

Diary of a Desert Raider



**RAAF Flying Officer
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Preamble

In 1939 WW2 started and the Air Force beckoned. I initially enlisted in the RAAF Reserve, and was then accepted into the Empire Air Training Scheme in November 1940. I was quartered at Melbourne Cricket Ground until a place in an Initial Training School (ITS) was available. At that time I had a condition called blepharitis – reddening of the eyelids - which the Air Force bickered about as a disqualifier for air crew. The specialist ophthalmologist for the RAAF took me under his wing and after treatment persuaded RAAF command to start a new category “unacceptable for pilot but acceptable for other aircrew”. As a result my place on course 2 was filled, and I eventually got down to Somers ITS on course 9 in February 1941.

Then followed 3 months at Mt Gambier where I qualified on 23 July 1941 as an Air Observer. After a further period at Port Pirie I qualified on 20 September 1941 as a Bomb Aimer and Air Gunner, then at Nhill I qualified on 16 October 1941 as an Astro Navigator. On 23 October 1941 I was commissioned as a RAAF Pilot Officer (Observer).

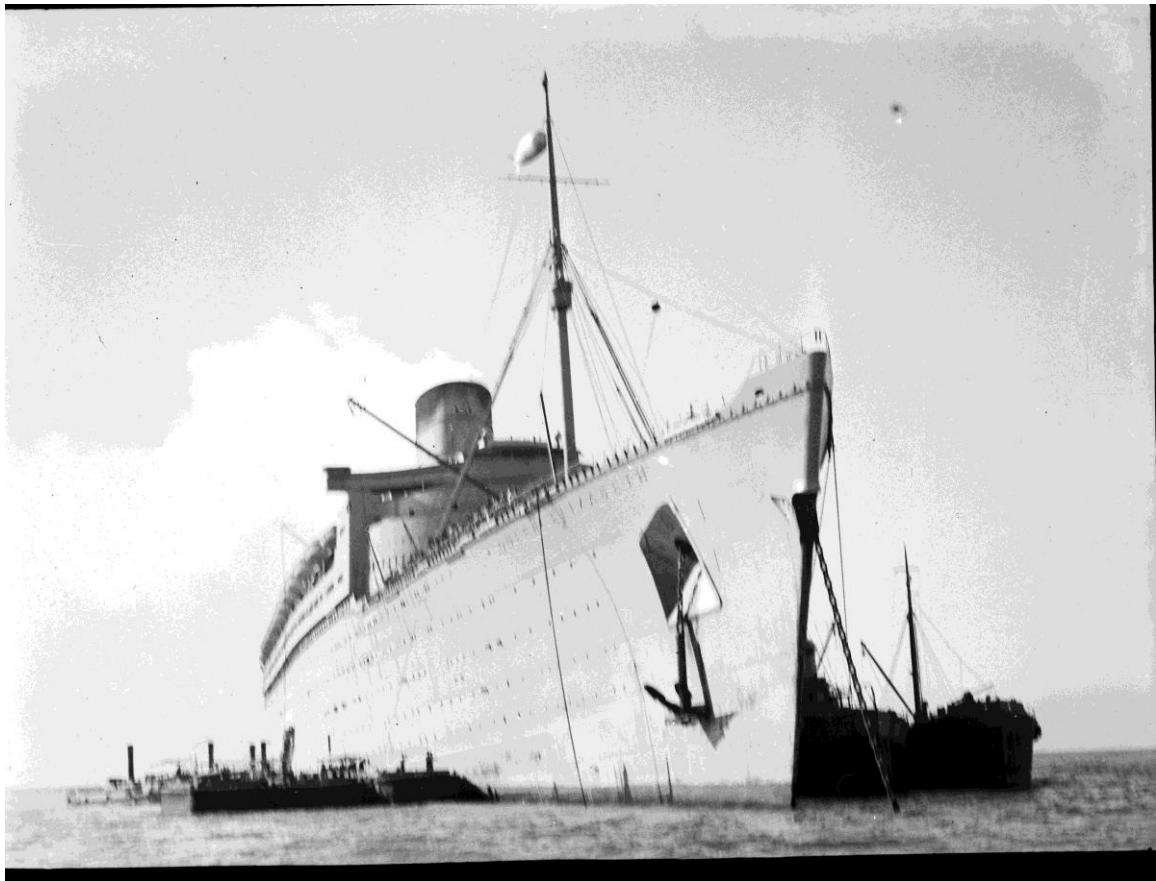
November 1941

We were some days back at the Melbourne Cricket Ground when we entrained for Sydney to embark on 1 November 1941 on a historic trip on HMTS Queen Elizabeth accompanied by HMTS Queen Mary, and escorted from Fremantle by HM Cruiser Shropshire to Port Suez – the lower end of the Suez Canal - arriving on 24 November 1941.

The Queen Elizabeth had been in the course of construction at the outbreak of WW2 and the lower ranks – airmen, privates etc – had the use of the “tourist class” quarters – 8 men to each room. The officers used the first class decks, with three beds to a stateroom. These areas were then as they were originally planned for trans-Atlantic passengers of more than moderate wealth. Our life was a period of some ease – the dining room was as planned with enough waiters to have your personal choice of servers. Wines were really top class and unlimited. After two days crossing the Great Australian Bight some of the more adventurous of the officers got a poker game going and I ended up at Port Suez with my pay book showing twice the amount usually earned by a Pilot Officer.

20 Nov (letter) – en route to the Middle East on Queen Elizabeth. 6000 troops on board. John Matthews ill in ship hospital. Aircraft spotters on duty due to danger of being attacked.

30 Nov (letter) – disembarked in Egypt (at Port Tewfik). Train to Alexandria in first class carriages. Train overloaded. Stopped near a POW camp filled by Fritzies (Germans) and Ities (Italians). Traveled along the Suez Canal. Saw a bomber fitted for anti-mine work. Arrived at Alexandria.



Queen Elizabeth at Port Tewfik in Egypt

December 1941

Our status in Egypt was that of conquering soldiers and life was one long bludge. It was only the approach of Rommel and the Afrika Corps of the German Nazi Army that interfered with the sublime existence. There were about 5 flying crew (complete) to every aircraft. So the powers-that-be decided to shift all the "useless" crews out of the way to an Operational Training Unit in Kenya, and we sailed on HMT Dilwara on 20 December 1941. At this stage we were still known as pilots, observers, wireless operators and air gunners, crewing up had not taken place and we were still trade oriented – ie all the pilots worked, lived, messed and played together. In all there were about 10,000 air crew in the Gilgil OTU near Nakuru within the Rift Valley.

During the easy time we enjoyed at Gilgil we were encouraged to fly now and again with other country's air crew – we had South Africans, English, Scotch, New Zealand and even Canadians – the USA was still not at war!

- 3 Dec (letter) – Completed forms to transfer across to the RAF. Traveled to Cairo by rail. Down the Nile delta. Delivered some effects to Air Commodore Cole (RAAF).
- 10 Dec (letter) – in bed for two days with dysentery. Described Alexandria, some buildings 3000 years old. Roman ruins. Played the tourist, visited botanic gardens, beautiful palace, Pompey's Pillar – 215 BC (photos).
- 18 Dec (letter) – on his way to Kenya via ship. 10 officers and 10 sergeants.

26 Dec (letter) – in Aden after a trip through the Red Sea. Appointed security officer with responsibility for censoring mail.



Sights around Alexandria & Cairo

January 1942

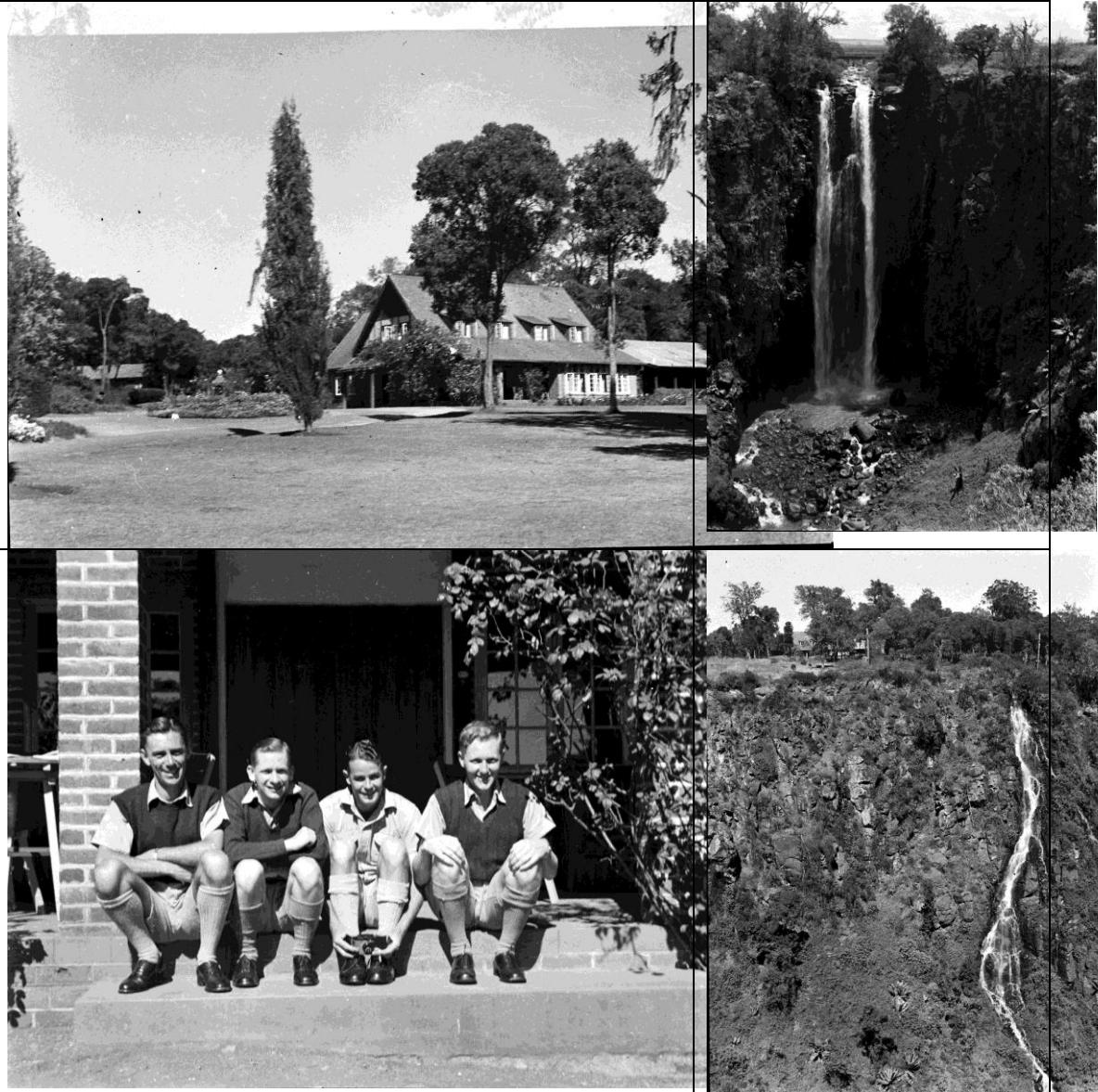
- 4 Jan (letter) – Disembarked at a port in Kenya (Mombasa) on 1 Jan.
Overnight train into the interior. Climbed 5000 ft. Arrived Nairobi.
Woman carry bundles with strap around head (photo).
- 14 Jan (letter) – Bought stamps in Nairobi - sheets of South African stamps overprinted, postmarked (rare). Arrived at Gilgil, 6582 ft above sea level.
Sleeping in tents, share with John Matthews. Went sailing on lake.
- 21 Jan (letter) – Started bomber training. After 6 weeks expect to go back to Egypt to a pool from where posted as a complete crew to a squadron on active service. Talks about “crewing up” – that is a pilot, observer, wireless operator and air gunner get together and form a team to fight together. Got together with an English F/O pilot named Jock Barker and an Australian air gunner P/O named Ken Bennett who he trained with in Australia at Somers. Jock Barker is a veteran fighter pilot. Their native “boy” is Gjerry. Went for a long walk with John Matthews and John Rich.
- 28 Jan (letter) – more lectures, tests soon on studies, some leave then back to flying. Will have a break at Barry’s Hotel at Thomson Falls.



