

## CHAPTER 1

### *My Urge To Fly*

After receiving a copy of John Gee's book it stirred a lot of memories, so I thought whilst I was able, I should put some of my thoughts and war memories down on paper.

I was a young lad of 15 years working in a grocery store, Irwin Bros. at Ceduna on the West Coast of South Australia, when Jimmy Mollison a famous pre-war flier flew over Ceduna during his round Australia flight to break the existing record.

Saturday was an all day-night trading in the country, so the prescribed half day off was on a Friday. On this particular Friday I was standing in a vacant paddock when Mollison flew overhead. I saw him throw something out of the plane and when I retrieved it, I found a rolled up copy of the Advertiser and written on it in Mollison's handwriting was a request to notify Adelaide of the estimated time he expected to arrive. In excitement I ran to the Post Office and gave the Advertiser to the Postmaster who promised to notify Adelaide of the message.<sup>1</sup> I don't know what happened to the paper but I often wish I had retrieved it, as it may now have some historical value.

I penned the foregoing as this I think was the start of my urge to learn to fly. In my young mind I thought those who could fly were Supermen. Financial circumstances in those days prevented so many from fulfilling their ambitions.

At the age of seventeen and still working at Irwin Bros. store earning the magnificent wage of 30 shillings a week and with no further prospects I applied for and was accepted as a trainee in the South Australian Police Force. The then Commissioner of Police, Brigadier General Leane, had devised a Cadet Scheme. Wages on enlistment was two pound fifteen shillings a fortnight and keep. This wage remained constant until the swearing in ceremony on reaching 21 years of age. Looking back I now think this was a form of slave labour as we were called on to do a lot of outside mounted duties, escorts, race duties and parades. Race duty at Oakbank consisted of riding up the day before, in the saddle for 14 hours the next day and the long ride home of approximately 20 miles the following day. However, in fairness to the scheme it did make me a fit, more confident person and I learnt the value of discipline which stood me in good stead during crisis in my air force career, and best of all a great improvement in my educational abilities.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Postmaster was killed in a Japanese air raid.

Most of my pre-war service was at the Sea Ports - Port Pirie, Port Lincoln and Port Adelaide where I think my fistic ability at the time may have had something to do with it. My few years spent at Port Lincoln was during the Sailing Ships Period with sometimes three ships in port at the same time. The crews consisted mainly of Swedes and Norwegians of no small build.

Sober they were no trouble, but after months at sea they made the most of shore leave and influenced by liquor could become troublesome. In one instance, the whole force at Port Lincoln, all five of us were lined up with revolvers cocked to prevent a storming of the Police Station to release one of their number who had previously been arrested for disturbing the local dance. Luckily a local fisherman who spoke their language defused the situation. I often wonder what the alternative would have been. However, the local people were very law abiding so mainly my stay at Port Lincoln was a happy one. The scrapes with the sailors must of tuned me up while stationed at Port Lincoln because when I went to Adelaide I won the Police Heavyweight Boxing Title.<sup>2</sup>

I was stationed at Port Adelaide when war broke out in late 1939, when my ambition to learn to fly was re-kindled. My three year younger brother, Steve was also in the Police Force.<sup>3</sup> Together we both sought and obtained permission from the Commissioner of Police to join the Air Force. We both presented ourselves at the Air Force Receiving Office in North Terrace, both passed the medical examination, and started attending night classes to pass the required education exams which was duly accomplished.

At that time due to lack of training facilities, the waiting period could extend up to 18 months. Before our notice of enlistment was received the Commission, acting under the *Man Power Act* withdrew his permission. We both sought help from the Recruiting Officer who, though sympathetic, advised that any decision he would like to make would be over-ruled by the *Man Power Act*. With all the fuss we were making the Commissioner separated us by sending Steve to a post at Mount Gambier approximately 300 miles away. I was left at Port Adelaide and given the job of boarding overseas ships at the Outer Harbour anchorage with the Doctor and Customs to register and photograph alien seamen on board.

---

<sup>2</sup> Belt on display in the South Australian Police Museum.

<sup>3</sup> Later became the South Australian Assistant Commissioner of Police.

The frustration of not being able to enlist in the R.A.A.F. started to increase. Staring blankly out of a window one day I thought why not "nick off" to Western Australia where I was born and enlist there. At this time it was necessary to obtain permission to travel by train to Perth. A Statutory Declaration was required stating reasons for travel.

I completed the Declaration stating that the majority of my relatives lived in Western Australia, which was true and I wished to rejoin them.<sup>4</sup> This was sufficient to obtain the required permission, I might add, unbeknown to the Police Authorities.

Police regulations required that I give a months notice of my intention to resign which was duly lodged. I did not receive any official notice in reply. Several sources quietly told me I would be prosecuted under the *Man Power Act* if I took the action I had decided. I also was given the opinion my resignation was treated as a joke, with the Commissioner known to use the term:

"That bastard, of a pig-headed Tobin."

From my early service I started off on the wrong foot with the Commissioner Brigadier General Leane, a famous First World War Veteran, a reason why I thought he would be more sympathetic to my cause, due to the stage we had reached in our enlistment, especially when his son, Geoff and several others had been allowed to enlist in the Army.

For some reason my 21st birthday was always supposed to be a very special day for me. It was the policy that the Commissioner swear in a new Constable on their 21st birthday. After swearing me in the Commissioner extolled all the virtues of a good Policeman, about taking bribes etc and when asked if I had any questions I blurted out,

"Can I have a day off to celebrate my 21st?"

he nearly had a fit and told me I was bloody lucky to have a job, which was so in those days. I think that black mark carried through to our recent confrontation. Even when I won my first Heavyweight Boxing Title, when he ordered the fight stopped due to the condition of my opponent, he was not over enthusiastic when he presented me with the belt and cup.

---

<sup>4</sup> Thomas Patrick TOBIN, brother and sisters were born in Kalgoorlie, Western Australia.

When my 28 days notice of resignation expired, with my ticket and required permission I quietly boarded the train and was on my way to Western Australia. At the time there was a loop hole in the *Man Power Act*. If you left your place of employment and did not obtain another job you could not be prosecuted. This loop hole was later closed and several Policemen were prosecuted for leaving.

A warrant was issued for my arrest. They even explored the possibility of prosecuting me for signing a false Declaration to obtain travel permission. The warrant was never executed as I think at that time no specific charge could be laid. To carry on the spite, the Main Power Branch in Adelaide sent a telegram to the Man Power Branch in Perth requesting that I was to be stopped from enlisting in the R.A.A.F.

One of two lucky breaks did come my way. When I visited the RAAF Enlistment Officer in Perth, I found it was the same officer who was in Adelaide and was so sympathetic of my position. He advised me to visit the Man Power Branch regularly and gave me his word I would be in the first intake if I obtained the necessary Man Power permission.

At this time I was living at the Railway Hotel, Barrack Street, Perth. It was managed by a young couple whom I became very friendly with and by helping with a few odd jobs my full board worked out very cheaply 30/- a week. When I visited Perth for a weekend they always found a bed for me even if I had to sleep in the sewing room.

After nearly two and a half months of harassing the Main Power Branch, sometimes twice a day the position was unchanged. However, my second lucky break was around the corner.

When I visited the Man Power Branch this particular Monday morning I was told,

"We will send a telegram to Adelaide and if no answer is received by Thursday giving reason why permission to enlist should be withheld, further consideration will be given to your case."

It would be hard to explain my feelings after a sleepless night as I walked towards the Man Power Branch that Thursday. I met a man I had never seen before, after some questions, name etc he checked and said,

"We have no record of you."

and advised me to visit the Man Power Branch at RAAF Recruiting if I wished to join the RAAF. I doubt if anyone did the distance required faster than I did that day.

Permission to enlist was given without a question asked.

Next I was knocking on the door of the Recruitment Officer. True to his word he told me there was an intake on the following Saturday and to report there at 9 a.m.

Regarding the Man Power Branch I later found out that the head went to Sydney for a conference and the second-in-charge had a heart and lost my file.

At this stage the money situation had become acute and I had intended to try for some employment, unaware then that this would make me liable for prosecution under the *Man Power Act*. Saved on the bell!

I only saw the Recruiting Officer, my saviour once more at a race meeting at the Perth Cup. He told me the Police were still asking about me, they knew where I was unofficially, but he would not tell them officially. What a queer situation. I often wished I had tried to find the Recruitment Officer when I was in Perth on my return to Adelaide after the war.

On the morning of Saturday 7/11/194~~2~~<sup>3</sup>, aged 26 years and 4 months, two and a half years after being put on the RAAF Reserve, I felt my age mixing with thirty-five other 18-20 year olds.

First posting was to Clontarf an ex-Christian Brothers College approximately 10 miles from Perth. I had left college before I reached fourteen years of age during the Depression and consequently did not reach a high standard of education.<sup>5</sup> I was apprehensive at the thought of competing against the much higher educated young ones. I found the knowledge and maturity I had gathered over the past 12 years stood me in good stead.

---

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Patrick TOBIN was educated at Christian Brothers College, South Australia - (C.B.C.)

The course of six weeks at Clontarf was very intensive for at this stage not knowing what our mustering would be it was necessary to cover all courses concerning pilots, navigators etc. I had to study all day and later into the night if I was to make the grade. I had never studied electricity and magnetism needed for wireless operators and found this subject the most difficult. The other subjects mainly English, Maths, Navigation and Morse Code I found much easier. I was pleased to finish with 87 and a half% overall marks.

It never entered my mind that I would be anything but a Pilot, and was very positive of this when I went for my final interview. I achieved the required result and felt the worst was behind me, and the rest would be a test of my manual abilities.

## CHAPTER 2

### *Induction*

On Foundation Day, 28/1/43 those mustered as pilots arrived at the Cunderdin Aerodrome north of Perth. Apart from learning to fly Tiger Moths the only subjects set for exams was on airframes and theory of flight. These exams were a farce as a scrub pilot working in the Chief Flying Instructor's Office openly sold copies of the exam papers. I think everyone bought a copy. The marks averaged around the 99 to 100% mark and no questions were asked.

