

19th Day. Wednesday. 4th June (Nicosia - Agir - Fayid)

Nicosia - Agir - Fayid legs were carried out without further trouble, final landing time at Fayid being 1700 hours.

20th Day. Thursday. 5th June. (Fayid)

I reported the arrival of four Proctors to the Group Captain C.T.O. No. 205 Group, Fayid, who promptly informed me that they were already above their establishment, and that the Proctors would be placed in storage. I also informed the C.T.O. of the aircraft scattered along the route and of the arrangements made to get them to Fayid.

21st Day. Friday. 6th June. (Fayid)

Undermentioned Officers and N.C.O's of No. 1. F.U. left by Transport Command York aircraft at 0800 hours this morning for Lynham.

F/O Tucker.
F/O Morgan.
F/S Parsons.

F/O Taylor.
F/S Stagg.

Unofficial

I reported to the Group Captain Commanding No. 205 Group the next morning only to be informed that the Proctors were no longer required and they would be housed in a hangar until someone decided what to do with them. What a waste of our effort and the taxpayers' money I say this with tongue in cheek - we had enjoyed a marvellous Cooks' tour through Europe.

I felt a little sorry for the four Proctor pilots and one navigator who were bundled onto a transport plane the next morning and sent back to England.

RECOMMENDATIONS.

Use of 100 Oct. fuel.

Due to the availability of 100 oct. fuel only at numerous stops on route, some of the legs, including long sea crossings, were made extremely hazardous owing to plug trouble. Every time 100 oct. fuel was used numerous plug changes had to be made. We were extremely fortunate in as much that we had no complete engine failures, but should a similar convoy be attempted, from experience gained, I could ^{not} vouch for the safety of same.

Unserviceability of Proctor Aircraft.

(a) After Air testing his Proctor at Calato, F/O Tucker reported that he took an excessively long take off run and that when airborne only just maintained height with full throttle.

On checking the engine it was found that one of the contacts in the distributor was completely rusted over. This may or may not have caused the lack of power but obviously the aircraft was in this condition when it left Pershore.

(b) Whilst flying at 4,000' over the Adriatic W/O Darton reported complete engine failure. He promptly made towards a long stretch of sandy beach, at 300' his engine picked up and he was able to make destination. Previous to this, W/O Darton had experienced petrol pipe blockage on two different occasions. At Hassini a major petrol feed fault was indicated and the A/C was left there to undergo a petrol feed line inspection.

Proctor Commitment to Fayid.

On interviewing the Group Captain C.T.O. at Fayid I was informed that the Proctor Communications Flights at both Fayid and Shallufa had more than their complement of aircraft. Apparently the same day the convoy arrived at Fayid a conference had been called by the C.T.O. to discuss the possibilities of disposing of surplus Proctors. ~~The~~ four Proctors which arrived in convoy at Fayid were eventually put into No. 137. M.U. as no use could be found for them. During the course of my conversation with the C.T.O. I was informed that this commitment of Proctors was nine months behind schedule.

Accommodation at Bari.

The British Consul at Bari informed me that Air Ministry are

From:- F/Lt. Jones. E. L.
To:- W/C. Abrahams. O.C. Flying. No.1. F.U. Pershore.
Subject:- Proctor Convoy. Pershore-Fayid.
Date:- 10th. July. 1947.

Sir,

I have the honour to submit to you my report on the above mentioned subject.

Out of the eight Proctor aircraft which originally took off from Pershore on the 17th. May only four eventually reached their destination under my supervision. The remaining four - having gone unserviceable on route had to be left behind for servicing. These four aircraft along with their respective mechanical faults are recorded in tabulated form beneath:-

Proctor 224. P ll. Livingstone. (U/S Rome)	Suspected twisted fuselage. Unable to continue further.
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Proctor 201. P ll. Wattret.	Engine missing badly.
Proctor 601. P ll. Darton. (Both U/S Athens.)	Petrol Feed Lines unserviceable.

The Wing Commander O/C Flying assumed responsibility for these two aircraft. In spite of repeated signals sent by myself to Hassini (Athens) Airport, questioning serviceability of these aircraft no reply was received.

Proctor 590. P ll. Mackensie.	No. 6 Cylinder Head gasket blown. Hassini was requested by signal to send servicing party. As, owing to communications, there was no possibility of a reply for at least three days the convoy proceeded to Nicosia.
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As recorded above the W/C. Flying, Hassini assumed responsibility for aircraft left on his unit. When these aircraft became serviceable an Anson would be provided as an escort to Nicosia. From Nicosia aircraft are constantly flying to Fayid via Lydda, one of these would be detailed to escort the Proctors over the last lap of the trip. I had no further news of this plan as no replies were forthcoming to my repeated signals.

Bari airport to the Middle East. Bari airport is essentially a 'night-stop' aerodrome due to its geographical position and as there is no accommodation available on the unit itself, accommodation has to be found in the town of Bari. This, naturally is the British Consul responsibility, but on sending the Hotel receipts to Air Ministry for cash settlement he has received replies to the effect that no Air Force personnel use Bari Airport therefore no repayment can be made in lieu of hotel expenses. The British Consul is naturally worried about this situation and would like the matter cleared up with Air Ministry.