February 1942

- 4 Feb (letter) – ground studies finished, completed tests of individual ability.
Took a week's leave at Barry's Hotel at Thomson Falls with Jack Rich, Geoff Harnett and Bob Annells. (WW2 Honour Roll lists John Frederick Rich 400998 and Geoffrey William Harnett 400987 died on 23 July 1943. Robert Harvey Annells 401292 died on 21 February 1943).
- 11 Feb (letter) – Back from Thompson Falls, lots of tennis at the hotel.
Mentions Mrs Barraclough, fair haired woman of 40, husband is a Major, has a young son, manages Barry's Hotel on her own.
- 18 Feb (letter) – New CO at the Gilgil camp. Sending three photos - a euphorbia tree, like a giant cactus, the others at Thomson Falls, foot of the falls and in the gardens at Barry's Hotel near the fishpond.
- 25 Feb (letter) – appointed as 2IC of native labour as well as accounts officer to manage the mess funds. Works with P/O Peter Mansfield (OIC).
Sending photos of Mombasa (port) and Nairobi.

Barry's Hotel at Thomson Falls



John Rich, Bob Annells, Geoff Harnett & Ross at Barry's Hotel

March 1942

4 Mar (letter) – has assumed command of native labour office while Peter Mansfield away.

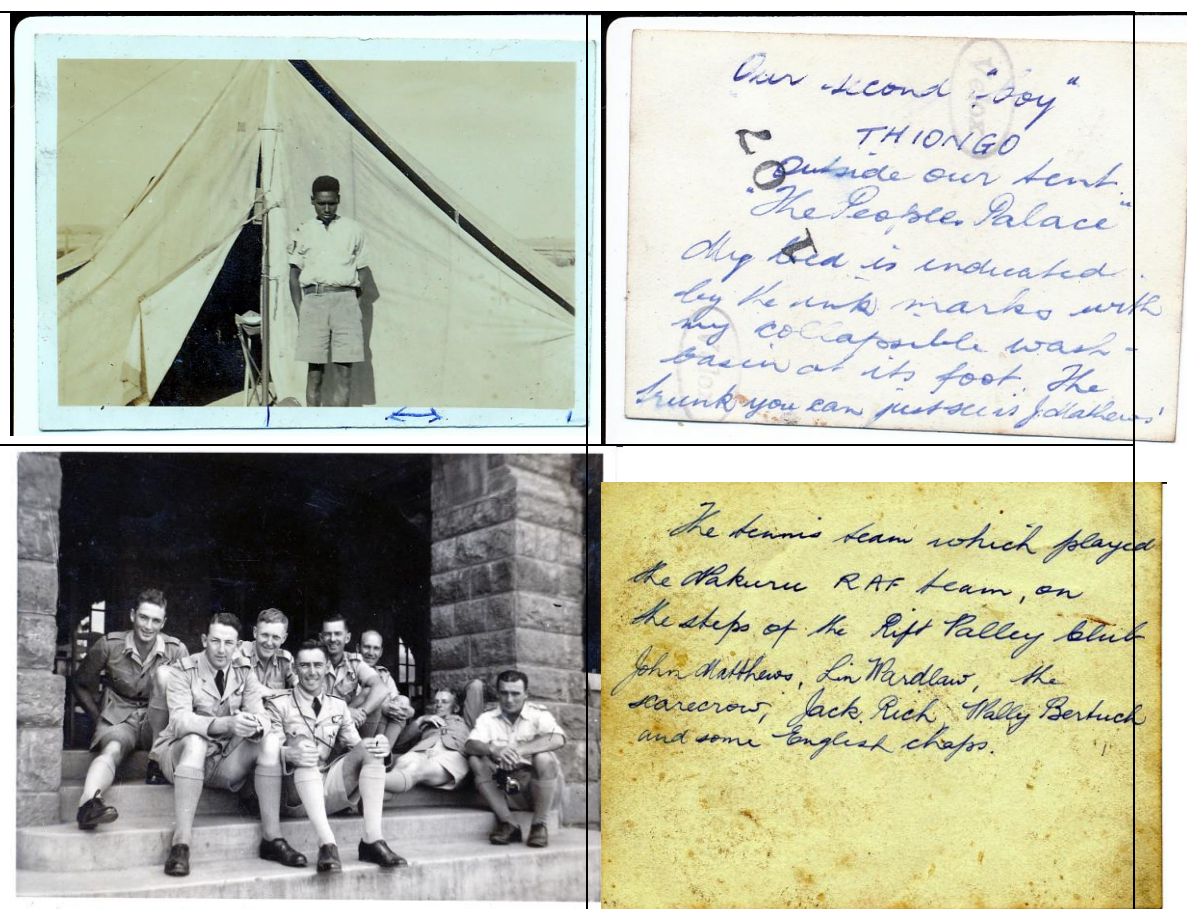
for the officer's tennis team against the sergeants (who won). Played

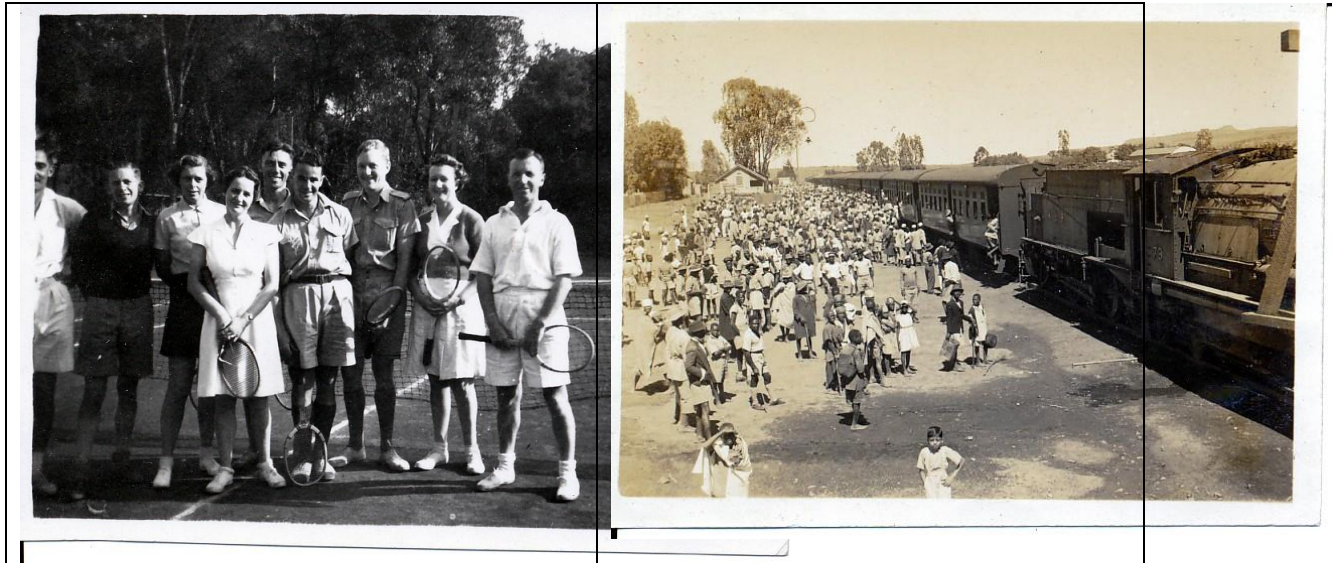
11 Mar (letter) –

More photos - his former "boy" Thiongo next to his tent, and three from Thomson Falls. Mentions Jock Barker going on to flying school, he hopes to follow. Ken Bennett has also moved on to flying school. (WW2 Honour Roll lists Kenneth Jack Bennett 401409 died on 3 January 1943).

18 Mar (letter) – seven Pilot Officers went to Nakuru to play tennis at the Rift Valley Sports Club against a RAF team (photo).

25 Mar (letter) – five months since has last flown. About to go away for 8 days to Barry's Hotel at Thomson Falls. Played tennis with the RAF team against the Kenya Armoured Car regiment. Enclosed 3 photos – one group photo of tennis match at the Falls, Mrs Barraclough is on my right (2nd from the right); one taken at Lake Kaivasha; and the crowd that meets the Uganda-Mombasa express.





April 1942

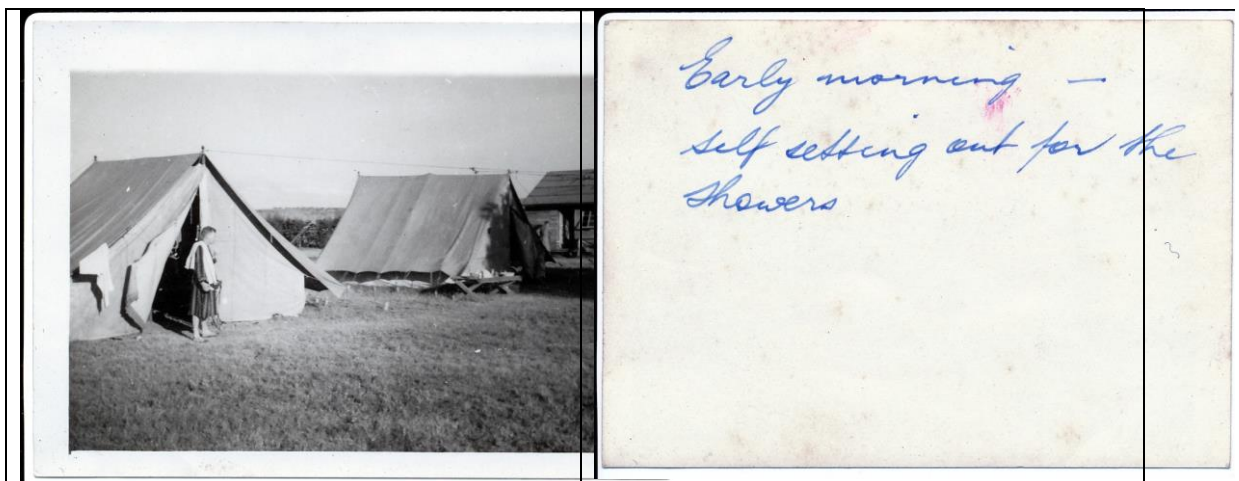
8 Apr (letter) – been away on leave at Barry's Hotel at Thomson Falls, back at camp on 6 April.

15 Apr (letter) –

Played tennis doubles England vs Aust, team of 6. Peter Mansfield just returned from Rhodesia where he had 3 weeks leave with his new bride. Shares a tent with Peter.

22 Apr (letter) – went to country club with Peter Mansfield.

29 Apr (letter) – Peter Mansfield went to Nairobi for a medical as he had a problem with his left eye. Peter returned, eye damaged, "grounded". Has to go to Cairo for an eye operation. "Last Thursday one of training planes from another school crashed and the crew of three were killed. They were all Australians. I used to work with the observer in Melbourne – Jack Ahern – met him at Somers, I was 2 courses behind him". (WW2 Honour Roll lists John Arthur Ahern 400909 died on 23 April 1942).