During lectures we were told that the solo flight stage should be reached before ten hours instruction, after this we would be placed in the hands of the Chief Flying Instructor for a final decision, the scrub or a few hours extension time. They did encourage us by saying not to worry too much and that the art of landing would come suddenly.

I was allotted to an Instructor named Flying Officer, English. I was never fully comfortable with him. He waited until I had been to Perth for the week end before starting aerobatics. He seemed to derive some pleasure from my being sick.

The young lads were going solo after six hours but I was still struggling and getting worried. After eight hours and thirty-five minutes instruction without being able to master the landings, English passed me over to a Sergeant Martinovich for assessment. What a difference.

For one hour twenty minutes he nursed me through circuits and landing, giving me confidence and encouragement, everything fell into place, perfect landings flowed. When the Sergeant stepped out of the Tiger Moth patted me on the back and said away you go - nine hours and fifty-five minutes had elapsed. I think the Sergeant had a heart and keep track of the time.

From that moment I never looked back and during the rest of my air force flying even under some difficult circumstances I never made a ~~read~~ bad landing.

During the rest of the three months flying Tiger Moths I did a lot more flying with F/O English, for some reason there was little improvement in our relations. During aerobatics he did his best to make me sick and was not happy when he failed. I must admit I became a little bit over confident at times landing well inside the drome to save a lot of taxing to the hangers. He was not happy about this and halted this practice. I was glad I was pass the scrubbing stage.

Cunderdin is remembered for my first solo flight, which I think remains in the mind of every pilot. To be up there by yourself putting one wing down and say that's me doing that is a great feeling.

My next posting was to Geraldton and I was looking forward to flying the much loved Ansons with no vices. It took longer to master taxing the Anson in a strong wind then it did to learn to fly them.

My Instructor was a very likeable Flying Officer, Gibbons and after five hours instruction I was up solo. The hardest task flying Ansons is winding the undercarriage up and down took 98 turns both ways.

Another pupil of F/O Gibbons, a Lac Riley was paired off with me after we passed the instruction stage. He had one serious flaw, he could not judge his landing approach, either over-shooting or under-shooting, to be able to judge an approach for landing is a must for every pilot, lack of this aspect was the reason more pilots were scrubbed than any other. Riley got away with landing Tiger Moths because at Cunderdin on account of its size you could land and take off twice. Riley should have been scrub but the likeable beer swilling F/O Gibbons was too soft. Riley had the humiliation of being scrubbed after a short time in England and sent home.

The reason I have dwelt on Riley is that we shared the same danger of losing our lives on a night cross country exercise.

On July 5th, 1943 during the middle of winter we took off, Riley was in charge as I was instructed to act as second pilot. On return before reaching the drome a violent tropical storm moved in obscuring every landmark. At one stage we were directly over the drome and even thought flares were fired into the air we were unable to see them.

Geraldton is on the coast and we were unable to determine whether we were over land or sea. After discussion we decided to head inland and fly north to see if we could get out of the storm. We eventually found what seemed to be a small cleared paddock, the only one we had seen in what seemed hours. We circled the paddock several times to orientate ourselves and decided the best approach for landing.

We saw a railway line across our intended approach, during this period a railway car came along, realised we were in trouble and shone their strong lights along the lines, as if issuing an invitation to land along them. This is the course that Riley wanted to take, but I wanted to land in the paddock which I considered would be safer. Imagine the situation, here we were arguing loudly both with hands on the dual controls, with fuel running low.

Riley gave in first so I made preparations to land in the paddock on our belly with wheels up, the recognised procedure on forced landings.

On approach I had underestimated the height of the trees on the boundary so had to pull up causing me to land well into the paddock. Luckily the paddock had recently been ploughed which helped to slow our slide. Our landing lights



shining brightly showed us heading for a fence and some trees with no way of stopping. By the time we reached the fence our speed had slowed, but believe it or not one of the bigger strainer posts slanted towards us, struck one of the engines, turned us right around and we finished up facing the opposite direction and coming to a complete standstill.

For disbelievers I have two very good photographs to support the above. One funny aspect of the whole thing is that although we had parachutes we never at any stage discussed the possibility of bailing out. I know we just sat in the plane for several minutes, stunned and relieved we were still alive. I can't remember my exact emotions. Riley was the first to speak, half crying, saying,

"I will take the blame."

I know I reassured him saying,

"We will both share the blame."

We walked back to the rail car which had remained stationary. The rail car driver climbed a pole and used his portable telephone to notify Geraldton of our position. They boasted about us being tracked on radar facilities as Geraldton had told us to stay where we were and that we would be picked up the next day. We were due to spend a cold wintry night in the bush, but luckily a railway gang had a mp nearby and they invited us to share the warmth of their tents and camp fire and a delicious stew they were making. The Anson used fairly standard petrol, and petrol being a luxury in those days they asked if they could siphon some out of the Anson tanks. I said O.K. but my friend Riley would not let them have a drop, I thought the ungrateful BASTARD!

The upshot of it all was we were picked up next day as promised, they were able after a little repair to fly the Anson out of the paddock. We had landed at a place called Ajana about 90 miles north of Geraldton and had found the only cleared paddock in a 30 mile radius. It was estimated that we had approximately 12 gallons of fuel left, but the best part of it all Riley and I received a special recommendation for our effort in saving the plane and ourselves.

This may have helped Riley get his wings because he was listed as first pilot on the night. I never flew with Riley again. He told F/O Gibbons I was a Jonah and wanted another partner. I agreed whole heartedly with the swap. My next partner called Lucky Watson and I became good friends and spent weekends together in Perth. Lucky finished up staying behind as an instructor, so I lost contact with him.

Eventually, the great time arrived when my ambition was realised when on 27th July 1943, I was presented with my wings and Sergeant stripes. I must admit this was probably the most conceited time of my life. I kept throwing my left chest out and looking down to make sure my wings had not fallen off.

Just prior to leaving Geraldton, Lucky Watson and I foolishly decided to see how high we could get in an Anson, neither of us then realised the dangers of lack of oxygen above 10,000 feet. We thought we reached 19,000 feet but in the befuddled state we probably reached nothing could be certain. However, some sixth sense must of sounded a warning and we lost no time in getting down near the ground. Through this stupid incident I lost my voice for three weeks, which spoilt most of the three weeks I spent on embarkation leave in Adelaide.

Being a South Australian at this stage I parted with all the friends I trained with in Western Australia and was no included with the South Australian trainees. However, I made some very close friends among the South Australian boys, John Byrnes, Phil Pearce and Rex Gogler<sup>6</sup> in particular - an everlasting friendship.

The main topic at the embarkation depot was "where to next". I dreaded the thought of going to the Islands as I am not partial to hot weather, and secretly hoped that England would be our destination.

---

<sup>6</sup> (now deceased)

## CHAPTER 3

### *Destination America*

Before leaving Adelaide I thought it would be wise to clear up my situation in regards to the Police Force.

I spoke to the Commissioner's Secretary about the reason for my visit. He in turn spoke to the Commissioner behind closed doors.

After, the Secretary advised me the Commissioner did not wish to speak to me and to tell me I had been removed from the strength of the Police Force. I am glad he used those terms and not that I had been dismissed, a term I would have objected to as I had voluntarily resigned. At that time it did worry me.

We eventually left by train for Melbourne and was billeted at the Exhibition Grounds, still not having any idea of our final destination. During the five days we spent in Melbourne I had my first try at ice skating. I was hopeless and was still hopeless when later I tried again in England.

This night after hours spent at the St Kilda Skating Rink several of us arrived back at the Exhibition Grounds with uniforms soaking wet. Next morning about 3 a.m. we were ordered out of bed, told to pack up all our kit and be ready to move out. Having to put on a wet uniform was not pleasant. We entered railway carriages on a siding close to the grounds and under darkness taken to Port Melbourne, and put down the hold of an American ship. We were not allowed to show ourselves and were kept under guard down in the hold until the ship was well out to sea approximately twelve hours later. Wearing a wet uniform did not improve matters.

On an American ship, where were we headed for. The Islands, or America. That was the question everyone wanted to know. In hindsight it should have been obvious that the Islands were not our destination as we were too untrained and no facilities existed on the Islands for training purposes. Also there were a mixture among us, some had got their wings on single engined aircraft the Wirraway and others on twins the Anson.

After finding our destination was America there were a lot of happy boys on board. Quite willing to help the crew chipping and renewing the old paint around the ship. The ship, the USS America of approximately 35,000 tons was then the biggest American passenger ship and the fastest which enabled us to travel to America unescorted. The trip took approximately 12 days arriving at the Port of San Francisco.

From San Francisco we journeyed right across America by train. A wonderful experience seeing the Grand Canyon on the way. We stopped at several small mid western siding towns on the way to stretch our legs. I sent a card home from a place called Winnemucka a reminder of some of our Aboriginal named towns in Australia. We were served on disposable plates which were thrown out the window after. Our longest stay was at Kansas City and for a short time we were able to sample the hospitality of the American people. A lot of the boys managed to return to the train in cars driven by American lasses. We were all on our honour to return by a certain time. The only two people who were late was the Padre and the Administration Officer.

We eventually arrived in New York, no stopover before being routed to an army camp, Myles Standish some miles from Boston. During the fourteen days spent there we were given periods of leave with free travel passes. Most went to New York but as I was able to make contact with American relatives, three of my mother's sisters who had gone to America and raised families at a place called Bangor in the State of Maine, north of Boston, in view of this I resisted the temptation (just) of going to the glamour city of New York.

I caught a train from Boston to Bangor and when I arrived at about 5 a.m. in the morning I must admit I had a few tears when I found my three Aunties and their families at the station to meet me. My stay in Bangor was great and I was glad I resisted the New York temptation. The unabashed affection shown by my Aunties and young cousins was embarrassing at times. The only problem arose in sharing my six days leave between the Aunties. They had worked out to the exact hour I was to spend with each.