I have the honour to be,

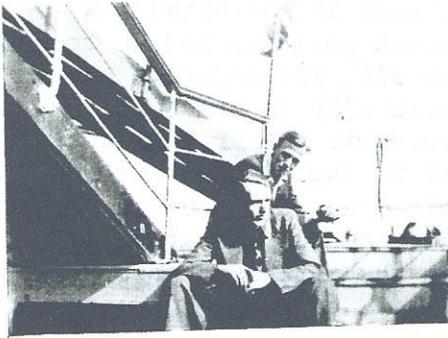
Sir,

Your obedient servant,

.....F/L.

Attached:-

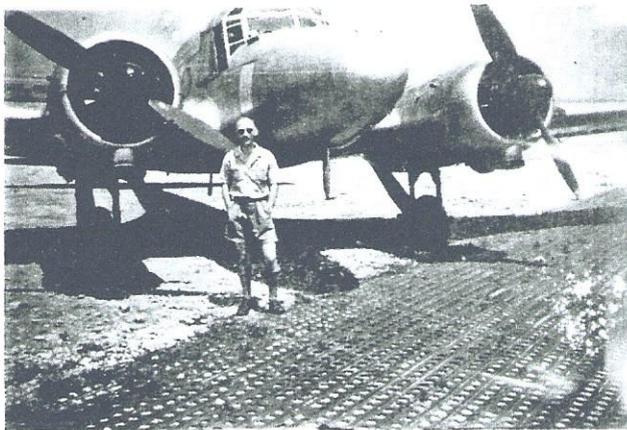
Petrol Invoices.
Complete Diary of Trip.



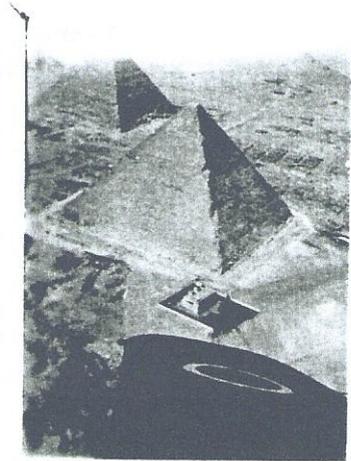
On the boat to Capri



Jack with Italian transport plane at Lecce airfield



Jack with Anson TX 222 at Mersa Matruh airfield North Africa



Our only view of the Pyramids.

With the Officer i/c stores at Cagliari, Sardinia.



our own route back and we had a comfortable mini air liner in which to do it. Did Royal Air Force officers ever find themselves in a more favourable position?

Fayid is on the shore of the Great Bitter Lakes which form part of the Suez Canal complex. Rumour had it that they were aptly named considering the amount of effluent which flowed into them. About ten miles to the north was the town of Ismailiya which sported a fine Officers' club and sixty odd miles to the south west was the city of Cairo. We didn't get to Cairo but we did get to the Officers' Club. We spent three full days in Egypt savouring the local tastes and smells. I don't recall where we were billeted but it might well have been under canvas because I do remember someone having £50 stolen from their belongings in a tent. £50 was a fortune in those days, and one could readily lose this amount, quite legitimately, pitting one's wits against the three card tricksters who operated on the streets of Egypt.

The choice of route back to England was our own. We didn't want to return the same way as we came so there was only one other way, back along the north coast of Africa.

Place names along this route were made famous by the fluctuating Desert War which had raged a few years previously culminating in the great Allied victory at El Alamein. The range of the Anson could have carried us over this area but we were keen to land and at least be able to say that we had visited famous places, such as, Mersa Matruh and El Adem. Jack found navigating over the desert interesting. No roads or railways to pin point, only dried out water courses (wadis) and these were the only landmarks visible for miles on end.

We stayed at El Adem overnight and the next day we were en route to Malta stopping only at Benina in Cyrenaica to refuel for the long sea crossing.

We landed at Luqa airport in Malta 3 hrs 40 mins later and not without some relief. Over the sea we had developed engine trouble, not sufficient to shut the engine down but sufficient to keep us in Malta for 17 days waiting for spares to be flown out from England.

Initially, we enjoyed this unscheduled stop on a sunny island set in the blue Mediterranean Sea but it was June and it was hot. At the end of our stay we were only too pleased to get airborne and head north to cooler climes.

We spent those 17 days at an Officers' 'rest centre' at St. Paul's Bay a few miles to the north of the capital city Valletta. The main pastimes were drinking John Collins' (a mix of gin, vermouth and other items), getting sun burnt, watching a certain officer's wife 'skinny' diving from a diving platform which was unfortunately too far in the distance, occasional trips into Valletta where curiosity took us to the 'Gut' - the famous Maltese 'red light' district and even less occasional visits or phone calls to the airport to find out if our spares had arrived from England.