May 1942

6 May (letter) –

Ross

and Peter Mansfield went to a local farm to collect 2 sows. Went to Nairobi on Sunday with P/O Jim Abraham, P/O Jim Lacie and Flt/Lt Stan Clarke. Had to drive a Fiat truck back to camp (78 miles). (WW2 Honour Roll lists John Mitchell Lacie 401409 died on 3 January 1943).

13 May (letter) – hopes to be flying soon. Will be going on to flying school, doing a two week refresher course on Morse code, then on to the Operational Training Unit at Nakuru for 6 weeks then back to Cairo.

22 May (letter) – Peter Mansfield left on train to Kisumu where the flying boats leave for Cairo. Ross traveled to Nairobi to sort out a security matter at HQ. Train back. Next letter will be from the flying school at Nakuru.

27 May (letter) – at RAF training squadron at Nakuru, train from Gilgil. Left on the Monday with 14 Observers and 14 Gunners in trucks. Caught the Kampala Express, shared a first class compartment. When got to Nakuru had proper rooms (had been living in a tent at Gilgil).



June 1942

No.70 Operational Training Unit in Nakuru received Baltimore aircraft.

3 Jun (letter) – started 6 week training course at 70 OTU at Nakuru. Expects to fly next week. Temporarily “crewed up” with an English Pilot named White. Attending lectures. Five officers on this course.

16 Jun (flying log) – first training flight in a Blenheim.

26 Jun (letter) – should complete training as an observer in five or six weeks. Then on to second stage of training. Had first flight in formation. On second flight forgot to take the safety pins out of the bombs and couldn't carry out the exercise. Flying in a “world famous British medium bomber” (Blenheim). Not yet “crewed up” – has chosen an English Sgt Pilot called Geoff White, looking around for a wireless air gunner (WAG).

July 1942

2 Jul (letter) – finally got to fly, but had a sore left knee (slipped in shower). Flew low over the Cooke home (friends). Has water on the knee, restricted.

8 Jul (letter) – still training as an observer. Unable to crew up with Ken Bennett. Had crewed up with RAF Pilot Geoff White, but not sure if they will be on the course together. Only 2 of 14 observers who came over are on the course.

15 Jul (letter) – letter from Barry's Hotel. In previous week had another flight. Flew 50 foot above ground, over a game reserve. Chased herds of Zebra at 200 mph. Visit to the Cooke's with Sgt Pilot Murray Kettle, played tennis. Big meeting to arrange crews. As Geoff White had not passed all of the training he crewed up with RAF Sgt Pilot Gordon Hampson and Aussie gunner Max Sandery. “I think I've got a good crew”. Later discovered three crews had been put back to do the following course, and his was one of them. At least two weeks before starting the next stage, so took some leave. Played tennis with Murray Kettle. Train to Thomson Falls.

22 Jul (letter) – got a lift in a car from Barry's Hotel to Nakuru.

27 Jul (flying log) – first flight in Blenheim with Gordon Hampson as pilot.

29 Jul (letter) – well advanced in training. Started flying last Thursday, now flying every day. Played in tennis tournament (officers vs sergeants).

Forth person has now joined his crew. They are to be trained in the latest type of American medium bomber which has two gunners instead of one. New crew are Sgt Gordon Hampson (pilot from Wigton), Sgt Max Sandery (wireless operator from Glenelg in SA), Sgt Jock Price (gunner from Glasgow in Scotland).



August 1942

5 Aug (letter) – constantly flying. Fortnight to go to complete training. Visit from the HRH Duke of Gloucester, tour of inspection. HRH lunched with all the officers. Ross demonstrated a machine called the crew trainer. More tennis at the Nakuru Activities Club. Visit to the Rift Valley Sports Club for dinner.

12 Aug (letter) – hectic week, only a fortnight to go to complete training. "On Thursday had first flight in one of the very latest American medium bombers (Baltimore), tearing over the ground at over 4 miles a minute. Gordon has got the hang of these planes quickly and made a good landing. The observer is right up in the nose and it was quite a hair raising experience". Since had a number of flights, getting used to seeing the ground come to within four feet before the wheels touch down. Today we had quite an experience during a cross country exercise. Heavy cloud limited visibility, couldn't see the ground. Had to abandon the exercise, but navigated the plane back to base. Flying conditions much better in the mornings.

- 19 Aug (letter) – more flying. Flown 2500 miles in both British and American aircraft. Stayed at the Cooke's place on the weekend with Murray Kettle. Expect to complete the whole course in three days time, followed by leave and a posting north.
- 28 Aug (letter) – going on eight days leave tonight. Has successfully completed the Operational Training Course. Today getting organized, return clothing and equipment, completing flying log, clearances etc. Eight days leave for crew. Two days in Nairobi then to Thomson Falls.
- 28 Aug (flying log) – last training flight at 70 OTU at Nakuru.
- 28 Aug (flying log) – assessment of operational training – “above average” as navigator, photography and reconnaissance, “below average” as bomber.

Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty												
<p>ASSESSMENT ON OPERATIONAL TRAINING WHICH INCLUDES THE UNDERMENTIONED :-</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>DETAIL</th> <th>ASSESSMENT</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>ABILITY AS :-</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>NAVIGATOR</td> <td>ABOVE AVERAGE.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>PHOTOGRAPHY</td> <td>ABOVE AVERAGE.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>RECONNAISSANCE</td> <td>ABOVE AVERAGE.</td> </tr> <tr> <td>BOMBING</td> <td>BELOW AVERAGE.</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>					DETAIL	ASSESSMENT	ABILITY AS :-		NAVIGATOR	ABOVE AVERAGE.	PHOTOGRAPHY	ABOVE AVERAGE.	RECONNAISSANCE	ABOVE AVERAGE.	BOMBING	BELOW AVERAGE.
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<p>REMARKS :-</p> <p><i>R. Rokiam</i> S/LDR. OC. "D" FLIGHT</p> <p>RECOMMENDED FOR SPECIALIST TRAINING IN NAVIGATION AFTER FURTHER EXPERIENCE. YES/NO.</p> <p><i>W/COR.</i> C.F.I. 70 OTU.</p>																

Time carried forward:-															
REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)			Flying Times												
			Day												
<p>SUMMARY OF FLYING AT 70 O.T.U. PERIOD FROM: 16/6/42 TO: 27/8/42</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>INDIVIDUAL TRAINING.</th> <th>A/C AND CLASS</th> <th>DAY</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>NAVIGATION (STAFF PILOT)</td> <td>BLENHEIM MK I.</td> <td>9.05</td> </tr> <tr> <td>OTHER FLYING</td> <td>BLENHEIM MK IV.</td> <td>NIL</td> </tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">TOTAL.</td> <td>9.05</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				INDIVIDUAL TRAINING.	A/C AND CLASS	DAY	NAVIGATION (STAFF PILOT)	BLENHEIM MK I.	9.05	OTHER FLYING	BLENHEIM MK IV.	NIL	TOTAL.		9.05
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NAVIGATION (STAFF PILOT)	BLENHEIM MK I.	9.05													
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TOTAL.		9.05													
CREW TRAINING	BLENHEIM MK IV	BALTIMORE													
	DAY	NIGHT	DAY												
NAVIGATION															
PHOTOGRAPHY	14.15	1.20	11.30												
RECONNAISSANCE															
BOMBING	2.00	1.50	2.05												
AIR FIRING	2.45														
OTHER FLYING	2.00		1.00												
TOTAL	21.00	1.70	14.35												
<p>GRAND TOTAL : 45.50</p> <p><i>R. Rokiam</i> S/LDR. OC. "D" FLIGHT</p> <p><i>W/COR.</i> C.F.I. 70 OTU.</p> <p><i>G/CAPT.</i> OC. 70 OTU.</p>															
TOTAL TIME ..															

Extract from flying log

September 1942

Nine months after leaving Egypt we came back to our sand-drome at Ismailia in the Canal Zone in September 1942 – more training in dual-engine aircraft before becoming a “Baltimore” crew in 223 Squadron, an operational squadron. The crew with which I ended up as navigator consisted of:

- *Sgt Gordon Hampson (pilot) RAF*
- *Sgt Jock Price (air gunner) RAF*
- *Sgt Charlie Grant (wireless operator) RNZAF*

The Baltimore was made by the Martin Corporation of the USA for the RAF – it was not used by any other air force. The Yankee equivalent was the Martin “Mitchell” and the RAF made the Beau fighter and Beaufort their medium bombers. The Baltimore did not show up in the Pacific War zone nor was it used in the European zone.

The Baltimore had a Perspex nose sticking out in the front of its 2 propeller engines. It was this Perspex that saved my life – Gordon had a freeze on landing in the sand at Ismailia and our aircraft turned on its back over the nose. [Flying log list date of crash landing in Baltimore AG 810 as 14 September 1942]. Fortunately only a few splinters of Perspex needed to be removed from my nose and forehead after I was dug out of the sand. The aircraft was a “write-off” (in RAF terms) and we were posted to 223 Squadron at Landing Ground 115 on the other side of the Nile River.

The RAF used the Baltimore as a light bomber in support of General Montgomery’s Eighth Army in the Western Desert. There were only three squadrons of Baltimores – 55 South African, 456 Australian and 223 RAF. These squadrons were usually very mobile and followed Monty’s Army right through the desert – up the side of Tunisia, on to Malta-Sicily and then on to Brindisi in Italy. It was shortly after our arrival at Brindisi that the Italians surrendered and executed Mussolini.

1 Sep (letter) – left base at midnight, collected Gordon, Max and Jock to get the train at Nakuru station for Nairobi. Booked into the New Stanley Hotel in Nairobi. Walked the streets with crew while Gordon hired a car for the week (Ford 10 sedan). Tried to buy pewter tankard as a course passing out gesture. Went to the theatre, film interrupted by an air raid alarm test. Visited Limuru 14 miles north east of Nairobi with Gordon and a friend called Rose. More tennis with friends Barbara and Marion. Given a lot of stamps. Went riding. Back to Nairobi, realized had lost wallet, possibly when riding. Took train to Thomson Falls, sent telegram to Max to ask him to look for wallet. Near A’kalua the train jumped the track. On the Friday got a telegram from Max to say had found wallet. Mentions was recommended for specialist navigational training after further experience at end of course.

13 Sep (flying log) – first training flight with 223 Squadron in a Baltimore Mk2.

13 Sep (letter) – left Nakuru on Saturday 5 Sep, traveled to Kisumu. Flying boat to Kampala. Then to Khartoum, then on to Cairo. Now in the

- Western Desert. Bought new boots for the sand. His crew went into Cairo and he bought a filter for his camera because of the glare.
- 14 Sep (flying log) – crashed on landing in Baltimore AG 810 after formation training. No one hurt.
- 21 Sep (letter) – “I’ve had my first crash! One day last week we were doing some formation practice and when coming in to land we nearly collided with another aircraft and on our second attempt to land we got down on the deck OK but while still running along the runway, Gordon applied too much brake pressure and the aircraft just went right over on its nose and then on to its back.

As my position is right up in the nose with nothing but mica glass to protect me I got rather a big fright, for the nose just crumpled up and bits of the plane went flying past me in all directions. Fortunately the aircraft hovered for about 5 seconds before going on to its nose and that gave me time to protect my head and body by drawing my knees up about my shoulders, hanging my head between them and hanging on to the straps with my hands and generally relaxing.

