.	SGT PILOT FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1941	DARTMOUTH - NOVA SCOTIA	Air test prior to delivery flight. Incorrectly adjusted flying controls.	AIRSPEED OXFORD SGT/PILOT FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1941	DARTMOUTH - NOVA SCOTIA to MONTREAL	Delivery flight. No maps or radio. Following lockheed 10 (RCAF) through cloud filled valleys. (USA-Maine appalachian MTS yp to 6000).	AIRSPEED OXFORD SGT/PILOT FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1941	SOUIX LOOKOUT to WINNIPEG (STEVENS FIELD)	Night flight with no maps or radio. Malfunctioning controls, short of fuel, separated from formation - missed crashed A/C on runway when landing (by about 12 inches).	AIRSPEED OXFORD SGT/PILOT FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1942	RAPID CITY - MANITOBA	Blind landing in thick fog.	ANSON I's. F/O FLYING INSTRUCTOR

YEAR	LOCATION / AREA	DETAIL	A/C | ROLE
1942	OPERATION MONTLUCON - FRANCE	Met main bomber force head on over Baie De La Seine.	STIRLING I BOMBER PILOT F/O
1943	NEWMARKET HEATH	Emergency diversion to Newmarket due to JU88 intruder action (Hannover) scattering anti-personnel bombs at Chedurgh - (F/SGT Sellars). Ran out of fuel after landing.	STIRLING III 2ND PILOT
1943	OPERATION - MANNHEIM	Deadly game with JU88 N/F over English channel. Returning from Mannheim (Nervous crew on 26th OP). Confirmed kill.	STIRLING III 2ND PILOT
1943	N/A	Crumbling elevator control pulleys when air testing (twice).	STIRLING III BOMBER PILOT F/O
1943	N/A	Shaky do taking off with 6x1500 sea mines. Hot day - X wind - Old A/C - Short runway.	STIRLING I BOMBER PILOT F/O
1943	RAF ACKLINGTON NORTHUMBERLAND.	Late diversion of 90 A/C to RAF Acklington (small fighter A/F all other UK Airfields in fog). Returning from mine laying in Skagerrak. A/C ahead hit farmhouse on approach and blew up. Flew through flames to land.	STIRLING III BOMBER PILOT F/O
1943	OPERATION - LUDWIGSHAFEN	Used up all ammo in rear turret in combat with JU88 N/F on way to Ludwigshafen. Attacked by 4 FW 109's over target. Hit by flak and fighters over target. All fuel tanks holed. Bomb doors bent. 1x2000LB HE + 4 can incendiaries hung up. Emergency landing west Malling Kent. 250+ holes in A/C.	STIRLING III BOMBER PILOT F/O
1943	OPERATION - FRANKFURT	Flew through showers of bombs (twice). A/C damaged.	STIRLING III BOMBER PILOT F/O
1944	NEWMARKET HEATH	Shaky landing on first flight at bomber development unit.	BEAUFIGHTER I PILOT

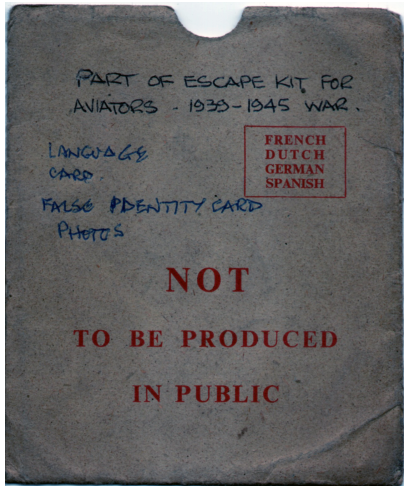
YEAR	LOCATION / AREA	DETAIL	A/C | ROLE
1944	N/A	Lane patrol over Dutch coast. Mosquito top cover briefed to wrong rendezvous point.	FORTRESS II G PILOT RADAR/COUNTERMEASURES
1944	OPERATION - COLOGNE	Just missed by 8000 LB bomb over cologne.	FORTRESS II G PILOT RADAR/COUNTERMEASURES
1944	N/A	Dinghy broke loose during fighter affiliation and wrapped around elevators and tail plane.	FORTRESS II G PILOT RADAR/COUNTERMEASURES
1945	KARACHI TO CAIRO	Taken ill over Arabian desert. Landed at Cairo West (somehow).	YORK 1c TRANSPORT PILOT
1946	HABBANIYAH	Caught out in bad weather - Night. Thunderstorms, static - no diversion. Habbaniya near Baghdad.	YORK 1c TRANSPORT PILOT
1946	HABBANIYAH	Caught out in bad weather Cairo West - Habbaniyah. No diversion blinded by flares on approach.	YORK 1c TRANSPORT PILOT
1946	MALTA	Headwinds and sandstorms flying between Habbaniyah and Malta. Benina (Libya) only diversion - 2 mls clear of rising sand.	YORK 1c TRANSPORT PILOT
1948	BERLIN	Icing conditions during Berlin Airlift.	YORK 1c TRANSPORT PILOT
1950	RAF TERN HILL	Spun from 10,000' to 800' when checking pupils spin recovery.	PERCIVAL PRENTICE FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1951	RAF TERN HILL	Near (6 inch) collision in cloud over main Lorenz beacon (Lorenz blind approach system) - Back beam landing. Instructors I/F practice (Jack Mansfield).	PERCIVAL PRENTICE FLYING INSTRUCTOR
1952	N/A	Tangle with LT. Ghurka Rifles when jump simultaneous.	HASTINGS A/C PARACHUTIST