Over the years we had only occasional contact with one family, the Flynn family, it was them I contacted and expected to spend most of my time with them as they had children more in my age group. I went to a hotel party with my cousin Frances Flynn, one of her work mates was leaving to join the army.

The Australian cousin was asked to say a few words and fortified with many ales this was not a problem. The chaps wife had just had a baby and I rattled on about the Australian custom of wetting the baby's head etc. When I sat down I was greeted with loud applause and thought I had done pretty good. Next day when my cousin returned from work she told me,

"They all enjoyed hearing my Australian brogue but not one understood a word I said."

Deflated, my Aunties said that the only time they understood me was when I was singing.

In an endeavour to extend my stay in Bangor, the Aunties tried to persuade me to visit a doctor they knew, who would give me a certificate for some reason stating I was unfit to travel. It was tempting but I could not risk being left behind in the U.S. if the friends I made were suddenly shipped out. Luckily I was given another 3 days leave which I spent at Bangor.

After a train journey to New York we were placed on board the 'Aquatania', a big four funnelled ship and after the Queen Mary the biggest ship afloat. There were approximately 300 Aussies and we were billeted in tiered bunks, four holds down in the bowels of the ship. It would not have been a pleasant place to be if the ship was torpedoed.

The ship was jammed with troops, white and black with very little space to move in, especially with the black's habit of lolling around the decks. Some estimated there were 25,000 men aboard a little exaggerated perhaps. Food was rationed to two meals a day and water two hours a day. Being aircrew we were supposed to be experts on aircraft spotting which was far from the truth but that job was allotted to us. Once when a four engined plane was sighted and no one could make a decision, the guns on the ship started blazing away. The panic on deck was indescribable especially among the lolling blacks. The plane turned out to be an American plane of some sort which got the message and turned away. The incident made us apprehensive as to what would happen to our small number if a real emergency arose.

Abandon ship drill was called often, to allow us to see our station and lifeboat allotted to us. However, it was generally felt that if a torpedo struck while we were in our bunks our chances of getting safely off was nil. It was easy to sense the hostility existing between the white and black troops, especially when most whites carried revolvers around their waists. One American officer was bashed on a darkened top deck reserved only for officers, the culprit was never found but the incident heightened tensions and made our chances more slim. I found later in England that white and black troops were not allowed to spend evening leave in the same town together, and where necessary the nights were alternated.

The 'Aquatania' was a very fast vessel and ran the gauntlet unescorted, but the ship was constantly zig zagging to make a hit harder, should any 'U' boat be lurking around. Once lying in our bunks during the night the ship came to a complete standstill with all the engines shut down for several hours. This was the most nail biting period of the trip, we could only assume the navy had reported 'U' boats ahead and they were clearing the path before the ship could proceed. We had left New York on 3/10/43 and landed in the north of England on 10/10/43 a seven day cruise.

## CHAPTER 4

### *Brighton*

England greeted us with a cold misty rainy day apparently a daily feature in that area in October. We left by train for Brighton by the sea a popular seaside resort, the RAAF had taken over all the big hotels on the seafront, after they had been stripped of their refinements back to bare cement and wire bunks. I was billeted at the Grand Hotel, made famous when the IRA tried to wipe out Mrs Thatcher and some of her Ministers with planted bombs during a conference they were holding. When I revisited England in 1975 and did a trip to Brighton I was unable to recognise the Old Grand Hotel returned to its former opulence plus. There was no free board waiting for me then.

On top of the Hotels and big buildings on the seafront were placed machine guns, and apart from doing occasional duties manning them, life at Brighton was a holiday. Previously it was the practice to take squads on marches but when a German Fighter shot over and found them bunched together and let go with its machine guns this practice was discontinued. This happened at Blackpool another seaside resort. I must admit I never saw a German Fighter while I was at Brighton, but one night a bomb did drop close by that shook ours beds.

My initial stay of seven weeks at Brighton doing nothing was pleasant, but we began to wonder if there was a war on. Apparently the training facilities were unable to cope with all the newly arrived trainees. When I first arrived in England I was naive enough to think it would be only a matter of a few months before I saw some action, I knew so little of the further intensive training required. When word came early in December 1943 that I would be going to a civilian drome called Clyffe Pypard for further training I was relieved. However, when I found I was back to square one on Tiger Moths my ego suffered a dive. I eventually came to realise the sane reason for this. Flying over the open spaces of Australia and the crowded countryside of England where every paddock looked the same was a different proposition, and the weather in England was cold and unpredictable.

## CHAPTER 5

### *Tiger Moths and Oxfords*

It was back to the instructional stage again with a FL/SGT McGuffie. I found that even though I had not flown for nearly 6 months my flying confidence had not deserted me and after only one hour and twenty minutes instruction I was up there soloing over the pretty English countryside. Here I received my only above average classification and even though I was convinced my flying skills kept improving for the rest of my career I never got past the "Average" proficient or "Required Standard" classifications. However, once you reached the big four engined types no classification was considered. How could anyone classify any operational pilot. There was no instruction stage on the operational squadron by the time you reached there you were supposed to be competent in all aspects.

I must admit my navigational skills were zero and I got lost on two occasions in Tiger Moths. There was never any problem finding a drome in England during daylight to land on and get directions. Tiger Moths had the shovel type rear wheel so it was necessary to land on grass alongside the runway to avoid cutting up the bitumen, woe betide the pilot who disobeyed this instruction. I was glad they were more concerned about my flying than navigational skills, I had no desire to be a fighter pilot, and apart from doing slide slipping in the Tiger coming into land, I had no desire to indulge in the favourite aerobatics of looping the loop and slow rolling, even though I was quite capable of doing so. Even though well rugged up, flying the Tiger Moths during December well into winter I suffered a lot of sore throats. My first Christmas and New Year in England was spent at Clyffe Pypard, and I hoped to see my first fall of snow but was disappointed.

After a few days back at Brighton I was posted to Croughton for a course on twin engined Oxfords. The Oxford was more advanced than the Anson, faster with more powerful engines. Their wing loading was higher than the Anson (less wing area for size and weight of plane) and they had to be treated with more respect. The controls were more responsive, any sharp movement back of the control column and the Oxford could flip over onto its back. However, the wheels were automatically retractable a plus over the Anson. Their biggest draw back was that they had no wireless equipment, which I considered a must in the busy airwaves then existing over England. Take off and landing were controlled by visual signals by vans at the start of the runways.

Flying Oxfords I considered was the start of my serious flying on the way to operations. Several of us thought a real binge was called for to get everything out of our systems before starting. What a fallacy! Together with Reg Franklyn, a great friend of mine, now deceased and another chap called Green we visited the mess before walking down to a nearby town about a mile away

to go to a dance. After consuming 15 full whiskies and beer chasers, ignoring the sane advice of the airman behind the bar who warned that the whiskey was the real thing and would catch up with us, we started for the town dance, even went into a nearby pub for another beer. I am ashamed to admit that was the finish of me and I just laid down in the gutter in a hopeless mess. The only thing I can say in my favour is that this was the only time then and to the present time I was ever in such an incapable position.

Reg Franklyn and Green then proved what great guys they were by virtually carrying me the mile back to Base. I can even remember the comedy of the situation, Green was much shorter than Franklyn and I felt I was staggering back to the drome with one leg a foot shorter than the other. I often wonder why they were not so visibly affected, and think they must of missed a few rounds. To top the story off it took me four days to recover and I never touched another drink of whiskey until approximately 20 years later.

I was flying Oxfords from early April until the end of May and as I had anticipated flying was becoming more serious daily doing day and night exercises. I was subjected to six hours intensive instruction before being allowed go to solo. My instructor was very strict and I was subjected to a deal of blind flying under the hood on take off and landings. I cursed him under my breath many times, but he taught me to have faith in the plane's instruments and forget all about that bull about flying by the seat of the pants.

Under his strict guidance my flying improved greatly and later on operations when I had to place complete trust in my instruments when tired or distressed and with a definite feeling that one wing was down lower than the other, his advice always came back to my mind when in doubt always trust your instruments. This stark reality was rammed home to me the night I was over Berlin, my 29th operation and a day before my 29th birthday.

I always hoped I would see Berlin before I finished my tour. After dropping our bombs I was more interested in seeing the damage being caused than watching what I was doing. I had no feeling or sensation that I was in a sharp turn and losing height rapidly until I saw the altimeter spinning around, coming to reality and placing explicit trust in my instrument. I eventually gained control but not before we had plunged down to 8,000 feet from a height of 18,000 feet.<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> During a re-union in Lincoln, England of 153 Sqn. I asked my navigator why he did not alert me to what was happening. He said, "Skipper we all thought you had a good reason for what was happening". What complete trust they showed in me that night.



During Oxford training a beam course was included. Given a course to fly from a certain point it was possible to locate a beam, which when located came over as a continuous morse signal in your ear phones. By flying along the beam it would take you directly back to your drome. If you strayed left of the beam, morse dots would be heard and straying to the right, morse, dash-dash-dash would come over. So it was reasonably simple to keep along the beam. Beam flying was never used on operations to my knowledge, but at that stage not knowing how much longer the war would last, beam flying was a possibility.

A lot of emphasis was placed on night flying so I was now convinced I was destined to fly the heavy bombers in the future. Not having wireless communication it was necessary to carry a beacon chart on night flying trips, the beacon charts being changed daily. All over England beacons were flashing morse code signals and if a beacon was flashing say the signal "A" your chart would tell you the exact course and approximate time you would need to fly to locate your base, which would then be identified flashing the morse code signal for that day.