Then the next thing I knew was that I was upside down (strapped into my seat of course) in a cloud of dust and splinters. It didn’t take me many seconds to undo my harness and drop the few feet to the ground and then rid myself of my parachute and start to push my way out through the broken glass and bent metal. Both Jock and Max had already got out and fearing for the worst (the observer always get the worst of the argument when this type of aircraft crashes) they tore around to see what had happened to me.

The first thing I heard after the din of the crash was an unearthly silence broken by first of all by Gordon then Max saying “Are you all right Ross?”. When Max got to the nose the first thing he saw was my tail jutting out of the broken framework followed by the rest of me. I must have looked a sight and for the good of your health I’m glad you weren’t there mum for I was completely covered in dirt with splashes of blood around my legs.

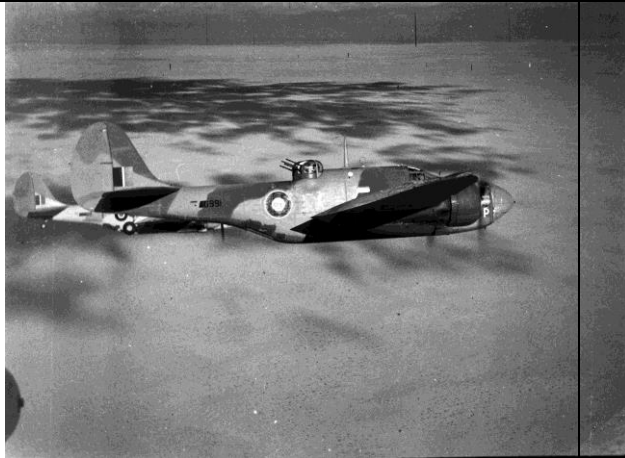
As soon as they got Gordon out (all he had was a bump on the top of his head) they packed Gordon and I into an ambulance and rushed us to a nearby hospital. All our injuries amounted to were Gordon’s egg, and a few cuts on my shins and knees and a large graze along my left thigh where the bombsight had rushed past me. A bit of picric acid and a bit of lint soon had us 100% again, but those who saw the crash and the damage done say that I’m amazingly lucky to be alive, in fact the chief mechanic said that I’m living on borrowed time from now on.

Still it’s all in the game, and I offered up a very heartfelt prayer of thanksgiving to the Almighty for his mercy. But please understand that I am absolutely unscathed and quite fit both physically and mentally”.

Then a couple of days later had to shift camp to another location, Ross was OC convoy. Riding in the first truck. New location very different, skyline broken by hills and the desert. Not much water.

28 Sep (letter) – prohibited from flying since crash. Possible that crew may be set back to Nakuru for further training. Two days ago all the officers left on leave in Cairo, so he is in charge. Has to organize the base of 100. Last Friday visited some nearby ruins (took photos). The ruins are quite massive and are of a BC palace, the rooms number over 200. “You may recollect my mentioning a Sgt Pilot called Murray Kettle who was at the Cooke’s a lot with me in Kenya. Well he joined this squadron about a week ago and yesterday we learnt that he and all his crew (3 Aussies and 1 Englishman) had had an accident while taking off and they were all killed. I knew the three Aussies very well and after a time I intend writing a note to their families”. (WW2 Honour Roll lists Andrew Murray Kettle 401170 and Norman Ross Buchanan 406609 were killed on 25 September 1942).

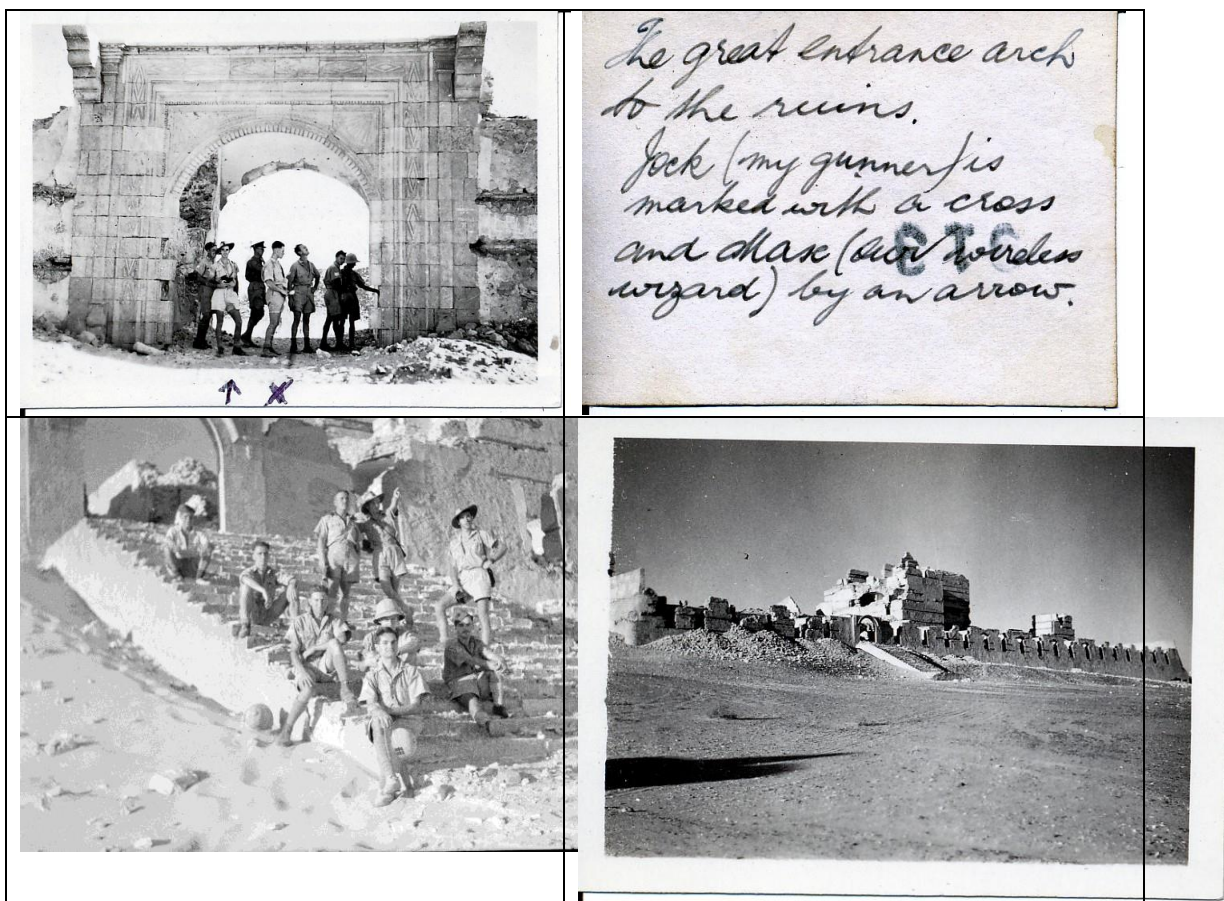
Baltimore Mk.2 bomber



Gordon Hampson & Jock Price

October 1942

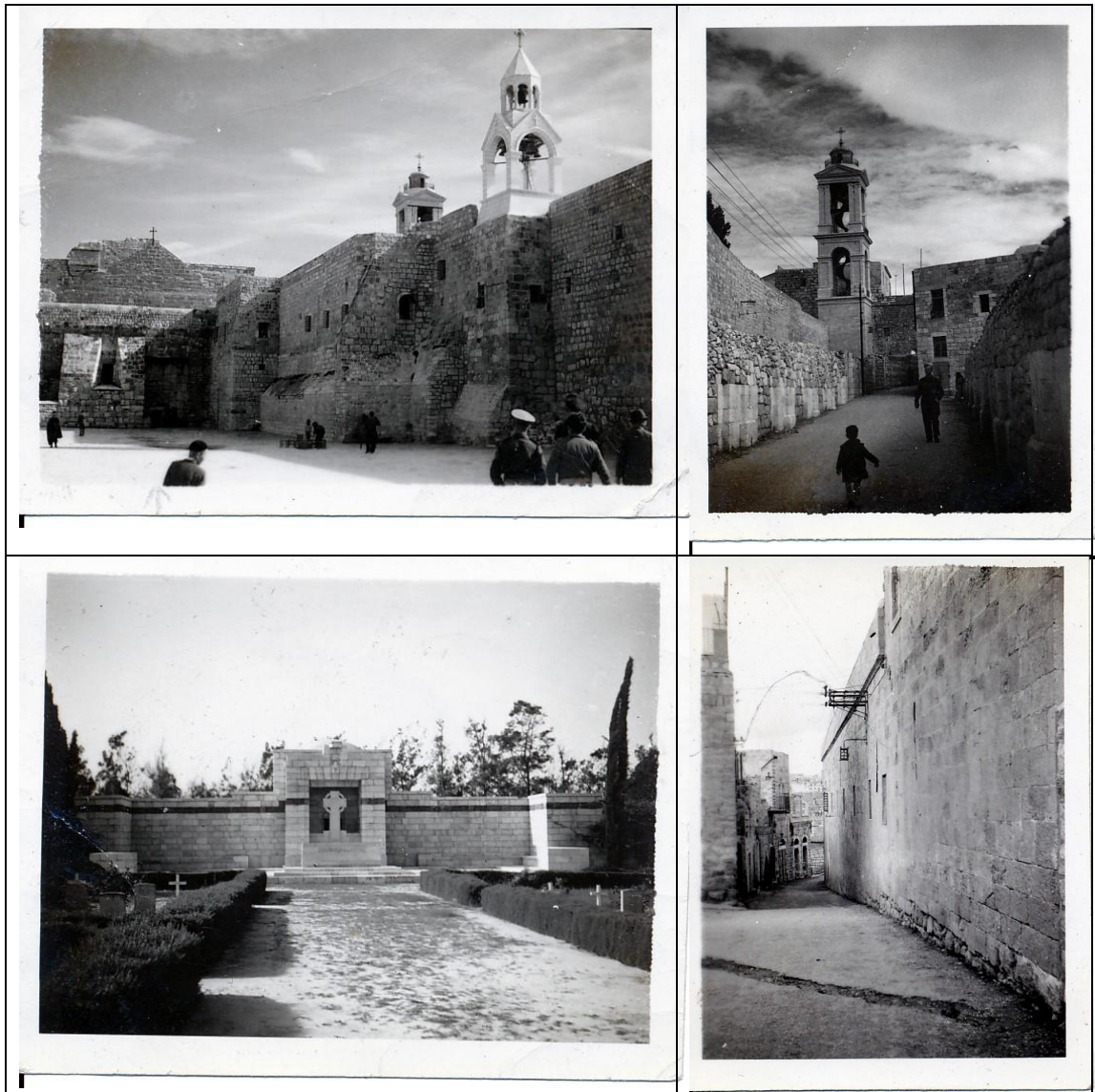
- 5 Oct (letter) – terrible winds and sand everywhere. Still in charge, things very quiet. “Just the usual run of leave passes and documents to sign, the mail to censor and generally administering justice”. Drove lorry to Cairo. When officers return intends to take leave to visit Palestine and visit Austin Marshall.
- 11 Oct (letter) – has written two letters to Austin Marshall. Felt terribly homesick when read about Con’s marriage (his sister)
- 18 Oct (letter) – Still base CO, so hasn’t gone on leave. “Has to administer to the demands of the 100 or so bodies here”.
- 25 Oct (letter) – mentions no further developments over plane crash, getting frustrated not flying. Many of the crews in 223 Squadron are getting in many blows at the Hun. “It will be maddening if we are held here while Rommel is cleaned up and we have no hand in it”.