One of the 'inmates' at St. Paul's Bay must have been drinking far too many 'Tom Collins'. He was the only person I have seen suffering from a

genuine case of DT's. He spent most of his time beating imaginary spiders from his chest. Very unpleasant for him, poor chap.

Talking of sun burn I also became a 'poor chap'. Just off the coast at St. Paul's Bay was a small island on which St. Paul was supposed to have landed when spreading Christianity throughout Europe. One day Jack & I acquired a canoe from somewhere and decided to paddle out to the island, a distance of a mile or so. Being unfamiliar with heat of that intensity I was stripped to the waist. A huge blister developed across my back and for many days life was extremely uncomfortable. Barbara now tells me that if this had occurred in the Navy I would have been on a charge for personal neglect. I don't recall Jack suffering in the same way he obviously had more sense.

One other notable event occurred in Malta. I learnt to float on water without sinking. Jack had given himself the task of teaching me to swim. I was supposed to have been able to swim right back in the days of the Initial Training Wing but somehow I had always managed to 'skive' off swimming parades. When on operations Navigator Ken had always said he would look after me if we ditched in the North Sea. He was a strong swimmer and in my innocence I believed him. So Jack gave up the swimming bit and just settled for getting me to float.

The spares arrived and the engine repaired and we were airborne from Malta on the 26th. June. This stage would take us to Elmas which was the airport for Cagliari, the capital city of Sardinia. We arrived there as the RAF were pulling out. The officer in charge was also the Stores Officer who had been left behind to dispose of all remaining food stuffs. I suppose he had to account for these, never-the-less we left with quite a number crates of corn beef and butter etc. These items were still in short supply back home as the nation was still on ration books. Of this shipment some would be for the Officers' Mess at Hendon, some for us and at least a couple of dozen tins of corned beef for the Stores Officer's mother in Ireland (to be delivered when next we flew to Aldergrove, the airfield for Belfast). Quite a few months later I did fly to Aldergrove but I'm afraid the old lady never did get her corned beef. It's funny how one always remembers little things like this. Conscience I suppose.

The next day we reached Buc airfield, Paris after refuelling at Istres in southern France. 6¼ total flying hours in one day. Our longest day's flying on this trip to date.

At Buc we were approached by a certain S/Ldr. Woolley who wanted to hitch a ride to Hendon. If I remember correctly the fare was a bottle of Scotch. The customs at Hendon were quite lenient with the Met. Comm. pilots but when they found a Luger pistol, a souvenir, in the S/Ldr's luggage they took him to task. I did hear later that he had been threatened with a Court Martial but whether or not this ever took place I wouldn't know. No problem with our food, customs accepted a few cans of corned beef and the rest was OK.

As we flew back over the English Channel we noticed a huge black cloud

just inland from the south coast. England had been experiencing a heat wave almost from the moment we left for Egypt and this heat wave ended on the very day we arrived home.

The date was June 30th. We had been away for six weeks. For us it had been a memorable journey. I wonder what we would have thought had we known that a present-day jet would be able to do the same journey in eight hours.

So we settled down to the more mundane routine flying out of Hendon. My time in the Royal Air Force was slowly running out but there were still a few items of interest which I think are worth recording.

When in Egypt I bought a pair of 'brothel creepers' - thick rubber soled shoes. Parades were becoming more frequent at this time, in line with a general tightening up of discipline. No more silk scarves or flying boots in the Mess. On our return Hendon held one of these parades with Group Captain Rodgers himself officiating. He spotted my 'creepers', and although I still had my 'excused boots' chit he sent me off parade to change into some decent shoes immediately. I believe it was on this particular parade he was also checking wire stiffeners in the officers' hats. I doubt if anyone had bothered with them so it was a question of putting them back into the hats - without delay. Aircrew discipline in the air was always quite strict but on the ground it was somewhat lax and it was obvious that these parades were an attempt to get it back to peace time standards. It was this tightening up of discipline which got me thinking about that four year Extension of Service I had applied for and also the possibility of a Permanent Commission. I dearly wanted to continue flying but might it not be better in some other sphere other than the RAF? Also there was Sylvia and Keith to consider. To be fair to Sylvia she had never pressurised me to do this or that particular thing but would she really want a life spent in 'married patches'? Obviously there was much to think about.

We were still ferrying RAF and Army personnel around Europe, some of them of high rank. One such person was 'Blood and Guts' Staton, an Air Commodore at the time but who went on to higher things. Rumour had it that he had shot his way out of a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp with two revolvers blazing. A lovely but unlikely story only to be believed by romantics. We were flying him to Marham in Norfolk when he asked if he could fly the aircraft. We were over full cloud cover (10/10ths) but that didn't stop me handing over the controls to him. However, weather reports were coming in of a very low cloud base so when it was time to go through the stuff I exercised my rights as Captain, tapped him on the shoulder and told him I would now take over. He may have shot his way out of a prison camp but that didn't mean he could drop a plane down through dense cloud. It was the only time in the RAF when I had to exercise the Captain's privilege over a much more senior officer than myself.