At 2.30 a.m. one morning with a full tank I was ordered to take off solo and keep circling around the drome area, so I was not issued with a Beacon Chart. Getting bored doing this I foolishly decided to do a small square cross country trip. By doing a timed square I reasoned the last timed leg would take me back over base. I previously admitted my navigational skills were zero, and ignoring one of the basics that you must know the direction and wind strength to fly a true square and also not clamping the magnetic compass tight enough to prevent movement, I got hopelessly lost. Flying a twin engined plane in darkness by yourself can be a very lonely affair. Having plenty of fuel I was determined to find base, but two and a half hours later near dawn I gave up and landed at the first drome I found, at that time being approximately 90 miles south of my base. I had to suffer the humiliation of waiting for an instructor to be flown down and fly me back to base. A form of punishment. As I said before, they were more concerned with my flying ability than navigational skills, and in my next step I would have a navigator to see that I did not get lost.

After escaping the weeding out process on Oxfords the only plane in between the heavy 4 engined bombers was the twin engined Wellington which at the outbreak of war was used as a front line bomber. It was nicknamed the 'Wimpy' because of its round, rotund, pregnant appearance.

## CHAPTER 6

### *The Crew*

To operate a Wellington a crew of six is required. Up to this stage mine was a solo performance. To obtain a crew I was sent to a holding depot called Hixon.

Hixon was stacked with pilots, navigators, bomb aimers, wireless operators and gunners. On arrival you were advised to mix and if possible obtain a voluntary compatible crew. If you were unable to do this within 14 days a crew would be allotted to you. I often wonder how a man would feel when a complete stranger asked the question:

"Will you place your life in my hands?"

After several days circling around I was no further advanced. When you line up for pay or whatever it is always in alphabetical order. This day Tobin lined up behind a Tilson. during waiting a conversation ensued, noting he had a navigator's badge I promptly asked him if he would be in my crew. Many times in the future I was glad his answer was 'yes', as he turned out to be a great crewman and a great navigator and to my mind no better in England. At the end of our tour he was awarded the Distinguished Flying Medal. Due to his navigational skills were put in the leading V of a daylight raid when correct timing to meet the fighter escort is necessary for their conservation of fuel. He remained in the RAAF after the war and was posted to Changhi.

In 1947 he visited Edinburgh, Adelaide in a Dakota and we had an all night reunion. His pilot then told me my northern Irish crew mate was the best navigator in the South East Asia Command.

Paddy Tilson completed his training in South Africa and had a friend with him who also trained in South Africa. Bob Muggleton was a scrubbed pilot re-mustered as a bomb aimer.

Bob was happy to join the crew and again I was very lucky. Bob had been a transport officer in the British Rail and his ability to map read was phenomenal, and this was very valuable later in our long trips inside Germany when out of range of Gee (explained in Book), map reading through the H2's screen was necessary.

Bunked in the same hut with me was a young Australian wireless operator. We often exchanged glances so I eventually asked him to join the crew. He told me he only had two pilots in mind who he wanted to fly with and I was one of them.

Peter Rollason was very compatible and did everything asked of him. On long trips a good rapport existed between Peter and the navigator and bomb aimer which was essential. Ever alert Peter was quick to pick up relayed information concerning wind change and strength and any other information valuable to the crew coming from anywhere.

Peter lives in Melbourne and we still remain in touch. He visited Adelaide with his wife, Edna in April 1988 and stayed five days at our home.

I now only required two gunners to complete my crew. I think every gunner you spoke to lied about his gunnery marks. The main question asked. I made two bad choices, they were more concerned with booze and women than the serious time ahead of us. Thankfully their life styles led to supposed sickness, half I think was brought on by their fear of the future. I don't know what eventually happened to them nor did I care.

I was eventually offered a young Canadian, Patrick (Red) Maloney. I did not then or now have a high opinion of the stability of Canadians and objected, but was told bluntly you take him. How wrong I was in this case. Red was a quietly spoken very religious lad and I think became the most all round liked member of the crew. It was said that the word of Red was worth the word of any two of us.

I know Red suffered air sickness on operations but never complained and he and the rest of the crew tried to keep me from knowing with the possibility of being grounded and declared a L.M.F. case - 'Lack of Moral Fibre'.

That was never on as far as I was concerned, I admired his great courage. When he once wrote to me after the war and included the simple words,

"Tom, I was glad I was in your crew."

It meant a lot to me.

I would be remiss if I did not make some remarks about our rear gunner, Yorky Bill Dolling. A likeable, talkative Yorkshireman with the favourite saying,

"Down there is Yorkshire and attached to Yorkshire is England."

Yorky was discharged from hospital the same time I required a rear gunner. Flying with a previous crew that got into difficulties, he was forced to bail out. This is his story which he vows is true.

When he bailed out he landed in a paddock and his parachute caught in the horns of a cow. Freeing himself he found the paddock was surrounded by a

When he bailed out he landed in a paddock and his parachute caught in the horns of a cow. Freeing himself he found the paddock was surrounded by a

high hedge all round. When he could not find a way out he panicked, he was only 18 years of age. Placing the parachute in front of his face he tried to dive through the hedge. He succeeded in doing so but landed heavily in a deep ditch on the other side, ending up with cuts and bruises which culminated with a short spell in hospital.

Once again I was lucky. Strangely I never asked Yorky the circumstances why he bailed out or to make any comparisons between his two crews.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>8</sup> I saw Yorky during a re-union in England on 19 May 1990. He told me his previous crew were sent on a Nickel Raid over France and got shot up, so was told to bail out on reaching England.

## CHAPTER 7

### *Wellingtons*

Next stop was a place called Leighford, a Wellington conversion school. The Wellington was a big step up from the Oxford like changing from a Mini up to driving a truck. However, my 90 hours spent on Oxfords was a great help, but this was the first time my crew was able to judge the ability of the pilot they had placed their trust in. I think I got fairly good marks!

The Wimpy lived up to its appearance heavy and sluggish at the controls. Bob the bomb aimer also acted as engineer and if necessary second pilot. He did all the tasks keeping a check on the fuel gauges, oil pressures etc, and operating the flaps and landing wheels under instruction from the pilot. Bob being a scrubbed pilot had some knowledge of flying and when opportunity offered I let him take over the controls and through the landing procedure up in the air. Shortly before the RAAF had decided to do away with the second pilot on all aircraft irrespective of size.

On operations if the pilot was put out of action the crew had to do the best they could. The only concession they made was a heavy sheet of steel behind the pilot's seat to protect his head from attacks normally from behind.

After four hours day instruction, and four and a half hours night instruction, we were on our own and for the next six weeks were in the air either at day or night time. The latter part consisted mainly in night flying with trips up to six hours duration.

The Wellington proved the finish of many pilots, you needed strong legs and long arms when full flap was used, you may say the lucky ones were scrubbed and the others with their crews who lost their lives the unlucky ones. I met one Australian who said he had five pilots before he got with one who could fly the Wellington. Records show that the casualty rates during training were very high, and I am sure the Wellington was the leader of the field in this regard.

To refute this many more pilots got through than the number killed or scrubbed.

Once after landing and reaching a bend on the way back to dispersal our brakes failed and unable to use the brakes to turn we were headed straight for some trees, I estimated I did not have sufficient space to turn the plane by gunning one engine, and if I did try and failed I would completely wipe off one wing probably causing a fire and a Wellington would blaze very quickly and some of us could get burnt to death.

I decided to cut the engines hoping to lose enough speed before gently running into the trees. This was the case and no damage was done. I shudder to think if I had of panicked and used the other alternative. I had to go before a Board of Enquiry and after explaining as above and on their inspection of the area they decided I had done the most sensible and safest thing, and so I was exonerated of any blame.

One of the worst things that could happen to you flying a Wellington was loss of one engine. They were under powered for their size in the first place and it was impossible to maintain height on one engine. John Gee explains in his book that overuse of one engine and you could finish upside down with no hope of recovery. It was bail out if possible or die. Your chances of making a safe landing in any case was 50/50, but if you had plenty of height and a suitable drome handy your chances increased. With any sense no pilot would be flying low in a Wellington unless he was taking off or landing. Perhaps they were more reliable early and a little worn out by the time I was flying them.

I had heard a lot of talk of crews being killed on Wellingtons trying to land on one engine, most casualties were caused when the pilot panicked about not doing a correct approach and trying to gain height to try again an impossibility and certain death for all. But the message coming out was clear,

"Don't try to go around again when landing on one engine, commit yourself to one landing."

I had listened to this several times and started to work out a plan of what I would do if placed with the problem, like a golfer who takes a few swings to get his balance. No sensible war time pilot would, when possible, not do a circuit when coming into land to allow him to get his balance and orientate himself with the runway and the surroundings. However, I thought even though it was very risky and required expert judgement, I decided a circuit was out and I would make a committed direct approach to land and be at least 1,000 feet at the start of the runway.

One night across country the inevitable happened, loss of one engine. Luckily I had plenty of height and on return was close to our drome. I contact control and told them I intended to make a direct approach. I got the O.K. but no advice was offered.

I could feel the tension with Bob Muggleton alongside me as we approached the small winking lights of the runway. I was determined to stick to what I had planned. On instruction Bob put the wheels down in plenty of time to allow me to correct my approach height if necessary.

It is very hard in darkness to judge to be at the exact height of 1,000 feet at a given time at the start of the runway I thought I was much too high, all the microphones were turned on and the crew were listening not saying a word, but I could detect heavy breathing.

I said more to myself in a little panic I will have to try again, a thing I vowed I would never do in a Wellington, then the quiet calm voice of Bob Muggleton came through the intercom.

"Skipper, you can't go around again".

I said, "Bob your right."

Urgently I asked for full flap, then pushed the control column fully forward and dived straight at the ground. How I judged the exact time to level off to land and prevent the plane squashing to the ground I don't know to this day, but we made a perfect landing. On touch down the noise of relief over the intercom was deafening.

Perhaps as you read this narrative you may think there are some exaggerations but I give you my word everything I have written and will write is true as I remember it.

Shortly after my start on the Wellington conversion, the powers that be must of thought I was going to make the grade, so I was granted an Officer's Commission.