Ancient ruins near the desert base

November 1942

- 1 Nov (letter) – still base CO. Sending off a copy of “Parade”, the 8th Army weekly, shows photo of the Baltimore. “When you see the nose you will realize what a lucky escape had when the aircraft turned over”. Got approval to go on leave at last. Going to see the Holy Land, and also see Austin Marshall. Got a lift to Alexandria. Night at Hotel Cecil in Alexandria, then train to Cairo, then train to Palestine, arriving at Lydda in evening. Taxi to Tel Aviv and the Ritz Club.
- 8 Nov (letter) – wandering around Tel Aviv taking photos, people from all over the world. Visited Jerusalem and the Holy City. Taxi to Gaza to meet Austin Marshall (refers to him as “Boss” and “Ocker”). Austin came in one of his staff cars and took Ross out to his camp for lunch. “Went with Ocker to a nearby Australian general hospital to visit Capt Colin Rigg who had been wounded in both legs at El Amamein”. Ross knew Colin in scouts. Boss took him in his car to Gaza, took quite a few photos. That evening caught the Cairo train, got back to camp on Saturday.
- 8 Nov (letter) – last Friday received orders to up camp and rejoin the major part of 223 Squadron. Packed up and moved on in truck in convoy. Now a mere Pilot Officer again, “enjoyed my brief taste of power”. Still no news what is happening to his crew. In the interim is to help out the Operations Room (coordinating raids). Can fly occasionally as fill-in observer. “Our crew is grounded” but still hope to get some raids to my credit. All of my doings from now on are taboo. “Longing for the day when I’m able to take a smack at Jerry”.
- 15 Nov (letter) – got away on 7 days leave. At the Ritz Club in Tel Aviv in Palestine. Gone quiet since recent success against Rommel’s Afrika Corps. Writing the squadron history for October.
- 22 Nov (letter) – returned from leave yesterday.
- 22 Nov (flying log) – resumed flying with Pilot Sgt Forbes.
- 26 Nov (letter) – talks about leave in Jerusalem – met Austin Marshall – describes geography in the area and the characteristics of the Holy City. Took lots of photos during his visit.
- 29 Nov (letter) – last duty in Operations Room. Has been back in the air (a “flip”), cross country exercises. Had some qualms on take off and landing (first time since the crash landing). On return from leave discovered Max Sandery (wireless operator) had been posted away, is doing an observers course. Gordon given the OK to fly again, but they need to find a new wireless operator. (WW2 Honour Roll lists Maxwell Leslie Sandery 407975 was discharged in August 1945).



Visit to the Holy Land

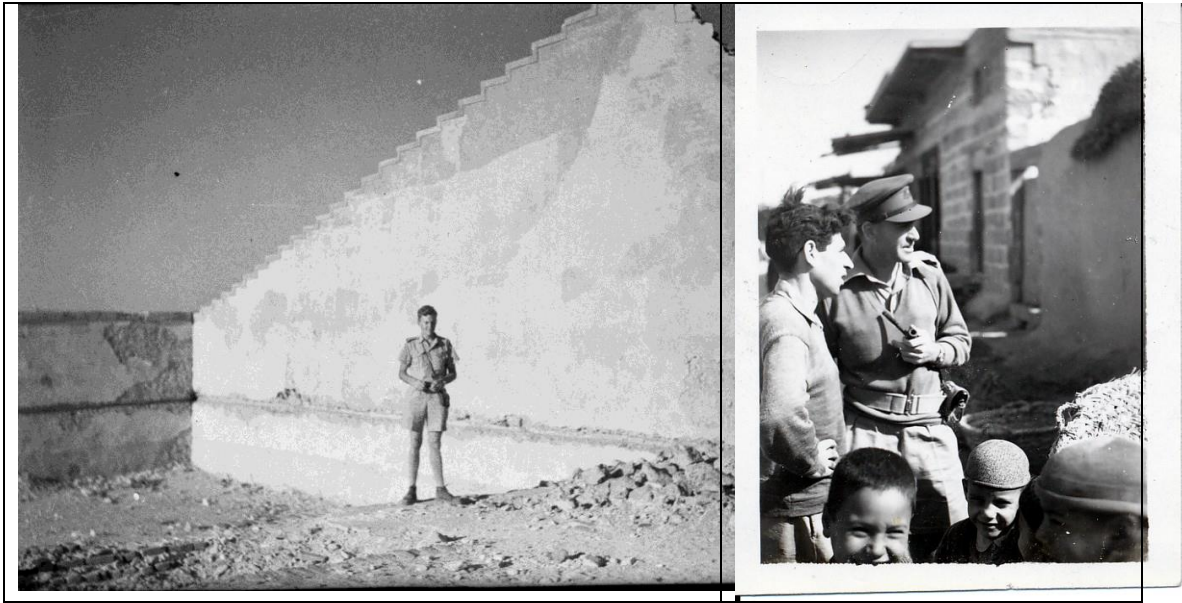
December 1942

- 2 Dec (flying log) – resumed flying training with Gordon Hampson as pilot in Baltimore AG 948.
- 6 Dec (letter) – Gordon flying again. Canadian Jack Bidmore as wireless operator. At home in the nose of the plane, but very safety conscious. Gordon, Jock and Jack have been up doing formation practice.
- 13 Dec (letter) – no flying this week. Looking forward to active service when can “get my smack at the Hun”. Last week went down to Cairo to pick up trunk and suitcase, they had arrived from Nakuru. Stayed overnight in NZ Club.
- 20 Dec (letter) – continued inactivity, with only one flight (formation practice). Still haven’t filled Max Sandery’s slot. Visited Alexandria. “Bored”.
- 23 Dec (flying log) – last of six training flights in Baltimore during December.
- 25 Dec (letter) – wants these letters as a record of his war experience for his grandchildren “how I beat Hitler”. Put in charge of the mess. On Christmas day invited sergeants over and entertained Gordon and Jock.



January 1943

- 3 Jan (letter) – 223 Squadron undertook major raids on New Years Day (though not Ross). No flying the last week. Still bored, “fun war isn’t it?”
- 10 Jan (letter) – visits Alexandria every day on mess business.
- 13 Jan (flying log) – resumed flying training with Gordon in Baltimore AG 882.
- 17 Jan (letter) – visits Alexandria again. “A little bird tells me Austin Marshall may be seeing the scouts at home soon”.
- 26 Jan (flying log) – last of thirteen training flights in Baltimore during January.
- 31 Jan (letter) – plenty of flying. Gordon has got over the “new boy” stage, good with landings! Mainly cross country and formation practice. Ross has been taking the controls sometimes. Dual set of controls in the observer’s compartment – in case the pilot is hit - has been practicing turns, dives and climbing on cross country exercises. Crew given 24 hours leave, went to Alexandria and stayed at a place called Crillion. Gordon and Ross went to pictures. Later joined by Charlie.



Captain Austin Marshall

February 1943

- 7 Feb (letter) – had another good week of flying, sometimes several trips each day. Ross doing more piloting. Visited Alexandria on the same day as a visit by King Farouk. People everywhere. Lunch at the Cecil Hotel.
- 14 Feb (letter) – during past three days have had over 10 hours flying. Flew into Libya, passed over the battlefields of Alamein, saw wrecked enemy tanks, also crashed ME 109s, JU 88 Hinkels and other planes litter the airfields. Passed low over the town of Tobruk, Sidi Barrani, Sollum and lots of others, “no idea of the damage that has been done by our bombers. Some towns are just a street or two of houses without roofs and occasionally with walls missing”. Visited the town of Derna, very battered, around the airport over 150 crashed “Hun and Iti kites”, had an interesting time crawling over them.
- 21 Feb (letter) – had only one flight this week as bombers have been undergoing major overhaul. Went into Alexandria and shared a room at the Hotel Cecil with another RAF fellow. When got back to camp discovered moving again.
- 26 Feb (flying log) – last of thirteen training flights in Baltimore in February.
- 27 Feb (letter) – crews at a base camp while tents are shifted to a new location. Pleasant change from the desert. Now shares a proper room with another officer. Wonderful facilities. Has a servant. Going to Cairo with Gordon and the others on Sunday (tomorrow).



Gordon, Jock, Ross & Charlie in front of Cecil Hotel at Alexandria

March 1943

- 7 Mar (letter) – Went to Cairo with Gordon, Jock and Charlie and another pilot, Bill Nutt. Stayed at NZ Club. Found out from RAAF Liaison Officer was eligible to be promoted to Flying Officer in April 1942. May be due for promotion to Flight Lt in April this year.
- 14 Mar (letter) – “flown off his feet”. Seen many famous towns and cities, some from the ground but most from the air. New location quite a change from the desert, quite flat with wadis running through it. At a temporary camp, crews have to guard their own aircraft, sleep under fuselage. Ross slept in a tent with seven other officers. Little water available. Polished the nose on the bomber, tidied cockpit. Haggle with locals for eggs. One of the squadron’s officer’s was posted back to the OTU, and has left his dog with Ross. Name is Jackson, or Jacky for short. Ginger haired pooch about a foot high. Sleeps at the foot of his bed in his wool lined flying jacket. Has been with Ross since base camp. “During the week was able to visit one town we’d captured from the enemy without resistance, and it was quite an experience. Row after row of identical houses”.
- 16 Mar (flying log) – raid in Baltimore FA 297 (MK 3) on M/T, tents etc at Arram. This is Ross’s first operational mission.
- 20 Mar (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on Mareth town, A/A accurate, no hits.
- 21 Mar (flying log) – raid on Kettana, A/A accurate, 2 hits.

- 21 Mar (letter) – “I’ve been happier this week than I’ve ever been since joining the RAAF, for this week I’ve really done a job of work for my King and country! Yes I’ve been dropping real bombs on the Hun and boy what a great feeling of satisfaction you get out of seeing the bombs burst amongst his troops and camps. I can now say that the last two years have not been wasted, and I can look any soldier, sailor or airman in the eye and say in all truth – yes I fought in the war”. “Our first “do” (raid) was even a greater thrill than flying for the first time”.
- 22 Mar (flying log) – raid on Kettana, returned with bombs, weather U/S.
- 23 Mar (flying log) – raid on Zarat, A/A intense, no hits.
- 28 Mar (letter) – “I suppose you’ve heard first hand news of myself from both Colin Rigg and Austin Marshall who were welcomed home along with the 9th Division. Doing lots of operational flying now. “Our opponents are certainly feeling the weight of our air forces. If you follow the newspaper accounts of the 8th Army’s attack on the Mareth Line, you’ll soon realize what a telling blow the RAF has been able to make in support of the ground forces”. We are on the edge of the sea. Jacky is spending all his time in the sergeants mess with a lady friend.
- 29 Mar (flying log) – raid on Djebel Tebaga LG, bombs dropped on dispersals.
- 30 Mar (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on South Sfax LG, returned with bombs.



Ross and Jacky

April 1943

- 223 Squadron moved to Tunisia
- 2 Apr (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on enemy north of Gabes, port engine hit, returned on starboard.
- 5 Apr (letter) – been doing an “odd spot of hammering the Hun”. Have move again, away from the ocean. “In a new country”. Staying in a tent, erected in a field of barley.
- 6 Apr (flying log) – raid on enemy M/T north of Inadi Akarit.
- 11 Apr (letter) – not as busy, set up a net for deck tennis. Suddenly have to move on.
- 18 Apr (letter) – have moved, traveling by convoy. “It was a great thrill to travel through localities that I myself had bombed and see such damage”. Days spent mainly waiting for targets.
- 19 Apr (flying log) – raid in FA 297 on Korba South landing ground.
- 23 Apr (flying log) – raid in FA 297 on enemy concentrations N/W of Enfidaville.