On checking my Log Book I discover that one trip I want to include in this record took place before I went to Egypt, so perhaps you won't mind if I retrace

my steps.

Myself and a Flying Officer Mills were detailed to form a team to provide information regarding a Harvard crash in Scotland and this information would be used in an official Court of Inquiry into the cause of the crash and if we could find out the cause so much the better. We managed to talk Bill Pendrey into loaning us a Proctor for the operation and this we used for part of the journey. For the rest of the investigation I flew, once again, in a Harvard and the operation was worth it for this reason alone. Details of this inquiry I have forgotten but it did take us as far as Kinloss and Elgin in Scotland. The crash was eventually pinned down to a missing baffle plate in one of the wing petrol tanks. With petrol being drawn from that tank and the plane banking to come into land the engine became starved of fuel and consequently the plane crashed. I had done a lot of the talking and the flying, the other fellow had completed all the written reports so it was he who was involved in the presentation of information to the Court of Inquiry.

So for the remaining four months of 1947 we flew to Northern Ireland, Holland, Germany and France. Very occasionally a trip to Vienna came up on the board but I was never the chosen pilot. Vienna was one European city I would like to have visited. I still haven't been.

On one of our flights to Aldergrove in Northern Ireland (it must have been the one when I didn't deliver the corned beef) we were asked to bring back some chickens for the Officers' Mess. For some reason we were unable to bring them out dead - they had to be brought out alive. So this we did - in a large sack. When we were over the Irish Sea the chickens broke out of the sack and started chasing around the cabin. Feathers were everywhere, and of course even if they were caught there was nowhere to put them. If they had been killed there and then it would have meant messing up all the clean upholstery and carpets. We were scheduled to land at Hawarden in Cheshire to refuel so I requested permission to taxi straight into a hangar and have the doors closed.

Some of the chickens escaped into the hangar but they were eventually caught and suitably dispatched. We left Hawarden for Hendon with a parcel of dead chickens and I'll bet they were finding feathers in that plane for weeks to come.

Hawarden was a dumping ground - a graveyard - for surplus Wellington aircraft. On one occasion, when landing at Hawarden I saw a pile of Wellingtons, one piled on top of the other and the stack must have been about eight aircraft high. A sad sight indeed.

I finished off my Royal Air Force flying career in style. Jack and I were able to engineer a nine day flight to Berlin, calling at Eindhoven, Buckeburg, and Utersen en route. A short time after, and still before the end of December I was offered a job with Sylvia's father's company, Charles Griffiths Ltd. I was given time to make up my mind, it was a big decision to make. Then, at the same time, I was offered that four year Extension of Service Commission, and

Goodbye Hendon

It was all because of Jack Potter's drinking tankard - one he had been awarded way back in 1932 for a Moto-Cross event!

Jack Potter had been my navigator on Anson XIX's for some considerable time during 1946/7. The tankard in question resided at RAF Hendon (the station not the Museum) and it had been there in the 'Silver Collection' for nigh on forty years. We knew it was there because on a visit to the Museum some years ago we called at the Officers' Mess, by arrangement, and the tankard was made available - and Jack duly put it to good use. Not dreaming that they could ever consider closing down the famous RAF Hendon the mug was left behind, I suppose as a good excuse to enable us to return again one day.

Jack started to fly out of Hendon in 1933 as a gunner in the rear seat of Hawker Harts. The squadron was the famous 601 City of London Auxiliary Squadron. This entitled him to wear the famous Flying Bullet badge and one of the many pilots he flew with was F/Lt. Dermot-Boyle who, as we all know, was destined for greater things.

Jack and myself, with the Metropolitan Communication Squadron (Met Com for short), a satellite of 24 Squadron, flew top Service 'Brass' all around Europe in the super Anson XIX. No 'wind-up' undercarriage here, away with fixed pitch props as well and the Air Chiefs of the day sat in upholstered seats and looked out through curtained windows. That is, some of them did. Some of our elite passengers, and Air Marshal 'Blood and Guts' Staton immediately comes to mind, favoured sitting in the driving seat. I think that title was earned when he shot his way out of a Jap POW camp wielding a brace of revolvers - or so the story goes. What does one do with a living legend like that when he is in the driving seat and the plane is above low 10/10ths cloud in the vicinity of Marham with heavy mist beneath the cloud, and he wants to put down through a little hole in that cloud. To say I was petrified was probably an over exaggeration, but it did take quite an effort to tap him lightly on the shoulder and say "Do you mind if I take over now, Sir?" I suppose it was to my surprise that he immediately handed over control, thus confirming that the pilot really was Captain of the plane.

So the recovery of the tankard was just one of the reasons why Jack wrote to Hendon and asked to be 'in' on the final closing down act. The other reasons are too numerous to mention but Jack, like myself, could not just let Hendon go without being present.