Up until this time I was a Flight Sergeant which enabled me to eat, drink and bunk with my crew. However, by this time we had forced a firm bond together, and the fact now that I lived in better quarters, ate and drank in the Officer's Mess did not alter our friendship. We had plenty of time to mix and drink together in Lincoln. I did attempt once to have a drink with them in the Sergeant's Mess on the occasion of my 29th birthday after we had just returned from a raid on Berlin. An officious warrant officer ordered me out of the mess saying,

"We are not allowed to drink in your mess, so get out of ours".

I could do nothing but obey, but I have had a snitch on Warrant Officers, the in-betweens ever since.

On another night exercise on Wellingtons fog and bad weather closed our drome before we returned so we were diverted to a place called Jurby on the Isle of Man. From memory there were five planes on the exercise. Next morning at Jurby the fog was pretty thick with no prospects of an early take off. I persuaded my crew to come with me into Douglas, the capital. We boarded a small railway carriage that passed close to the drome on the way to Douglas.

Our first thought was food hoping we could get a steak. No meat was available but eggs were in good supply. I gorged myself on five eggs with the rest of the crew having their full.

Paddy Red Maloney our Irish/Canadian Gunner had a burning ambition to swim in the Irish Sea, so we hired a row boat, rowed out a quarter of a mile where Red stripped off to his underpants and dived in and out in practically the same movement as the water was very cold.

It was early afternoon before we decided to head back to Jurby. By this time the fog had lifted and it was as I expected to see one lonely Wellington Bomber, all the rest had departed earlier.

When I eventually landed back at Seighford I expected someone to ask for an explanation, but not a word from anyone, little did I know what they had in store for us.

As usual a wind up sing song and party dance was arranged before leaving Seighford and we were looking forward to joining in. On the day in question our dreams were not shattered until after the midday meal.

The O/C of our flight a FL/LT Parrington with a smirk on his face called me aside and said,

"Tobin, you and your crew are going on a nickel raid to Tours, France tonight".

another word for pamphlet dropping to let the French know what was really going on. I often wish I had kept some copies. Can you imagine my thought, I hated flying Wellingtons and now as a rookie crew we found ourselves flying alone in reach of the enemy, probably as punishment for our Isle of Man episode.

Sometimes I tried to convince myself it was because we had such a good navigator. I should have asked the question, "Why us?" Perhaps it was better I never asked the question as it may have been interpreted as a sign of fear and that I was unsuitable for operational flying, at this stage they were very strict on mental attitude as well as flying ability. I always held and still hold the



opinion that any instructor who passed a bad pilot after they reached the multi-engine stage and thereby placed other lives at risk should be whipped.

I learnt on Oxfords to never treat lightly or ignore the advice of a good instructor who set an example to the crews who passed through his hands as that would influence their habits and conduct in the future.

I must admit I was a frightened pilot that night mainly because I think it was so unexpected, I could feel the tenseness in the crew, I think we all thought that any moment a German fighter would be on our tail. I am glad to say the trip was uneventful. The party was still in progress when we arrived back, but I was too drained physically and mentally to participate so just snuck off to bed, but I don't think I slept very well that night.

The trip was a reminder of things to come.

## CHAPTER 8

### *Regrets and Jock*

We were now ready to attack the big four engined planes. As the Halifaxes and Lancasters have a crew of seven we spent a few days at a place called Boston Park to get an Engineer.

On arrival a grey headed Australian approached me but I brushed him off rudely saying no, you are too old. I can still remember the hurt look on his face as he turned away without saying a word. I have often bitterly regretted that rude callous action of mine as he and the crew he joined were killed in a crash shortly after.

Perhaps he would still be alive now if I had not been obsessed with the idea of wanting a Scottish Engineer.

I don't want the above to be construed that I have regretted picking Scottish, Jock Smart as our Engineer. He was efficient and we worked well together and it was comforting to know I could rely on him to pull the right lever at the right time.

When I stayed with him in 1975 during my trip overseas he told me of a dangerous practice he had adopted which if I had known of then a confrontation would have resulted, stop or else. When an operation is planned the experts worked out the bomb load and the fuel needed to carry out the operation. Probably allowing for a small safety margin, increasing or decreasing the bomb load or fuel depending on the distance to the target and return.

Jock took the dangerous practice of persuading the ground crew to increase our fuel load and if we had to take off on one of our shorter runways because of a change of wind from the normal direction take off could be hazardous.

Most squadrons had their main long runway facing into the prevailing winds of that area, criss crossed by two shorter runways which were only used when a strong change of wind occurred. Overall it is not always possible to land directly into the wind, but if there is only a small safe drift on landing the main runway was always used for obvious reasons.

As it happened everything turned out O.K. and that extra fuel could have been handy at times especially on our longest rip of nine and a half hours to Dresden and return, which receives a mention in John Gee's book mentioning the strong winds encountered on return.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> I get a mention concerning Dresden which I will comment on later.

As previously mentioned I did a lot of ship boarding before and after the war started and every ship seemed to have a Scottish Chief Engineer so I thought they were the best. Hence my obsession to have a Scotch Engineer.

Up to this stage, I had heard about the great Lancaster but had never seen one. So when we were sent to do a Halifax conversion at a place called Sandtoft, I was convinced then we would be going to a Halifax Squadron.

The Halifaxes we trained on were the older version and I was disappointed at their very heavy feel and the sluggish ways they responded to the controls. They could also develop a vicious swing on take off and landing. After seven hours day and night instruction we were again on our own completing some long day and night trips solo.

On this course I had my first experience of searchlights. We were sent to fly over London to test the searchlights. They were getting out of practice. Once in the searchlights' cones we were passed from sector to another and despite all my efforts, diving, climbing, turning, I was unable to get free. Several times later I was coned by German searchlights and was surprised how easy it was to shake them off, of course they had many more planes to worry about than was the case over London.

Lancasters were converted with no upper gun turrets which was claimed would increase the Lancaster speed up to 50 knots. Some advocated that this be done to all Lancasters but the move was defeated to give the Lancaster greater defence power and an extra lookout for danger. The conversion was to enable the Lancaster to carry the 12,000 lb and 24,000 lbs blockbusters being produced. They were dropped from as high as possible approximately 20,000 feet for maximum effect and were mainly used to blast shipping and deeply protected submarine pens. One famous exploit was during the second front invasion when they blasted a bridge and via duct out of commission and prevented Panzer Divisions from reaching the battle front to stop the allies advance.

## CHAPTER 9

### *Lectures*

We had lectures on engines but I could not see how you could repair an engine up in the air, so I concentrated on what I considered the main topic, how to conserve fuel. Dinghy drill was practised on the ground over and over until the abandon ditching drill was down to an acceptable time. Of course the pilot was the last to move and I suffered some knocks and bruises in my haste to not let the crew down.

The crew used parachutes which were strapped to the chest. On bail out pilots had the option but most preferred including myself to wear parachutes permanently strapped to our bottoms. The parachute with foam insert acted as a cushion for the pilot to sit on, the pilot seat had an inset into which the parachute fitted snugly. Of course in ditching drill this prevented the pilot from being as mobile as the rest of the crew. The main reason most pilots preferred the strap on type was in an emergency the pilot would have his hands full using the controls and being strapped down would not have freed hands in time to get the parachute under him and strap it to his chest.

Lectures were also hard to explain the effects of lack of oxygen, when, examples given of pilots up in the air thinking they were flying underground. We were placed in decompression chambers and asked to count in odd numbers and keep signing our names. I was signing my name one after the other so I thought, but when shown after, there were only a few pencil dots in the middle of the page; not one signature. The amazing thing is, given oxygen you are back to normal instantly. Bob Muggleton held out the longest and did accomplish something with perspiration pouring down his brow. This episode showed the great determination he possessed.

During our operations we only had one episode concerning lack of oxygen. Small portable oxygen bottles are carried which when necessary allows a crew member to move away from his main oxygen supply. On this occasion the navigator, Paddy started giving me way out instructions, sensing the reason I had his oxygen supply checked and corrected and everything was back to normal. Oxygen is normally used from 10,000 feet upwards but to be on the safe side I always ordered my crew to connect up to the oxygen after reaching 8,000 feet. From the foregoing it can be seen that we were being thoroughly prepared for what was ahead.

## CHAPTER 10

### *153 Squadron*

After a new intake started their course, we spent two weeks at Sandtoft doing nothing with the only thoughts in our minds, where to next. We tried to find out where all the Halifax Squadrons were situated. Imagine our delight when told we were off to a place called Helmswell to do a Lancaster Conversion 13 felt alive, no vices, the controls were light and the plane was quick to react to any move. It may seem childish to some who read this but there were times when I stood alongside my operational plane 'W' for Willie and spoke to it saying what a great plane it was.

By this time I was supposed to be a competent four engined pilot because the conversion to the Lancaster was short and only lasted 3 days. A total of only 11 hours flying, approximately 6 hours solo and the longest trip 2 and a half hours. One of the general topics among pilots was where do you want to go. I heard someone say Scampton was a peace time base with good accommodation etc and after some dromes this was worth considering. When asked the question I immediately replied Scampton. So next day we were heading towards 153 Sqn. Scampton was only approximately 30 miles away. I did not know then that 153 Sqn. had just been reformed at Scampton and new crews were desperately needed.

I presume that early in the War squadrons were formed using new crews. At this stage of the war it was possible to use a new approach. 153 Sqn. became part of 5 Group and a nearby Sqn. 166 was also in 5 Group. Some of the experienced crews were taken from 166 Sqn. to form 153 Sqn. with the two Squadrons being brought up to full strength with new crews. A Canadian pilot and his crew a P/O McCormack accompanied us to Scampton, and we were the first of the new crews to arrive there, and we were the first crew to complete a full tour, 30 trips on 153 Sqn.