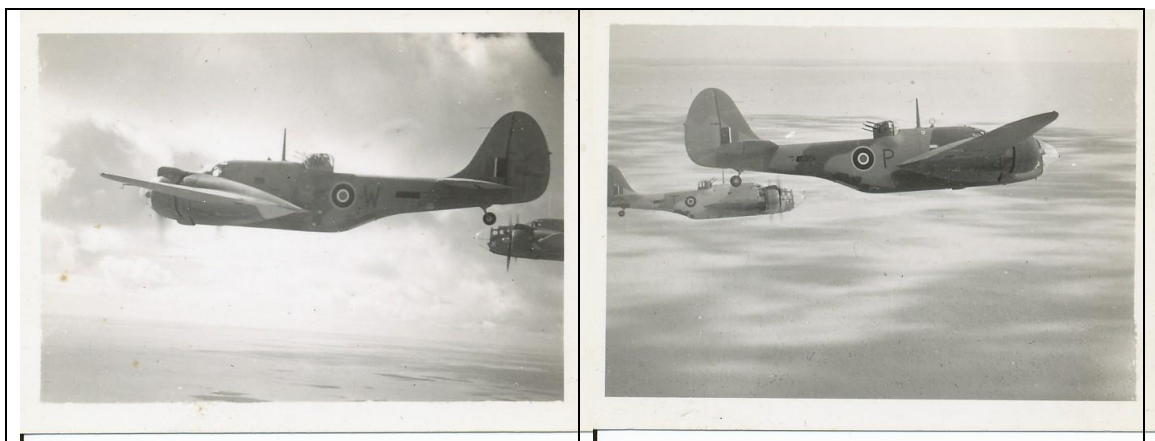
25 Apr (flying log) – raid on enemy concentrations north of Enfidaville.
 25 Apr (flying log) – raid in FA 297 on enemy concentrations north of Enfidaville.
 25 Apr (flying log) – raid in FA 297 on Soliman South landing ground.
 26 Apr (letter) – “Easter 1943 will live long in my memory, so many things have happened that it will be outstanding for years to come”. “On Good Friday took some very nice Easter Eggs over to the Hun, and boy oh boy were there some nice surprises in those eggs. It was a very good show all round. Had another crack at the Hun on Sunday, then again and again. Sixteen hours of flying”. Then advised promotion to Flying Officer confirmed, backdated to April 1942.
 29 Apr (flying log) – raid in FA 330 on enemy concentrations north of Enfidaville. (FA 330 subsequently shot down off Sicily on 7 July 1943)



Convoy on the move

May 1943

- 3 May (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on Fauconnerie N – Agareb – Cekhira – Fauconnerie N.
- 6 May (flying log) – raid on enemy concentrations east of Medjez El Bab.
- 6 May (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on gun positions at St Cyprien
- 8 May (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on Pantelleria landing ground.
- 9 May (flying log) – raid in FA 334 on Pantelleria landing ground
- 9 May (letter) – “Well here’s another week gone and the campaign over here is finished for all intents and purposes. We’ve had some fun during the past two weeks and we’re rather sorry its over in some respects but our overriding feeling is one of deep satisfaction in knowing that we’ve had an integral part in the smashing of the German forces in Tunisia”. ... “We have been lucky in getting in 21 “ops” and other than one rather “shaky do” (2nd April when engine hit by flak) we’ve been very fortunate in suffering no casualties”. Not sure where we are going next. Rumors that the Aussies are going to be repatriated. Dame fortune has been smiling on me at poker.
- 10 May (flying log) – raid on Pantelleria landing ground.
- 10 May (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on shipping in Pantelleria harbour.
- 11 May (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on St Marie Du Zit – recalled.
- 12 May (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on enemy concentrations north of Enfidaville – A/A despairing – “The last bombs dropped on the island of Africa!”
- 16 May (letter) – “your son (together with a few others) was the last to drop a bomb on the island of Africa!!! Our squadron carried out the last raid of this campaign and just after our bombing all resistance ceased and some 3000 Huns surrendered. The press people attached to the RAF were here the day after the raid and took plenty of photos and copious notes and they told us the story would be released to the entire Allied press, so you may see something about it in the local papers. Something to tell my grandchildren.”
- 23 May (letter) – Hope Colin Rigg recovers the use of his leg, wish him a speedy recovery. Talks about Tunisian heat.
- 24 May (flying log) – between 15 May and 24 May had ten training flights, including a flight in FA 146 that subsequently crashed on landing at Shandur on 6 June 1944.





Officers of 223 Squadron

June 1943

- 6 Jun (letter) – you must have been pleased to hear Austin Marshall's voice on the phone. I hope he told you some of what I am doing over here. Will try and send more photos of "me and me dawg".
- 8 Jun (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on coastal defenses at North Pantelleria.
- 10 Jun (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on gun positions on Pantelleria.
- 11 Jun (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on gun positions on Pantelleria.
- 11 Jun (flying log) – aircraft delivery (FA 344) Enfidaville to Soliman (FA 344 subsequently crashed on approach to Luga in Malta on 18 August 1943)
- 27 Jun (letter) – "After our glorious stay on the shores of the marvelous Mediterranean we returned to work again on an airfield further inland". Have done the odd spot of serious work the last week and now we are going on a spot of training again, but anxious for the next stage to open and get cracking again (bombing). OC canteen
- 30 Jun (flying log) – between 11 June and 30 June had eight non-operational flights.

July 1943

223 Squadron moved to Malta.

4 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on Trapani Milo – recalled.

4 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on Trapani Milo aerodrome.

4 Jul (letter) – future movements uncertain, may no longer have to wear khaki!

“During the past week I’ve been inspected by the King, and addressed by Lord Trenchard and Air Marshal Cunningham and Air Chief Marshal Tedder, and then to cap it off I was caught in a parade in honour of General de Gaulle in Tunis!” “The parade for His Majesty was a marvelous sight for the air forces in Tunisia all sent representative groups and these formed up three deep on both sides of an aerodrome a mile or more long, with all types of aircraft. The king drove by in a jeep saluting in response to the cheering airmen”. Sleeping in a tent. Odd spot of flying now and then. Now passed the 300 hour mark in flying time, with 30 raids to his credit.

8 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 287 on Sciacca Aerodrome.

10 Jul (flying log) – night raid in FA 287 on Trapani Milo aerodrome.

11 Jul (letter) – “you can get some idea of the types with whom I am fly from my photos”. “As I do all their censoring for them I naturally add some comments of my own when they write to their parents”. Got a letter from Gordon’s sister, Joy who is a WAAF up in Scotland. “I’ve got 30 “ops” to my credit to show for it, besides a rather intimate knowledge of most of the northern part of Africa. You were right in imagining the “WORST” in that I was right in the thick of things, and no doubt I shall be there again but remember my trust is in God and He shall always stand me in good stead. Anyhow I’ve only got another 20 to do and I should be due for a “rest” (but not return to Australia)”. “There is no official period of time for an RAAF chap to spend overseas as yet, so it is quite possible for me to see then end of this bloody war without going back to Aust unless they bring in some new rule giving us the chance to return to Aust after say three years”. (RAF serve 4 years). “They’ll only need to offer me one chance of getting home and I’ll be on your doorstep”.

17 Jul (flying log) – night raid in FA 463 (Baltimore Mk4) on Leonforte township.

18 Jul (letter) – stresses is in a RAF not RAAF squadron. “I see that you have just heard of the fall of Tunis, well Dad you can rest assured that our family played its part in that great event! I’ve heard that I’m now the proud possession of a decoration! The King announced the award or the Africa Star to all who took part in the campaign.” Warned to be ready to move soon. Been flying at night, far more interesting. Having two swims a day. Jacky goes with him into the water.

23 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Tradina township.

23 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Adrano township.

25 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Novarra township.

25 Jul (letter) – settled in new location in a peace-time hotel. “Back in civilization, servants and all”. Been going to the cinema.

26 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Regalbuto township.

26 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Regalbuto township.

28 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 289 on Regalbuto township.

- 29 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Milazzo docks.
- 31 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Paterno township.
- 31 Jul (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Centuripe township.

August 1943

223 Squadron moved to Sicily.

- 1 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on St Maria Di Licodia township.
- 1 Aug (letter) – steadily mounting up the flying hours, now got 40 raids to my credit which “makes me over half way to my “tour” after which I shall most probably be given a rest – not that I need one by any means. Usually those on rest go to the OTUs as instructors until they get back and start on their second tour.” It’s taken me nine months to get up to 40 “ops”. Going to the pictures regularly.
- 5 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on enemy concentrations east of Adrano.
- 7 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 395 on Randazzo township.
- 11 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on enemy concentrations south of Fiume Freddo.
- 12 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Falcone township.
- 19 Aug (letter) – new address – Central Mediterranean Forces (CMF). At last in Europe! In Sicily. Tent is pitched in a cotton field. Fields harvested by hand. Lots of grapes. Visited a local town and well received – children giving the Churchill V sign. “Gordon and I bought a large art silk scarf of royal blue at the reasonable price of 1/3 ea”. In a malaria area so have to cover up. Directed to change over to RAAF pay now in Europe.
- 24 Aug (letter) – “the Calcutt representative in Sicily”. Has been in the Sicilian campaign and completed 43 “ops”, total is now up to 45. “Watch the papers”. During visit to Malta had to leave Jacky behind (rabies scare) but reunited after 3 weeks. Jacky dozing quietly at my feet. “He’s a loveable critter” sleeps at the foot of my bed. In Tunisia the camel ticks gave him hell. “I’m going to make every effort to bring him back home when I return”. Thanks for Horlicks tablets, “nothing like something to suck when clear of the target, as soon as we are clear of the flak”.
- 27 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on road/rail junction at Catanzaro.
- 28 Aug (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on marshalling yards at Lamezia.
- 31 Aug (letter) – “I’m getting quite good at being in at the finish lately – Africa, Pantelleria, Sicily and where next? The news should prove interesting in the next week or so”. In the attack on Sicily “I was in it up to the neck, as the saying goes”.

September 1943

223 Squadron moved to Italy. Italians surrendered

1 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on troop concentrations in Sinopoli.

2 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 395 on gun positions at Calanna.

2 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 395 on army HQ at Scido.

4 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on gun position at S Stefano.

6 Sep (letter) – “Here’s hoping it won’t be long now and we can get the war over in this theatre and get to grips with that slimy yellow creature in the South West Pacific. The news from Russia combined with the fact that our chaps in Italy are meeting with no resistance other than blown bridges and mine fields puts a really rosy prospect on the chances that 1944 will see the end of Hitler, Nazism and the war”.

10 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on M/T north of Lagonegro.

12 Sep (flying log) – raid on Lagonegro-Aoletta-No Escort-Stork

13 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 543 on road junction at Atena (3 runs!). (FA 543 subsequently damaged beyond repair after a belly landing at Brindisi on 9 October 1943)

15 Sep (flying log) – raid on enemy concentrations at Eboli.

16 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Bucchino town.