On Wednesday, April 1st it was pouring with rain when we arrived at the Guard Room. The ceremony was now to be a private affair we were told, the public were not to be allowed access. It was all going to be done in the hangar and not out of doors. We gave the guard the magic password. In this case the name of the officer who had written to say it would be alright if we mentioned his name in the event of any trouble. We waited with bated breath, it had been a long hard drive from Poole - especially the M25 bit in the pouring rain - and of course it was April Fools' Day. But all was in order, 'Go through to the Officers' Mess, have a drink at the bar, go through and have lunch and I will see you as soon as I can. You will appreciate that I am pretty busy at the moment.'

So we entered through that hallowed portal for only the second time in forty years. This building which Graham-White built in 1917 as an hotel to grace his London Aerodrome and, heaven forbid, there was talk on that day of the possibility of it being demolished when the land is eventually sold off for development.

To the bar, once the snooker room where we used to play volunteer snooker (you never hear of it these days), and sure enough, in spite of all the hassle and preparation for this, Hendon's big day, they had gone to the trouble of finding Jack's tankard and had placed it on the bar for him to collect. We were unaware of the day's programme until a helpful Flight Sergeant (on duty in the Officers' Mess) filled

(contd over)

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us in with the details and gave us an official programme. Apparently Royal Air Force Hendon had been given the Freedom of the Borough of Barnet at a morning ceremony. I knew that this honour was being bestowed on the Station sometime during the day, pity they had not thought of doing it decades ago, seemed a little late to get it on the closing down day.

During lunch we heard all about the 'Upside Down Dinner' which had taken place in the Officers' Mess some days previously (you may have seen it on TV). Apparently it followed the pattern of a dinner held at Hendon to commemorate the first loop of the loop. They worked through the menu backwards, drinking and singing 'Goodnight Ladies' at the start of the evening and finishing up with the saying of Grace. One officer we spoke to said it was a ghastly, never to be repeated, but never to be forgotten, experience. One was supposed to start off p....d and finish up sober, but it did not quite work out that way.

We met our 'sponsor' in the bar after lunch (which he had kindly paid for) where he insisted on buying us a beer and then kindly offered to take us on a limited tour of the old aerodrome buildings. There are still some of these left, but most of RAF Hendon comprises of temporary buildings which house banks of computers which are busily handling all the stores for all Royal Air Force units. The whole lot is being moved out lock, stock and barrel, leaving the ground to be sold off to the highest bidder, but mercifully not the old Graham-White hangar or the Control Tower. These have been saved by the bell by Conservation Orders being served at the last moment. What a pity they could not have done the same for the Officers' Mess.

So we completed our little nostalgic journey around the old airport buildings and returned to the Officers' Mess. We did not have to depart to the hangar (where it was all happening) for some time yet. The Queen 'Mum' was not due to arrive until 5 p.m., and the fly-past had been scrubbed due to the foul weather. The Queen Mother had asked to attend the Beating of Retreat Ceremony, and how pleased everyone was that she had done so.

It was about now that a few more 24 Squadron types turned up. Jack recognised some of them as being old buddies and, in no time at all, they were trading stories of the good old days. These boys turned out to be the real 'cream'. They had flown top 'Brass' and Royalty all around Europe during hostilities in the famous old Hudson aircraft. They had taken a liquid lunch up the road in a local pub, and were somewhat peeved to hear that we had been on the station for quite a few hours and what is more - enjoying it's hospitality.

We weren't too sure we would be allowed into the hangar where it was all happening, but by walking to it with plenty of time to spare we even acquired seats, albeit in the back row. Senior Officers and Station personnel with their ladies arrived and took their allocated seats, and right on time H.R.H. The Queen Mother's limousine arrived and out she stepped. I could only see her turquoise green hat, but by standing on a chair which increased my height to 8'6" I saw a small girl present the Queen Mother with a posy. After being received by the Station Commander, Wing Commander W.G. Simpson, and the Mayor of Barnet, Cllr. D.L. Dippel, she took her seat and I do hope she wasn't too cold. There is no central heating in hangars and hadn't they left those hangar doors a little too wide apart.

The Station Commander gave a potted history of Hendon Aerodrome, and then handed the Freedom Scroll and Poniard to Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Michael Beetham who promised to keep it in the safe confines of the Royal Air Force Museum, Hendon. The Central Band of the Royal Air Force, led by Wing Commander Eric Banks, gave a fine display of marching and counter marching whilst rendering the programmed selection of music. Stirring stuff this, especially with the unusual acoustics of an aircraft hangar.

Beating of Retreat Ceremony was carried out by the Queen's Colour Squadron, ably supported by the Central Band, and then the sad moment when the RAF Ensign was lowered for the last time. H.R.H. The Queen Mother left with the dignity that only she can muster. It was all over - Hendon was an RAF Station no more. But Jack and I had been privileged to be present at the final ceremony at this once great aerodrome, the very foundation stone of British flight. Existing even before the Royal Air Force came into being.

I hardly noticed the driving rain as we drove back along the homeward motorways. We were dropping off one of the Hudson types at Basingstoke and Jack and he did not stop swapping stories throughout the journey and, by the way, the tankard was safely entrenched on the car's back seat.