P/O McCormack and I bunked together. He was attached to "A" Flight under Squadron Leader Rippingale D.S.O. and we to "B" Flight under S/L John Gee D.F.C., the Books' Author. After breakfast about 10 a.m. it was the practice for all the crews to line up behind the pilot in their respective flight areas. The flight could consist of between 12-15 crews. In our case John Gee would go along the line and ask the pilot if his crew was operational and note the answer down. If an operation was planned at this stage John Gee would advise certain crews they were on standby. The only time a crew is classed non-operational is if the pilot, navigator or bomb aimer is sick but if they are operational the wireless operator, engineer and gunners can be replaced, if any spares are available.

However, luckily this course was taken only in emergency and I had only an odd spare occasionally. The main cause of sickness were colds or ear trouble which meant immediate grounding until the doctor gave the all clear. Wartime planes were not pressurised and so flying with colds or ear trouble could be very dangerous to the individual. I never missed an Operation due to sickness, but we had some trouble with the Navigator and Mid-Upper Gunner at times which grounded the whole crew and lengthened our operational period.

When I lined up the first day I was glad John Gee did not know how nervous I was on account of my short experience on Lancasters. When I first met John Gee naturally I was curious about his background with his D.F.C. When I discovered he had completed a tour on Wellingtons and survived I thought he had a lot of courage and ability. To me he appeared calm, confident and approachable and I think a little bit of this rubbed off on me and gave me more courage to face the future. We developed a friendship which still exists as his book proves.

For some reason P/O McCormack attached to "A" flight did his second dickie, a trip every operational pilot must do with an experienced crew before taking his own crew on their first operation, he was then put on his first operation before we even got off the ground. He never came back. Can you imagine my thoughts when in the early hours of the morning our room was invaded by several special police who grabbed everything in sight. I then had to reclaim and prove my ownership of my gear they had seized. I believe, in the past when a crew went missing some valuable items, watches etc were taken by a survivor and when these items were not returned to relatives they complained, so the practice of immediately removing all items was taken to prevent this, however, this was common practice among the pilots. My new room mate an Englishman F/O McDonald and myself agreed between us that if I got the chop he would claim my pushbike and if he got the chop I would claim his electric razor, a novelty in those days. McDonald survived and we became good friends and I gave him my push bike when I left 153 Sqn. but I never got his electric razor. McDonald was a good piano player and I drove him crackers when I made him sit down when I was in a melancholy mood and play some of my favourite tunes over and over. I can still remember him sitting on the bed one day reading a letter and saying indignantly, "Do you know what, the dirty buggers have bombed my mother's home." He could not understand the humour of it all when I did not fully share in his indignation.

I know a lot of pilots if possible preferred to go to an all Australian Squadron say the 460 or 467 but I was quite happy to go to a mixed Sqn. 153 consisted mainly of English pilots and aircrew, the majority from the Commonwealth were Canadians, our Wing Commander Powley was a Canadian, apart from that there were one Dutch, one South African F/L Legg mentioned in John Gee's Book and

one Australian myself which was so for the majority of my tour on 153. Two Australian pilots who had nearly finished their tours came over from 166 neither were over friendly. One F/O Groves had a chip on his shoulder and the main reason he spoke to me was to try and stir me up against the English establishment but failed, perhaps because he was over-looked for his FL/LT Rank. Here I must say how I let my promotion to FL/LT slip through my fingers.

Near the end of my tour when next in line for a FL/LT John Gee approached me in his quiet way and said, "Tom you can have your FL/LT but it will entail a lot of work for such a short time you have left and you would lose your FL/LT on your next posting. I think in fairness he really believed that, but as I now know I would have kept the rank especially when I never received another posting after leaving 153 Sqn.

Prior to leaving 153 I was told I may later be used on transport duty, however, the call never came and I finished up with nearly 3 months indefinite leave spent mainly at the seaside resorts of Brighton, Paignton and Torquay. I was at Torquay on the day we celebrated victory in Europe day. I wish I had been in London that day. In the Square they had the flags flying of the Allied Nations who had taken part in the War. When they took the flags down at sunset and placed them under the Bandstand, I tried to souvenir the Australian flag, when I was trying to work out which to take out of the New Zealand and Australian Flags, (the Australian flag has one more star) I was discovered and sent on my way. I have since reminded John Gee about his error and chided him about the loss of my F/L L/T rank.

## CHAPTER 11

### *Scampton*

Scampton was only 4 miles out from the well known city of Lincoln, famous during the War of the Roses. It was said to be full of underground tunnels used during that War, and as you walked along some roads you could hear the hollow sounds of footsteps. There is also a famous old Cathedral which houses a copy of the famous Magna Carta. Included now is also a special chapel dedicated to the many airmen who flew around the area, and those who paid the supreme sacrifice. The spires of the Cathedral stood out high among the other buildings and they were favourite landmarks to the bombers returning. I am ashamed to say I never visited the Cathedral during the many times I was in Lincoln during the war but rectified this on my visit to Lincoln in 1975. Visits to Lincoln were mainly in the evening when it was straight to the pub. The Saracens Head was the most popular gathering place for aircrews but we preferred a much smaller pub called the Crown and Anchor where our ground crew could join us for free beer when they were in town at the same time. The pub was run by a widow and her spinster daughter, they adopted our crew and had our crew photograph on the wall of our favourite drinking room. I revisited the Crown and Anchor in 1975 and when walking out saw a massive Cathedral right opposite. I was sure it was not there during the war, it had been there over 90 years, such were those days.

The country around Lincoln is the flattest in England so a great deal of the famous bomber Squadrons were based in that area including the famous Australian Squadrons 460 and 467. Lincoln being the closest town was always full of airmen of all ranks and countries and the name Saracens Head would bring back memories to a lot of Australians.

Scampton was originally the home of the now famous 617 Dambuster Squadron, and was where they took off from with several Australians among them to complete the great dam breaking raids which are now history and which earned Wing Commander Guy Gibson the Victoria Cross. Guy unfortunately did not survive the War. 153 Sqn. moved into Scampton when 617, now reformed as a special squadron moved down closer to the coast, closer to Germany to cut flying time and save fuel.



## CHAPTER 12

### *Gibson, Hannah, Swan and Lloyd*

Hanging in our Officers' Mess was a wonderful oil painting of Guy Gibson showing his Victoria Cross. I often wondered why it was left there when 617 Sqn. moved out. I now think 617 regarded Scampton as their Squadron and only on temporary loan to 153 Sqn. This fact was born out when I revisited Scampton in 1975, 617 was back there now on Vulcan Bombers. As I first stepped into the foyer entrance of the Officers' Mess, there looking down at me placed right in the middle was the same portrait of Guy Gibson V.C. Also all the Honour Boards etc of 153 Sqn. had been removed, it was as though 153 Sqn. never existed. Their Honour Board showing Hannah V.C. and Gibson V.C. was prominent.

Hannah earned his V.C. by leaving the plane and climbing along a wing to put a fire out. As far as I know Hannah survived. At the time of winning the V.C. Hannah was a Flight Sergeant, I presume he was later commissioned. To show a V.C. winner respect it was the recognised practice that he be saluted first by an Officer and I did hear that Hannah became very objectionable in this regard if a salute was not made. Saluting was not my forte and I think it should be preserved for the Parade Ground and Official Functions. I never saluted John Gee or Wing Commander Powley although they were two men I would not hesitate to salute if they considered it necessary.

My then non-commissioned crew had their full say and opinions when we were not flying. Our ground crew also. I was only ever saluted once when in London by an Air Force Policeman. I think my distaste for saluting came during my initial period at Brighton. The O.C. there, a little pip squeak, Wing Commander Swan who when walking with another Junior Officer, would make the Junior Officer separate and so make us walk between them to make sure he got all the salutes. Wing Commander Swan was also known as the officer when stationed up north in Australia sent a lot of our boys up to certain deaths in Wirraways to fight against the Japanese Zeros. In our initial training period we were made to practice saluting officers, the hand taken to the brow the shortest way and the longest way down. Just as well conceited officers like W/C. Swan, did not see the thumb extended upwards in a well known gesture as the hand was taken to the brow. I only saw our Station Commander Group Captain Lloyd in the mess where saluting was out. He was not a very likeable person and being a peace time career officer, who disliked Australians, Irish and us 5 minute commission bods. I have stood elbow to elbow with him waiting for a drink at the mess bar, not once did he speak to me, the then only Aussie pilot on the Squadron, a small acknowledgment of some sort would have been appreciated.

When my great northern Irish Navigator went before him for a commission he goaded Paddy until he retaliated, then said he was not fit to be an Officer. However, he gave Bob Muggleton his Commission. John Gee told me Lloyd and Powley had many blazing rows.

I often admired the artist who painted the portrait for no matter where you sat in the lounge of the mess with a beer in your hand the eyes of Gibson seemed to be staring straight at you. For safety sake the portrait was protected by glass and one night a young English F/L L/T, who seemed unnecessarily stirred up probably due to tension, to let off steam, started a cushion fight, seems childish now but several of us joined in, then suddenly the English FL/LT said something of the nature, "Stuff you Gibson" and threw a cushion at the portrait breaking the glass. Everything went quiet after that but as punishment the mess bar was closed down for two days. A lot of tension had been released but the young English F/L L/T only survived one more operation.

## CHAPTER 13

### *Operations 2,3 and 4*

I have strayed a lot by reminiscing so I think it is about time I got back to the reason that prompted me to write this in the first place.

My 'D' Day came when I was assigned to do my 2nd Dickie with an English crew piloted by a F/O Jones also Ex 166 Sqn. to the heavily defended town of Essen flying in "N" for Nellie. "N" was lost when piloted by a F/O Reid on his first operation when he collided with a plane from nearby 150 Sqn. Either one or the other strayed outside the perimeter of their circuit area. I have previously mentioned the importance of an instructor setting an example and was horrified when well on the way to Essen, to hear F/O Jones call to his crew, "O.K. chaps it is time for a cup of tea and reached for his thermos flask, it was as though the War had stopped. The immediate thought that went through my mind was "This crew will never finish their tour."

Over the target seeing the flares, fires and bomb explosions was an eye opener for me and I could realise then why a pilot was sent on a 2nd Dickie, so he had a grasp of what to expect otherwise the trip was uneventful.