17 Sep (flying log) – raid on Eboli-Huletta Road-No escort-Stork

22 Sep (letter) – censorship relaxed, can talk about where he has been. “In Egypt I had my first taste of the desert on the eastern edge of the Delta but soon moved down to a spot half way between Cairo and Suez. It was at the latter that I was CO. On joining 223 Squadron at their location about 25 miles from Alexandria on the Western edge of the Delta where we spent quite a time, training, drinking and playing poker. Then came Derna – a beautiful little spot which I’m told closely resembles a Devon village on the sea.” “Benghazi, Tobruk and Misurata were the only towns in Tripolitania which I had the chance of visiting but I was not at all impressed with any of them. Tunisia came next and during my tours I came upon such places as Ben Gardane, Medenine, Mareth, Sousse, Sfax, La Fauconmerie, Enfidaville, Hammemet and lastly Tunis itself”. The towns improved as we went north and Tunis itself was a really good city. Unfortunately we visited it too soon after its liberation and the place was just finding its feet again after the change of management, and although the avenues and buildings are untouched by our bombing the civilian population had practically nothing to live on after the usual thorough Hun rape. Malta was another place visited during out “pleasure” trips. Although the island has suffered quite considerably the Maltese are a really brave people and their morale was particularly high and believe me our stay was a very welcome interlude” – excellent living conditions.

24 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on road/rail junction at Serino.

25 Sep (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on road/rail junction at Serino.

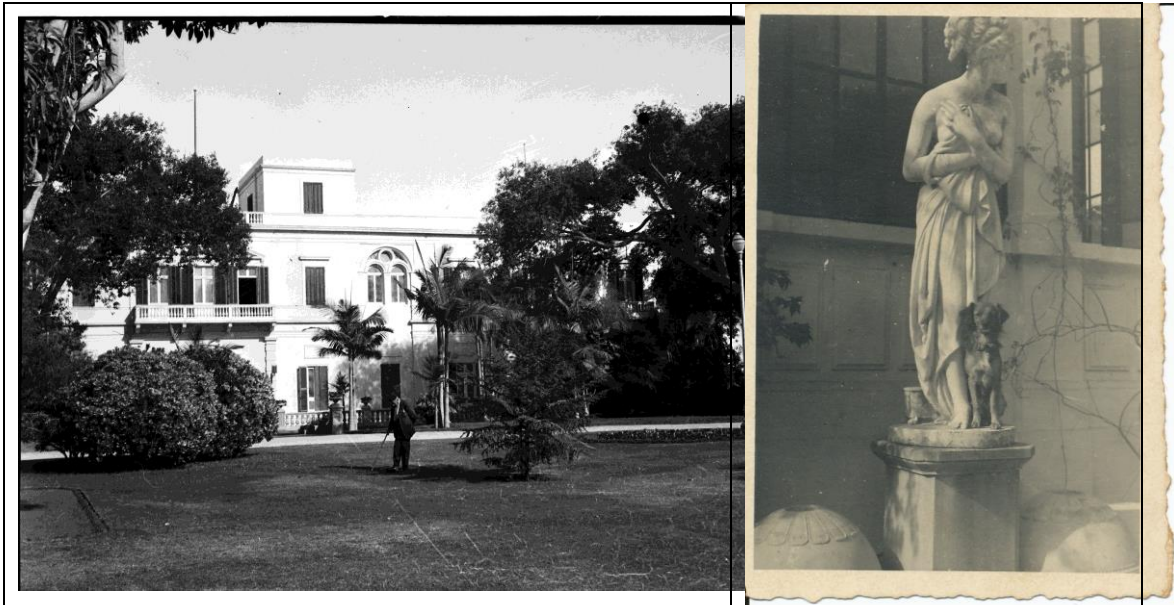
26 Sep (flying log) – raid on enemy concentrations at Nocera – recalled.

October 1943

From Brindisi we again helped Monty's men climb up the Italian "boot". My last effort was leading the squadron – 3 x 18 aircraft – over the Pope's Summer Palace at Monte Cassino which was reputed to be used as an artillery arsenal by the Hun.

This was our 63rd sortie – the air force command in the European Zone had always stipulated the maximum that any member of aircrew could perform was 30 sorties and this could be taken as a "tour". Two tours and you were considered to be "non-operational".

- 6 Oct (letter) – "If my present luck at poker holds I hope to be able to cable another 50 pounds by the end of the year. At the moment we are having quite a delightful change from the tent life we have become so accustomed to during the last year. We are stationed at an aerodrome "somewhere in Italy" and there is a town quite close, and the CO commandeered a large villa close to the aerodrome for use as the officers' mess. So now I'm writing in our own dining room with my bedroom (shared with the only other Aussie officer on the squadron) on the floor above". "Jacky has become quite a good house dog, no trouble at all, he just goes outside into the spacious grounds and finds himself a tree". I'll take a photo of the villa and send it on shortly". "I took the little blighter (Jacky) into town on Wednesday last and in no time at all he'd disappeared and I couldn't find him so he had a night out on the town. One of the officers went to town the following day and found him and he's been very penitent since".
- 9 Oct (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on enemy HQ at Palata – box leader, 4 spits escort.
- 11 Oct (flying log) – raid on Cassino – weather U/S – Stork
- 12 Oct (flying log) – raid on road junction at Vasto – unescorted –accurate A/A.
- 16 Oct (flying log) – raid on Venafro town – unescorted – bags of flak!
- 17 Oct (flying log) – raid in FA 463 on Teano – Stork – cloud over target. This is Ross's last operational mission, making a total of 63 raids.
- 25 Oct (letter) – "Jacky has just climbed up on the sofa with me and is looking at me with a most pleading expression wagging his tail thirteen to the dozen. It's just about his dinner time and he keeps a pretty watchful eye on my movements". Hitch hiked to the large town of Lecce in the centre of the heel of Italy. Describes Lecce in detail. In the centre of town is an ultra-modern five storey block of shops and offices overlooking the excavation of an ancient roman amphitheatre. "1943 within five yards of 43 BC makes one realize the youth and great potential of Australia".



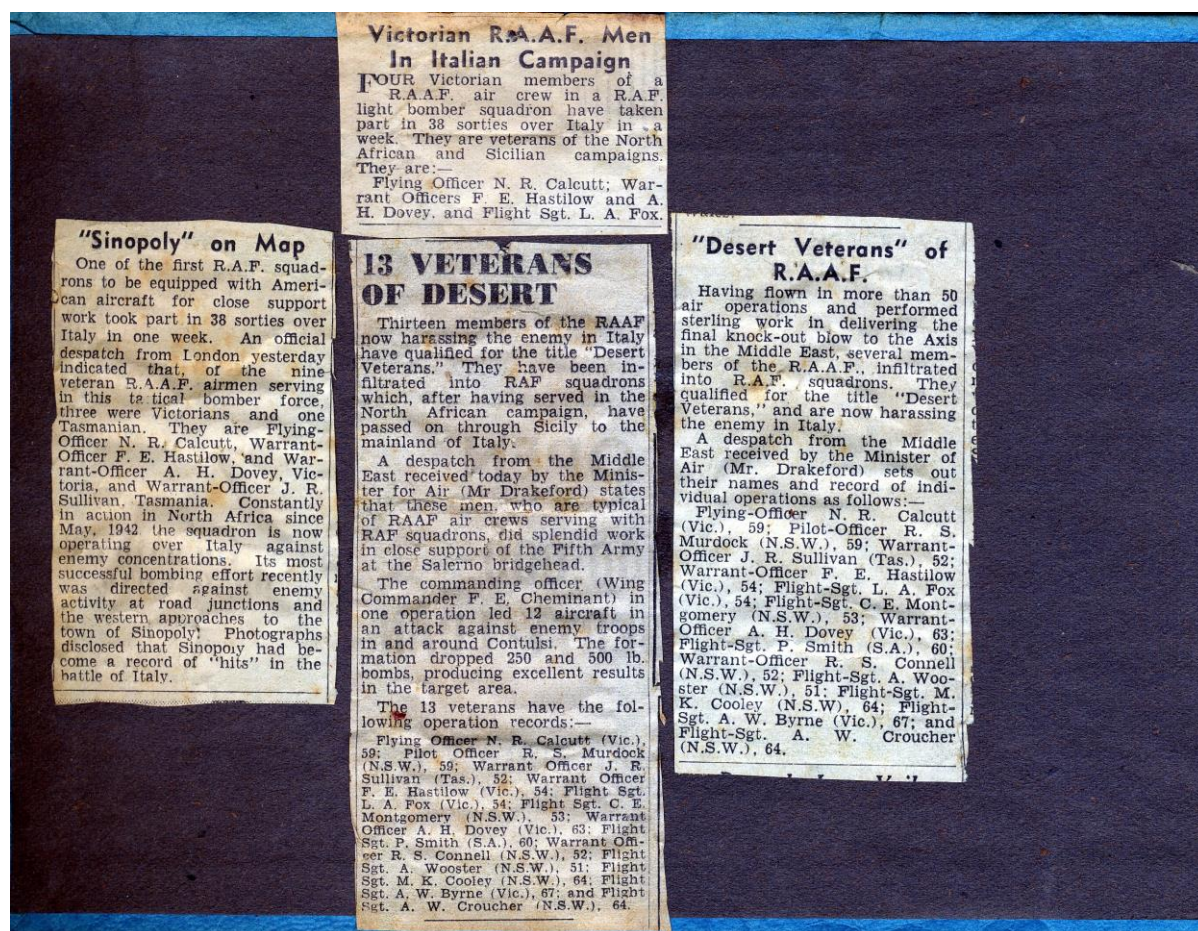
Jacky in Brindisi

6005... OPERATIONAL RECORD					6005... Time carried forward :-				
Date	Hour	Aircraft	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS	Number		Flying Times	
YEAR	MONTH	Type and No.	UNIT	AERODROMES	Targets	DAY	NIGHT	Day	Night
1943	MARCH	BALTIMORE	223 SQUADRON	MARSA GIARDANE	MARSA LONE AND L/GS	7		12.30	
	APRIL	"	"	MEDENINE	WADI ANARIT, ENFIDAVILLE LINE + L/GS	8		16.15	
	MAY	"	"	LA FAUCONNERIE	ENFIDAVILLE, PANTELLERIA	8		18.55	
	JUNE	"	"	ENFIDAVILLE	PANTELLERIA	3		6.00	
	JULY	"	"	REVILLE, LUQA	SICILY	12	2	26.35	5.10
	AUGUST	"	"	LUQA, GELA, GERBINI	SICILY ITALY (TOR)	7		16.00	
	SEPT	"	"	GERBINI	ITALY (TOR) SALERNO BRIDGEHEAD	13		29.00	
	OCT	"	"	BRINDISI	ITALY	5		12.45	
					TOTALS FOR TOUR	63	2	138.00	5.10
					TOTAL TIME				

Extract from flying log

November 1943

Due to our number of operations we (our crew of 4) were pulled out from Brindisi and traveled by train to Algiers and there loaded on a troopship (HMT Scythia) on 30 November 1943 for transport back to "Blighty" (UK). Landed at Liverpool in the middle of a snow storm dressed in khaki shirt and shorts - cold!!! Railed straight down to London and Australia House where the RAAF gave me a duplicate kit and a promotion to Flying Officer.