E. JONES, P.R.O. Bournemouth Branch.

eventually I had to make up my mind within twenty four hours. I still could not believe that the RAF would eventually give me Permanent Commission with my health record so I finally opted for Charles Griffiths.

My record shows that I obtained my Class A release from the RAF on the 4th. Jan. 1948. This I obtained at Blackpool and much to my surprise and delight I bumped into Ken Blackham, my operational navigator. He was being released at the same time. What a coincidence. We received our issue of civilian clothes and then went out on the town and painted it red.

I had completed 1,588 hours flying and I always considered it a near miracle that I had come through unscathed both in mind and body. Many who survived were not so fortunate. Some experienced or witnessed terrible scenes and they live with these even today. So much so that many have to still seek help through caring organisations. Many of these scenes might well have been taking place only a few hundred yards from us in those night skies so I was, indeed, fortunate.

Of all the squadrons taking part in the Bomber Offensive of World War II No. 49 suffered the least casualties.

The five remaining crew members joined up together for the grand Bomber Command reunion which was staged in the Albert Hall shortly after the end of the war. Thousands were present and all were trying to meet up with their own squadron friends. Anne Shelton, a famous singer of her day, was there but could not make herself heard above the din. When it was realised that Bomber Harris would not be attending everyone started to chant 'We want Butch'. All aircrew called him 'Butch' and in the years to come he was to call us 'his old lags'. As I have said before he was respected and revered by all aircrew and this feeling remained throughout his life. (When a statue of Bomber Harris was erected outside the RAF's own church in the Strand there was much opposition to it and I have recorded my own thoughts on this elsewhere.)

This was the one and only reunion to be staged at the Albert Hall. But the Bomber Command Association was formed and also dozens of squadron associations and they were and still are the meeting places for all ex-aircrew.

I lost touch with Ron , Jock and Steve after that Albert Hall reunion but a few years ago I got an urge to find out what had happened to them. I advertised in the Saga magazine and in Air Mail and I was delighted when I heard from Ron in Lancashire and Steve in Eastbourne. I have met them both and have passed on many photographs and much squadron information. I did not hear from Jock, but he was ten years my senior. These advertisements also unearthed two members of the ground crew who had serviced 'K' King. This particularly pleased me because due to only part of the crew finishing their tour we did not have the customary 'end of tour' binge with our ground crew. They are now both members of the No. 49 Squadron Association and have attended their reunions.

No. 49 was disbanded in the mid '50's shortly after one of its Valiant

aircraft had dropped Britain's first atom bomb at Christmas Island in the Pacific. The squadron has never been reformed.

Both Jack and I tried to rejoin the RAF in 1950. I was somewhat disillusioned with Griffiths and Jack was none too happy back in civvy street. We both failed, Jack because he was now about 35 years old and myself? well, I was never too sure. I suspected it was because of the asthma history but this was not confirmed until a few years ago when I was able to obtain my Service Records.

The London Gazette of 28th. July 1959 indicated that I was off the Reserve List and that I had finally relinquished my commission but that I retain the rank of Flight Lieutenant.

Long before this Sylvia, Keith and I had moved to 123 Shooters Hill, Woolwich to take up residence in our own home.

VIEW FROM THE GROUND.
F/Sgt. Trevor Simpson was in charge of the servicing of all A Flight aircraft in 49 Squadron. I was in A Flight.

TVI

Some 49 Squadron Anecdotes, and since you ask, they're all authentic!

From Trevor Simpson

These concern Air Crew and Ground Crew from late 1940 onwards.

At one stage, some of us were billeted in the village of Welton about 3 miles east of Scampton and we were ferried to and fro, but fed in the Airmen's Mess. I and 7 others were billeted on the local Grocer, a Mr Wilson, a great chap, and well disposed to his lodgers. We had four bedrooms at the front on the first floor, and Mr Wilson and his wife and baby son occupied down-stairs. Toilet arrangements were primitive, there was a two-holer earth closet outside at the back, (shades of "the Specialist"!) and a gozunder, possibly 2, upstairs, 8 Airmen for the use of. A Crew bus used to come for us at about 7-30 and so that we wouldn't disturb Baby Wilson we walked about in socks. This particular dark and frosty morn we piled into the bus but there was no sign of Cpl Johnson. After a while the upstairs sash window flew up, and Johnnie, red-faced with embarrassment and irate, stuck his head out, said that he had been using the gozunder, and it had been rather full, the handle had come off and it had shattered, leaving him paddling about in his socks! It took him some time to live this down.

We had some AC2s attached to us at Scampton, awaiting posting to Tech. Training and they were given odd jobs to do. We had Hampdens at the time and these had completely detachable "D" section leading edges on the centre-section of the wings. I spotted 2 of these erks carrying a L/E by the obvious, to them, handles sticking out. I was in a dilemma because they were unknowingly holding the cable cutters, and if their fingers strayed into the triggers they would go off and "look Mum, no Fingers". As it was I managed to get them to lower the L/E to the floor without activating the cutters, but there were 2 very pale-faced Airmen. The Armourers got a rocket for not putting on the safety covers.