My log book reads: "Weather exceptionally bad. Great damage." No, I never took a thermos flask with me, perhaps the rear gunner may have but I would not argue about that, knowing where he was situated on his lonesome.

After my experience with Jones I made a vow that I and my crew would observe the strictest discipline while operational or the likelihood of being so. (After the war Jock described me as a *Martinet*, but also admitted that my strictness was one of the reasons we survived). It must be remembered that once a crew steps in a plane the pilot, irrespective of rank is in complete charge and to disobey any reasonable order especially on Operations meant a court martial.

We devised an intercom system and adhered to it, no unnecessary chatter and regular inspection of equipment. Apart from the Navigator giving me the necessary instructions, change of course, airspeed etc, I was the only one to initiate speaking over the intercom unless an emergency arose. I made a practice of regularly, of approx. 5-10 minutes of speaking to every member of the crew, like pilot to rear gunner and Yorky would reply "or Skip" and so on. I concentrated more on the rear gunner, and even though he could hear every word said, he was shut away entirely on his own and unable to see any other member of the crew. I have since told Yorky that I feel guilty that I did not once climb into the rear gunners compartment to see what he had to put up with in a cramped space, in the coldest and most dangerous part of the aircraft in the event of a fighter attack. The other Navigator and Bomb Aimer worked in their blacked out compartment as they needed lights to work on their maps.

The Wireless Operator and the Mid Upper Gunner nearby had each others company and were able to see something of each other. The Engineer alongside me could swivel in any direction. Beer drinking was out when there was any chance of being operational. This was hardest on me as I was the worst offender, the rest were a conservative lot. You might say six saints and one sinner. In those days I had a good recovery rate and next day was able to throw off the effects of any binge the night before. What pleased me most was, that whenever I called up any of the crew the answer was always immediate, a sign everyone was awake and on the alert.

Back to Jones, it is ironical that on my 14th Operation after having the usual extra meal in the mess for the first time I was walking with Jones, now a FL/LT towards the briefing room to see our target for tonight, Jones would, by then be very near the end of his tour. As we passed, a fighter pilot stationed at Scampton to assist in fighter evasion practice, remarked "Stuttgart tonight - plenty of flak".

Stuttgart was one of the most heavily defended towns in Germany. On entering the briefing room and seeing the target was Stuttgart, Jones was upset thinking there was some intelligence leak, we were all conscious of that in those days. As soon as an Operation was scheduled all lines of communication to the outside were closed, no one could use a phone to make an outside call. There could always be someone wanting to tell a girlfriend. Jones spoke to the intelligence officer in the briefing room telling him I was present and heard the conversation with the fighter pilot. He promised to conduct an enquiry next day. Jones and his crew never returned.

I attended an enquiry next day and it was established that the fighter pilot had made a wild guess when he said Stuttgart, as he knew of its heavy defences.

For some reason I can't explain I was not scheduled to do my first solo operation until 12 days after my 2nd Dickie with Jones. My first room mate McCormack was rushed into things and did not survive, so perhaps John Gee in his wisdom was giving us some time to adjust. During this period I was instructed to air test several Lancasters. The policy at Scampton was, if a pilot signed his plane as unserviceable for some reason or other after repair it was given to another crew to air test before being handed back to the original pilot. I did not quite agree with this policy as the onus could be thrown back on the testing pilot if anything untoward happened, and no sane pilot would do anything to the plane he had to fly in.

After warm up and testing before taking off for an operation, the airman in charge of your ground crew would not leave the cabin until the pilot signed the log certifying the plane was fully serviceable. This prevented any onus being thrown back on them if any equipment failed. By the same token a pilot could "U.S." his plane anytime he considered it necessary. My log book makes interesting reading on the three planes I tested.

First "T" for Tom lost on a day raid to Essen. "L" for Larry shot up by a Junkers 88 Fighter , crew bailed out, and last "P" for Peter lost, circumstances unknown.

I did four operations in different planes before being allotted our own special plane "W" for Willie.

Operation - No. 2 in "S" for sugar to Bochum in the Ruhr Valley carrying incendiaries - uncontrollable fires left raging. "S" survived the war and was scrapped in 1946.

Operation - No. 3 in "P" for Peter, a daylight raid to Gelsenkirchen, an oil target - encountered very heavy flak, suffered superficial damage.

With flak bursting under you, unless you get a direct hit you can hear small bits of shrapnel hitting under the plane like someone throwing a handful of pebbles at you. Over the target the bombers fly at different heights from 17,000 feet up to 20,000 feet this with the help of Window which I will later comment on prevented the Germans from calculating the overall exact height of flight. To counteract this the Germans used two kinds of shells, one timed to explode at a given height and the other to explode on impact, many a pilot was lucky when hit with the latter that passed straight through without exploding leaving a gaping hole in a wing or some other non-sensitive area, however, luck was not always that good encountering either shell in close proximity.

The Germans had another device which was later aptly named the *Scarecrow* (although apparently no mention of these are made in any German document). When these exploded among the bombers over the target it gave the impression of a bomber being shot down. This was an evident ploy to sap the morale of the bomber crews however, when crews returned to base for briefing and were giving an exaggerated number of planes being shot down, which did not match anywhere near the actual tally, it was decided the Germans were using some device to confuse the crews. It is easy to see how the apt name of *Scarecrow* originated.

Operation No. 4 in "T" for Tom which was later lost on a day raid to Essen was to an oil target at Wanne Eickel. The trip itself was uneventful.

On return Scampton was closed down due to weather and we were diverted to an American Base of Mendelsham Heath. It was pouring with rain and after shutting down the engines and climbing out bone dry we were greeted by a grinning Yank in a wet uncovered jeep. I think at this stage we should have climbed back into the Lancaster, I wish we had as I think after talking to control better arrangements would have been made, I doubt if they would of allowed a tired crew just returned from an Operation to remain in the Lancaster overnight. However, winning or losing the confrontation may have caused more trouble than what it was worth. We did climb into the jeep but not before I mouthed a few words that fell on deaf ears.

By the time we reached shelter we were all soaking wet especially myself as I was only wearing a battle jacket. The officer accommodation was very poor and consisted of a hut of tiered bunks. I spent a miserable rest of the night. The only good thing we can say about the Yank drome was that the food was plentiful, chocolates available and next morning at breakfast all the eggs, sausages and chops you could eat. The boys gorged themselves. Unfortunately we had no money to buy things as we are made to empty our pockets before going on Operations so no one is carrying anything to identify him or his Squadron.

Next day before take off, with Yanks gathered around the only Lancaster they had seen, demanded to see the god damned Lancaster bomb bays that were supposed to carry double the load their flying Fortresses were able to. In a conceited gesture I had the bomb door opened for their inspection. After a time when I decided to close the bomb door they would not move. Imagine mine and the crews' embarrassment when to the jeers of the gathered Yanks the rest of the crew had to get out and use all their strength to get some movement in the doors. A little rocking did the trick, clearing something and the doors slowly closed. I thought then that some weakness had developed in the hydraulic system possibly a small leak or oil leak, so I decided to fly back to Scampton with the wheels locked firmly down just in case.

After landing at Scampton I signed the plane as unserviceable which is every pilot's prerogative. I wanted the hydraulic system fully checked out before the plane was sent on another operation. Can you imagine a crew carrying a delayed action bomb and the doors failing to open, especially if it was timed to go off before returning to base. It was known for a bomb to hang up and not go with the rest. It was the bomb aimers job to make sure all the bombs had left their racks. Once the bomb aimer pushes that master switch all bombs are live. This happened to us only once but not a delayed action bomb. The

normal procedure is to close the bomb doors, get away from the target and later on the way home open the doors and the pilot puts the plane up and down in dives which eventually is sufficient to release the bomb. When violent action is taken with a full bomb load the bombs are not active as the master bombers active switch has not been pressed so the bombs theoretically are supposed to be safe. But I have some reservations. I have only once ever landed with a full bomb load, it was a daylight Operation No. 19 on a place called Neuss, the operation was re-called before reaching the target. I think it was because of the worsening bad weather threatening to cover all England, so they wanted to get the Lancasters down before all dromes were closed. Before doing 12 Operations the pilot can opt to drop his bombs into the sea, after 12 operations the pilot was supposed to land with his full load. This included us. I can still remember the day the weather and visibility was very bad, however, once you get down to approx. 1,000 the visibility was sufficient to sight the runway, we landed O.K. but had to increase our landing speed to compensate for the extra weight. Some of our undercarriages were sternly tested that day. Lucky also it was counted as a completed operation.

When a plane is replaced the new one bears the same alphabetical sign as the one it replaces. This prevents any confusion with control identification when a plane calls up returning from Operations. Every Squadron had their own call sign, our call sign was 'Old Duke' and when I called up 'Old Duke William' to control the operations board held by the control tower would show the name of the pilot in charge or Willie and the names of the crew aboard.

After take off for an operation it is very obvious that every single plane could not haphazardly head towards the target. It was necessary for the planes of different squadrons to group together in a concentrated stream before heading towards Germany. All pilots are instructed to head for a focal point and be there at a certain time which in our case was the town of Reading not far from London. At this point navigational lights were still on which helped to avoid collisions. I never saw a collision at this point but I am sure there were some especially if some pilots turned across the stream too soon. I am also sure from experience a lot of planes were lost in collisions getting to the target and on return that were not seen or recorded. We were hit by slip streams several times on night trips, this indicated there was a Lancaster very close slightly above us which we could not see. It was nice to feel a slip stream to know you were going the right way and was not alone, but too strong, they were annoying and could press you down making you lose some height, and once you reached 18,000 feet getting extra height was a slow process. However, the practice explained at the start of this paragraph allowed the planes to turn in one concentrated group towards the target arriving there at an estimated time to allow the pathfinders to mark the target and the bombers to pass over the target in the shortest possible time.