December 1943

23 Dec (letter) – two months since writing. I had intended to get one off while in Tunis but "the move" cropped up just as I started. So much has happened in those two months. Two days after the 25 October letter advised were moving on. Had to return all gear – parachute, mae west. "Adieus were rather difficult after all that time together – living, fighting and playing – you really do become part of the squadron and come to know your fellow officers particularly well". The came Tunis, vastly different from the place I had known last June. The city had become a lot more like the French town one reads about, a gay life with the civilian population back in full force. Picture houses had all reopened. We (Sam Cotter F/O) had plenty of time to see all the shows. Stayed with Dr and Mrs Saul in Tunis – they have been very good to him. Stayed in flat on second floor. They even welcomed Jacky. Their dining room was

converted for their (Ross & Sam) use. Five minutes walk from a restaurant taken over for the exclusive use of RAF officer. Had army rations skillfully prepared by an Italian cook. The proprietor of the restaurant was a partner in a café in Brindisi and I was able to give him up to the minute information on his property. He arranged for Jacky's meals, and used to mind the faithful hound when his master went out, although on several occasions Jacky accompanied me and sat very docilely under my seat throughout the performance. "On receiving news of our posting to the UK there was great jubilation amongst our crew as we were the only ones going "home"- the others were going back to the Delta. After great hustle and bustle we got on the train for Algiers". Took four days, arduous, freezing. Cruise to UK from Algiers in style. Served butter! Crested crockery and silver cutlery, 3 courses etc. Played contract bridge in the lounge in the evenings.

25 Dec (letter) – discussed what happened after arriving at Carlisle. Met by Gordon and Pat (one of his twin sisters). Saw off their Canadian cousin, a P/O in the RCAF. Walked around Carlisle, met Gordon's father. Went to Gordon's home (in Parton) in a Morris 8. Met Gordon's 17 year old brother Keith. Wigton is two miles away from the Hampson family home. Leisurely life, up at 10.30, breakfast etc. Went Christmas shopping in Carlisle. On Christmas eve Charlie Grant – our NZ wireless operator who had joined the household for a week – went into Carlisle with Gordon, Pat and Ross. Pat and I went to the pictures. Had a wonderful Christmas day. Don't know what I will be doing when this leave is over.

January 1944

Was then posted as a "non-ops" to the Operational Training Unit (OTU) at Bicester on Oxfordshire. Took up the challenge and became Navigation Instructor then the "Navigation Officer" acting as Flight Lieutenant! During my stay at Bicester I complained to the RAAF about being classed as "non-ops."

7 Jan (letter) – reported to the unit to receive posting instructions. "So you got a thrill out of that newspaper report "Desert Veterans". I tell you I was just as thrilled to get your airgraph telling of the appearance of my report in the daily papers and on 3AR".

14 Jan (letter) – "By the way dad, those last bombs on Africa were not in the Cape Bon area but just north of Enfidaville where the Huns held out even after they were surrounded. By the way if you can get a magazine called Flight the last issue in December 1943 you'll see a photo of the briefing for that raid with your son in the background". "As you should already know Frank Hastilow, now a Pilot Officer, is with me at this OTU, and I've just been swapping notes with him".

20 Jan (letter) – talks about Aussies being repatriated by the RAAF. "I've applied for a staff course which will give me another bit of leverage to tip the scales in my favour, for after that course I will be a specialist and should therefore find the way back to Aussie a little smoother". Not embroiled in any gambling schools over here. "Poor Jacky's lost to me now – for when I first arrived I found that the RAAF were sending my mail to the Middle East and if the fellow I saw in Algiers had been able to

get back to me, the letter telling me of Jacky's whereabouts would have gone out to Cairo and will have to come back again. I'm not entertaining any great hope of seeing the little blighter again". "Re the newspaper clippings of the 38 ops (raids), the Aussies on the squadron did a total of 38 sorties, eg I did four, Bill did three, and so on till you get a total of 38 for the Aussies".

February 1944

- 7 Feb (letter) – "By the way I heard today that Jacky is back in Tunis again and is being well looked after by the people who run the RAF restaurant there, so I'm happy he's in good hands. They were very kind to him when I was last there and I had no qualms in leaving him in their charge if I wanted to go to the theatre". Describes the timber hut he is living in, total of six rooms, provides diagram of his room. Has a batman called Ivy. Cycles up to his office two miles away. Playing cards at night – has had a run of poor luck.
- 26 Feb (letter) – overjoyed to hear photos of Italy arrived. Hasn't taken a photo in the UK. Finished course last Saturday, packed and returned to his own station. Caught train to Rugby, then another to Carlisle where booked into hotel. Went to pictures with Pat. Shopping in Wigton, then went back to Parton. "Gordon, in his brand new Pilot Officers uniform, arrived". Went shooting, bagged a rabbit. Had photo taken in Wigton.

March 1944

- 6 Mar (letter) – "Your note re Mrs Hastilow ringing you reminds me that Frank has now joined me in our flight here, brings the total of ex-223 boys to four – which is pretty good. The Pic Scout which also arrived told of Lloyd Fox's passing on – mentioning that he was one of the few RAAF men to qualify for the title "Desert Veteran". You can reassure Mrs H that Frank has quite got over the sad event and is now in the very best of health and good spirits." "Which reminds me, Mrs Hampson was very profuse in her thanks for the little notes I used to add to Gordon's letters when I censored them". "It makes one feel rather proud to be a member of the RAAF when one hears the long continuous drone of bombers going out at night and then in daylight to see the Fortresses flying in formation high overhead in great droves. They've sure done some excellent work". "Enclosed are some photos that appeared in the press. I did 40 ops in "U" for uncle, it was our machine" (Baltimore bomber).

April 1944

I was then selected as a trainee at the RAF Central Navigation School – the highest form of training available to a navigator. Had the good fortune to head the course and was awarded the title of “Fellow of the Royal Meteorological Society”.

It was at this time that the RAF selected me as the “Nav Officer” of 666 Squadron, a mosquito aircraft squadron that was flying across to Norway and bombing the Nazi establishments. However the RAAF in Australia intervened and vetoed the posting, insisting that I was wanted back in Australia because of my “qualifications”.



Central Navigation School course photo

October 1944

Shipped out on a cargo ship (M/V Glenstrae) which traveled via New York then on to Melbourne via the Panama Canal and Cook Strait. Served again at MCG until they (RAAF) decided I needed to be re-trained in the “Australian way” of air navigation. Was sent to RAAF at Sale where the humour of the situation was well appreciated – the “pupil” was asked to lecture to the incoming course on navigation.

1945

Returning to MCG I waited for some operational posting, but the RAAF HQ confirmed I was "non-ops" so I was posted to Rathmines so that I could become proficient at navigating an Air/Sea Rescue Catalina. It was on the last day of my course at Rathmines that VJ Day (victory over Japan) occurred and despite my plea for discharge was posted to 115 Air Sea Rescue Unit at Morotai.



Images from 115 Air Sea Rescue Flight

April 1946

Discharged as acting Flight Lieutenant on 16 April 1946. Awarded the 1939-45 Star, the Africa Star and Rosette, the Pacific Star, the Italy Star, the Defense Medal and the Active Service Badge.

Veterans mentioned in Ross's records

Name	References	WW2 Honour Roll
Abraham Jim Pilot Officer (Aus)	*May 42-Nairobi visit	Lyle James Abraham, born 24.3.21 Vic, no.40392, enl 5/41 Melb, disch 2/47
Ahern Jack Sgt (Vic)	*Apr 42-died in crash (knew in Aust)	John Arthur Ahern, born 31.5.21 Vic, no.400909, enl 11/40 Melb, died 23 Apr 42
Annells Bob Flying Officer (Aus)	*Photo-Barry's Hotel *Photo-Gil Gil + Lace? *Feb 42-Barry's Hotel	Robert Harvey Annells, born 25.5.16 SA, no.401292, enl 2/41 Melb, died 21 Feb 43
Bennett Ken Flying Officer (Aus)	*Jan 42-crew up *Mar 42-off to training	Kenneth Jack Bennett, born 28.11.17 Vic, no.401409, enl 2/41 Melb, died 3 Jan 43
Buchanan	*Gilgil list *223 Squadron *Died crash (+Kettle)	Norman Ross Buchanan, born 17.2.20 WA, no.406609, enl 2/41, died 25 Sep 42
Byrne A.W Flight Sgt (Vic)	*Newspaper clipping	John Dennis Byrne, born 11.5.21 Vic, no.409505, enl 9/41 Melb, disch 11/46
Clarke Stan Flight Lt (Aus)	*May 42-Nairobi visit	Stanley Richmond Clarke, born 2.5.22 Vic, no.11323, enl 7/40 Melb, disch 7/47
Cooley M.K Flight Sgt (NSW)	*Newspaper clipping	Neville James Cooley, born 29.3.19 NSW, no.405073, enl 1/41 Bris, disch 9/45
Croucher A.W Flight Sgt (NSW)	*Newspaper clipping	Arthur William Croucher, born 9.7.17 NSW, no.405270, enl 3/41 Bris, disch 2/46
Eastgate	*Gilgil list *223 Squadron *Died same day Ross's plane hit by flack	Mervyn Louis Eastgate, born 4.11.19 Qld, no.405351, enl 3/41 Bris, died 2 Apr 43
Gurney	*Gilgil list *223 Squadron	Denis Albert Gurney, born 20.8.12 UK, no.402595, enl 10/40 Sydney, disch 1/45

Harnett Geoff Warrant Officer (Aus)	*Photo-Barry's Hotel *Feb 42-Barry's Hotel *Died crash (+Rich)	Geoffrey William Harnett, born 14.4.17 UK, no.400987, enl 12/40, died 23 Jul 43
Kettle Murray Sgt (Aus)	*Gilgil list *Photo-dingy drill *With Ross in 70 OTU *Died crash (Buchanan)	Andrew Murray Kettle, born 12.6.16 Vic, no.401170, enl 1/41 Melb, died 25 Sep 42
Lace Jim Pilot Officer (Aus)	*Gilgil list *Photo-Gilgil-Jim L? *Photo-shaving? *May 42-Nairobi visit	John Mitchell Lace, born 12.6.16 Vic, no.26907, Enl 6/40 Adl, died 10 Feb 45
Marshall Austin Captain 9 th Div Army	*Nov 42-Gaza photo *Ross visited in Gaza *Jun 43-back in Aust	Austin Geoffrey Marshall, born 13.2.06 Vic, no.VX28420, enl 6/40, disch 7/47
Matthews John Flying Officer (Aus)	*Nov 41-ill on ship *Jan 42-share tent *Jan 42-walk *Photo-tennis team	John David Matthews, born 30.6.17 Vic, no.401313, enl 2/41 Melb, disch 3/46
Rich John/Jack Flying Officer (Aus)	*Photo-Barry's Hotel *Photo-tennis team *Jan 42-walk *Died crash (+Harnett)	John Frederick Rich, born 23.1.16 Vic, no.400998, enl 12/40 Melb, died 23 Jul 43
Sandery Max Flight Sgt-W/O (Aus)	*Gilgil list *Photo-resting + Ross *Photo-on steps of fort *Photo-old arch	Maxwell Leslie Sandery, born 18.5.18 SA, no.407975, enl 2/41 Adel, disch 8/45
Wardlaw Lin Flying Officer (Aus)	*Photo-tennis team *Photo-on own *Photo-Barry's Hotel	Lindsay Albert Wardlaw, born 26.4.16 WA, no.408180, enl 2/41 Hobart, disch 7/45
Wooster A Flight Sgt (NSW)	*Newspaper clipping	Clifford Arthur Wooster, born 5.5.21 NSW, no.403294, enl 1/41 Sydney, disch 3/46

	Ross's crew in 223 Sq	
Hampson Gordon Flight Sgt (UK)	*Gilgil list *Photo-in bunk *Photo-dingy drill *Photo-Hotel Cecil	Pilot
Price Jock Flight Sgt (UK)	*Photo-in bunk *Photo-Hotel Cecil *Photo-old arch	Air gunner
Grant Charlie Flight Sgt (NZ)	*Photo-Hotel Cecil *Photo-on steps of fort *Dec 43-with Ross UK	Wireless operator