At Fiskerton the Sgt's Mess had a gramophone record of a song called "Gloomy Sunday". This was a most depressing effort, the original composition being Hungarian I believe, and it had triggered off a number of suicides and was eventually banned from being broadcast (fact!). One line was to the effect that soon there'll be coffins and candles, just the sort of thing to cheer up someone going on Ops. With the perverseness of the Brit, this was extremely popular in some quarters of the Mess and was played ad nauseam. I was in the Mess one night after the Ops A/C had left and the only other occupant was a little Scots Warrant Officer, in M Flt. He was sitting on the other side of the room and he got up, and out of the corner of my eye I saw him go over to the table and pick up the record. With a gentle smile and a look of satisfaction he put the record on the settee and sat on it! Neither of us said a word and we resumed reading!

Ralf Allsebrook, whose father was a High Court Judge, was what might be called a dashing character. He did two tours with us, one on Hampdens and one on Lancs, and eventually went down on 617's disastrous raid on the Dortmund-Ems Canal. In Feb 1942 he and his 3 crew survived 4 ½ days in a dinghy, (see p123 of The Dog). They found they had cartridges but no Very pistol. Ralf, ever ready to have a go, suggested that they stand these up on the rim of the dinghy and that he would fire at them with his revolver in the hope of igniting them. For some reason this suggestion went down like the proverbial lead balloon..

Once when he was landing away from base he was "pipped" on his approach by one of the locals. Ralf wasn't standing for this, so he opened the throttles, (and in so doing silenced the warning horn for the partly down U/C), and pressed on regardless. His F/E meanwhile was yelling "You've got two Reds!" (for the U/C, because the air-flow at the higher speed was stopping it lowering fully). Ralf meanwhile was shouting "Don't distract me while I'm landing!". At the last minute the message got through and they went round again.

He had a very good crew, his W/Op, Chiefy Grant was well liked. He was a "rather naice" small man, very conscientious. I remember on Boxing Day 1942, a miserably cold morning, we were in A Flt Office and he came in having done his battery change as part of his DI. We told him where the Forms 700 were and he signed the one for "B" and then decided to look at a few others. It was obvious that no other DI had been done, so Chiefy looked at us, more in sorrow than in anger (Hamlet, Act1), and said "I seem to be Joe round here." We gave him a mug of tea for effort.. We asked him one day what he did on ops. He said

"I just sit there and radiate heat, I never look out when the bombs go down." At one stage he was made i/c Waste Salvage. A little later as he was going on leave, our Electrical Officer met him going

TV2

out of Camp with two suit-cases, one of which was obviously very heavy, so he offered some assistance, asking what it contained. Chiefy said that it was full of scrap tins and metal that he hadn't been able to dispose of on site.

I had an excellent elderly (in my eyes) rigger from Aberdeen, Jock Esson, who spoke very broad Scots. I always remember his greeting me one morning when I asked him why "J" was U/S, with, "Ma braks are doon, nae a poon", which I correctly interpreted as meaning that the brake pressure had leaked away!

Life could be quite hazardous at times on Dispersal but we in our young days shrugged it off, instead of waking up screaming as I would do now-a-days. We took for granted that there were bombs all around, but things occasionally caused a raised eye-brow. , The Hampdens often took a 250lb bomb under each wing, and my "O" Orange brought these back one night, having tried unsuccessfully to drop or jettison them. We and an Electrician were doing our DI's, and he found that the acc. was flat and needed changing. He went in with the replacement and shortly afterwards there were two dull thuds as the bombs that still had the Jettison control selected fell to the grass. I had a rather similar experience one afternoon with "G" at Fiskerton in 1944., it was bombed up ready for the night's ops and was having last minute attention from air and ground crew, the M/U gunner was on top of the fuselage polishing his Perspex. I was astride my bike looking on and an electrician was cleaning the contacts on the bomb selector switch with a screw-driver, having religiously "turned off the mains" by putting the main electrical switch to "Ground". Unfortunately someone else had got in to do his own check a few minutes later and switched it on again just as the electrician cleaned the contacts and a 1000 lb bomb promptly fell on the concrete. For about 30 seconds there was completely instinctive and illogical panic, three ground crew jammed in the Air Raid Shelter door-way, I was half way up dispersal on my bike, others were haring in all directions, the mid-upper gunner was trying to guess what the flap was about, and a white-faced electrician who was not really to blame, stuck his head out of the cockpit and said "Was that the Cookie?". At this stage it dawned on us all that our escape efforts would have been totally futile if it had gone off!

Some time previously, for a raid on the Italian Naval base at Spezia several a/c carried special Delayed Action booby-trapped bombs. The nose fuse had a non-return valve behind it and if it was unscrewed to de-fuse it, the vacuum behind it would pull forward a diaphragm and set it off. As Sod's Law would have it one of these bombs was dropped while bombing up, it was decided to cart it away to a remote corner on the NE side of the 'drome and leave it to its own devices for a day or two. Nothing happened in 48 hrs so it was sent to Italy again but I have always wondered if the crew were told the history of what they were carrying.