APPENDIX

Thosands of leaflets distributed over Denmark in December 1943 by Sterling bombers enroute to sow mines in the Kattagat (3 shot down)

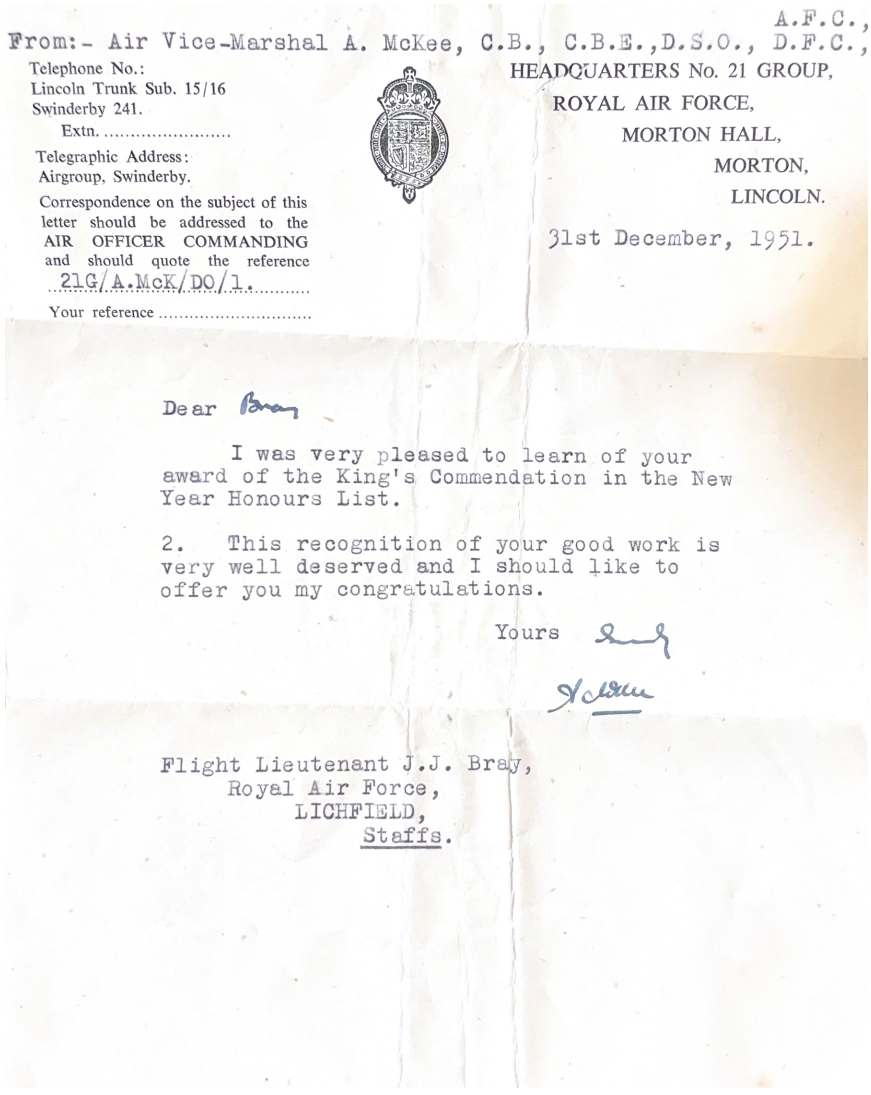


False identify cards & photos



Part of escape kit issued to aviators 1939 - 1945

Language cards



From:- Air Vice-Marshal A. McKee, C.B., C.B.E., D.S.O., D.F.C., A.F.C.,

Telephone No.:
Lincoln Trunk Sub. 15/16
Swinderby 241.
Extn. .....

Telegraphic Address:
Airgroup, Swinderby.

Correspondence on the subject of this letter should be addressed to the AIR OFFICER COMMANDING and should quote the reference
21G/A.McK/DO/1.

Your reference .....

HEADQUARTERS No. 21 GROUP,
ROYAL AIR FORCE,
MORTON HALL,
MORTON,
LINCOLN.

31st December, 1951.

Dear Bray

I was very pleased to learn of your award of the King's Commendation in the New Year Honours List.

2. This recognition of your good work is very well deserved and I should like to offer you my congratulations.

Yours

Flight Lieutenant J.J. Bray,
Royal Air Force,
LICHFIELD,
Staffs.

King's Commendation

Russian Language cards issued during the Berlin Airlift 1948.

About the Author

Squadron Leader J J (Jeff) Bray DFC served in the Royal Airforce between 1936 and 1956.

During World War two he flew both Stirlings and Flying Fortresses within 100 Group and No. 214 (Federated Malay States) Squadron. Completing 26 operational take-offs in fortresses alone.

He lived to the age of 90 with his wife Jeanne and two daughters in the village of East Chinnock.