Before Fiskerton was an aerodrome, a public road came in at what became the Reepham Gate at the NW corner, and this was on a route to one of the E..Coast sea-side resorts. One summer afternoon when preparations for that night's ops were in full swing, a Morris 8, with 2 men and 2 girls inside and suit-cases on the roof, presumably using a pre-war map, came through the unguarded gate, turned right on to the perimeter track and then drove wide-eyed past the A/C and the loaded bomb trolleys the length of A Flt dispersal, to the accompaniment of cheers from the RAF, and I assume went out unchallenged past the Main Guard Room!. So much for security.

The ill-starred Manchesters had big props to absorb the power of the R-R Vultures when they weren't on fire. Some-one told me they were the largest props in the world at the time. Despite this one of our Engine Mecs managed to walk into one while it was running and got hit on the head, though he made a good physical recovery, but he eventually got his "ticket" as he claimed, probably rightly, it had made him lose his nerve for working by engines.

We nearly had another one when we had Lancs. Our Engineer Officer, "Bob" Martin and a new and very diminutive Electrical Officer were standing at a dispersal point and as one of the ops kites was due to move off the chock jammed against the wheel. The rigger lay on his back kicking it to try to release it and the Officer ran to his aid, to our horror going straight towards the prop. Because he was so "vertically challenged" he only had to duck a fraction to go under the prop and he got away with it.

SEE TV3



MA7

Another strange accident was when an Engine Fitter was stunned by being hit on the head by a falling Lanc.

It was up on hydraulic jacks in the hangar and the mechanical lock on the jack ram was not screwed down far enough, and the Lanc suddenly dropped an inch or two on to the head of the surprised Erk, knocking him out for a few minutes. I'll bet his grandchildren got fed up hearing about that!

I am trying to solve "the mystery of Geordie King" who was a Cpl in M Flt. When I was at Fiskerton we had 2 ex-RFC men on strength. One was Geordie and the other was, from some research I have done, apparently Station Warrant Officer James Coram Jones, Service No.54. The latter served continuously to and throughout WW 2, talk about "get some in!" Geordie proudly wore his RFC cap badge and I am convinced also had a 2 figure number, and I am trying to confirm this. I definitely recall discussing this with Sgt Ben Bolt, an ex-Halton apprentice who had been with 49 from pre-war, and was still with 49 when I left in March 1945. I also have a strong recollection of being on Pay Parade when there was a Sprog Officer i/c and the Pay Clerk called out "Cpl King" and got the response "sir, eight five", whereupon the sprog said sharply "your last THREE, Corporal". Geordie came back very gently with "I've only got two sir" to the delight of the parade!

In charge of the Armourers was a Warrant Officer Spradbury, a very competent and respected rather dumpy Regular with a gammy stiff leg. When the aircraft got back from ops they were inspected for any "hang-ups", i.e. bombs which were still in the bomb-bay. These might be say 1,000 pounders, (McDonalds, eat your heart out!) or complete or partial cans of incendiaries. They might be still in their "crutches" or sculling around on the bottom of the bomb-bay, which was obviously dangerous. To check for this a panel in the front bulk-head of the bay had to be opened and it was checked by a torch initially, and then the doors were pumped open about 2", and if there were any bombs lying on the doors, a large flat-bed trailer would be pushed underneath and the bombs gingerly extracted. On this particular morning a canister of incendiaries had hung up over the target but the bombs, hexagonal and about 18" long and 2 1/2" in diameter, had jolted loose later and dozens of them were heaped in the bay. They were being carefully removed when the "log-jam" suddenly gave way and they showered out on to the wagon and one ignited at the bottom of the heap - I was an interested by-stander! W.O. Spradbury shot forward and plunged his arm into the tangled heap and somehow found the tail of the offending bomb, slung it back over his shoulder and clear of the dispersal point, and undoubtedly saved the a/c from damage or destruction, but I never heard any more about his bravery, all in the armourer's day's work I suppose.

I can hardly recall any talk regarding the courage of our crews, we "took it as read". But we did mentally categorise them, as for instance press on regardless, press on coldly and determinedly, reckless, happy-go-lucky, steady and dependable, or just doing a job, or even "gong" seekers, (not many of these!), Yet they were all brave men.

The "Bond" within most crews was very strong. I was told by a fellow Sergeant that a member of one of his crews who was near the end of arduous tour on which he had acquitted himself well, had found that things were getting on top of him. The rest of the crew had got together and knew that that there was no question of his being an LMF case so they "carried" him as passenger with his agreement on his few remaining ops.



MORE FROM U.S.A.A.F.

Problem: "Left inside main tyre almost needs replacement."

Solution: "Almost replaced left inside main tyre."

Problem: "Test flight O.K, except autoland very rough."

Solution: "Autoland not installed on this aircraft."