## CHAPTER 14

### *Leave*

It was time to go on our designated 6 days leave, normally every 6 weeks. In this paragraph I will try to group my leave periods together. I regret not keeping a daily diary as I am now very hazy about some of my leaves so will miss out on writing about some interesting events in those periods.

During my early days in England lists of people were available who were quite willing to accommodate airmen on leave. Looking at the list you could decide where you would like to go. Free rail warrants were issued for travel. I opted to go north to the Scottish areas, Glasgow, Perth twice, Edinburgh twice, and once south to a place called Tunbridge Wells near London. I spent most of my leave with two Adelaide boys, John Byrnes and Phil Pearce whom I have previously mentioned. We are still great friends, have a meal together occasionally, never missing an Anzac Day Re-Union, marching together and reminiscing. I can still remember us singing Waltzing Matilda at the top of our voices in Princes Street, Edinburgh's main street, at the foot of the statue of the Duke of Wellington at midnight, I think it was some festive occasion. A kindly policeman eventually moved us on.

On our two trips to Perth we were the guests of a very rich genteel Scottish husband, wife and family. They were wonderful people, the wife being one of the nicest people I have ever met. They had a young daughter, Elizabeth and a new born son, Tom. Whilst with them we were able to visit the famous St. Andrews Golf Course. Their kindness reflected their names Thomas Love and family. During one of my periods in Perth I was downstairs in a hotel drinking Rum and Cloves, must have been a cold night or the pub was short of beer, as I don't recall ever drinking rum again. I know some Squadrons had a rum issue at times but our Group Captain Lloyd thought otherwise. From upstairs with a piano thumping away voices singing scotch songs could be heard loud and clear. After several rums which gave more courage than I normally possessed, I strode upstairs entered a room crowded with soldiers of the tough famous Black Watch and demanded "What about an Irish song". I was grabbed by several soldiers and I thought they were going to throw me over the balcony, but they carried me to a chair made me sit down and for the next hour gave me their rendition of every Irish song they could think of. With head spinning I made several attempts to leave but was forced back into the chair. I eventually got away, but I was glad the Black Watch boys liked Aussies. Perth is the home of the Black Watch. Once before leaving Perth, Mr Love gave me a small round parcel, asking me not to open it until the train pulled out. It was a peach treasured in those days, that money could not buy, it was said a grape could cost you a Guinea, then 21/- shillings.



I wrote to Mr Love after my safe return to Australia, in return he sent me an illustrated photographic book on Scotland and advised of all the many airmen he had as guests during the war I was the only one who had made contact with him when overseas in 1975, I went to Perth especially to see the Love family. When I rang them from the hotel where I had booked in, Mrs Love immediately came down in their Rolls Royce and took me back to their now big estate in the middle of Perth. Mr Love had suffered a stroke but was still mobile. Elizabeth had not married and Tom still a bachelor of 30 years of age still lived at home. His hobby was restoring Rolls Royces, there were several garages around the estate with cars in different states of restoration. He had a cabinet maker working full time on them, in my ignorance I did not know that the early built coach type Rolls were made of wood. That night Mr Love and family insisted on taking me to a plush eating establishment where I had my first taste of top class Canadian Red Smoked Salmon. It was summer at this time and on the estate was a big glassed in Arbor of fruit trees, when I reminded Mr Love about the peach incident, he picked the ripest peach then on the tree for me to eat. When I left Perth for Edinburgh Mrs Love insisted that Tom drive me, as I said a wonderful family.

I forgot to mention Edinburgh Castle on the hill overlooking the town, it fascinated me when I saw it in wartime and again in 1975. It now houses a great War Museum. As you climb up to the castle, walk around its battlements, see the old Scottish King's Crown and Jewels and see the forbidding dungeons you get the real feeling of history. Many readers will remember Edinburgh for seeing the famous Edinburgh Tattoo on T.V. held in the square of the Castle. I believe you have to book in well ahead to attend the Tattoo.

Scotland was during wartime and still is consisted of strict Methodist and Presbyterian families who strictly observe the Sabbath, by this I mean no offence. Although I enjoyed my short stays in Scotland, I was always glad to get back to the more outgoing liberal atmosphere of England. Before entering a dance in Edinburgh we were searched to make sure we were not carrying liquor. In England there were liquor bars in the dance halls. In wartime to get a Sunday drink you had to catch a bus and travel out of town to some dingy pub and order a meal to get a drink. The meal consisted of a pork pie placed on a plate in front of you, so long as the pie was in front of you, you were safe if a policeman made a surprise visit. But what a farce even though you paid for the pie you could not eat it, if you did you would probably suffer Ptomaine poisoning as the same pie was used over and over. Even if you visit Edinburgh now on a Sunday it would be hard to find a cafe serving meals.

They openly talk about separation from England one day and the hotel where I stayed at in 1975, the same debate was openly still going on around me.

I have left my most important holiday till last. Most of my readers will know that my parents were of southern Irish stock. During my first leave from 153 Sqn. I had the opportunity to visit Southern Ireland.

Southern Ireland was a neutral country that left all lights ablaze at night making it an ideal navigational aid to German Bombers blasting English cities, this personally irked me greatly. Once I somehow got into a conversation with an Irish woman and declared I would bomb Dublin tomorrow if I was asked. She demanded to know my mother's address so she could write to her and tell her what a terrible *spalpeen* she reared - I knew I would never be asked to bomb Dublin. The Irish woman was of the same thoughts of my own Mum who hated the British for the misery they had caused to Ireland. After joining the RAAF the simple words that my mother said to me "Son I would not cross the other side of the street to throw a stone in defence of England" carried a lot of meaning.

I was not allowed to travel to Ireland in uniform as I would be interned. Perish the thought. It was necessary to travel in civilian clothes so Bob my bomb aimer lent me a suit. It was short in the legs but otherwise mainly fitted. I travelled by train to Holyhead in Wales and there boarded a small steamer plying between there and Dublin.

On boarding I was able to get a large meal of delicious steak and eggs and a return if required. Some reading this will think so what! I had never tasted anything like a steak since leaving America. Money as far as I knew could not buy a grilled steak and eggs in England. Our meat meals were always boiled mutton over and over. I know that horse meat was always welcome during that period. The crossing took several hours, I am not sure of the exact time. I often wonder why this steamer was allowed to go unmolested.

On arrival in Dublin I was shocked to see the apparent poverty and was mobbed by men, women and children of all ages offering accommodation. I had only intended staying one night in Dublin so settled for a hotel. The hotel had its own ballroom but I was refused admission because I was not wearing tie and tails. After the experience I had when I first arrived, I was angry and said a few words. I was directed to a public dance hall a short distance away. Here I had my first experience of the deep hatred among the Irish for the English. Australians talked like Londoners. I failed to convince the girls I was Australian even admitting my blood was pure Irish. None refused to dance when asked but they would not talk to me, felt like dancing with a mop.

Next day I caught a train to travel right across Ireland to Galway Bay recognised as the poorest part of Ireland. However, they were more friendly there and I found a lot of drinking mates in a hotel and had a jolly evening. I was persuaded to buy a raffle ticket in a big hamper giving my 153 Sqn. address.

Shortly after my return to 153 Sqn. I was surprised to receive a letter from the Irish barmaid telling me I had not won the raffle. Inside was an Irish Sweep Stake Ticket. She and the boys had clubbed together and bought one for me. The Stake then was worth 100,000 pounds to the winner. I had no luck.

Before leaving Australia I had the addresses of my mother and father's homes. I caught a bus to a place called Ardrahan, 30 miles from Galway. Here I saw a priest who kindly drove me to my mother's home. A widow, Mrs Geoghegan (my mother's maiden name) and 3 sons were surprised to see me. It was a Friday and the only food they appeared to have were apples, potatoes and a chicken cooking in a pot over an open hearth for next day. The kitchen, the only room I saw had a dirt floor. They offered me the chicken which I ate with gusto. I was thinking they could kill another for next day and I was very hungry, eating meat on a Friday in Ireland was then a mortal sin and as they watched me I am sure they expected me to drop dead at any moment. No accommodation was offered and apart from a short walk around the fields over which my old mum once trod, there was nothing else to do but wait for the night bus at Ardrahan and return to Galway Bay. My three male cousins accompanied me into Ardrahan and while waiting for the bus we had quite a few beers at my expense. I revisited my mother's home in 1975 and was disgusted to see the same dirt floor and open fireplace in the kitchen. Again the only room I saw. Before going out I had a talk with the publican, who spoke scathingly of my cousin who lived there with his wife and son. He apparently had nearly drank himself to death and was not welcome at the pub. The property they had was very valuable but he was too lazy to work it properly. I was at least given a nice ham meal and after a short walk around the paddocks and listening to the suggestive hard luck stories I was glad to get back to Ardrahan and again catch the night bus to Galway.

After arriving back to Dublin I caught a bus to the Carlow area to visit my Dad's home. My Uncle, Dad's brother, wife and daughter gave me a warm welcome. They had other sons and daughters away in England. Dad's brother was a bit of a rascal so we spent a lot of time at the pub where son Mick was a barman. He always wanted to sing a chorus as we walked home, only stopping occasionally to shoo a stray donkey out of the way. First thing in the morning he would bring a half glass of whiskey to my room, I threw it away as I was not partial to Whiskey then after my last episode with it. Just as well I was only able to spend two days with him otherwise I might have contracted alcoholic poisoning.

I had taken a little box camera with me taking some sentimental photos, but before boarding the ship to return to England, the film was taken out of the camera and destroyed by an official bastard, despite all my pleas of how innocent they were. However, I did have some wonderful steak and egg meals. The trip did not cost much and I got some of the wondering Irish dust out of my veins.

## CHAPTER 15

### *De-Briefing*

When a raid is on it is necessary for the navigator and bomb aimer to attend a pre-briefing to allow them to complete all their route maps etc. On some Squadrons the pilot attended the pre-briefing but this was not so on 153 Sqn. to gain some knowledge of cloud heights, force of winds etc. Mosquitoes were sent along parts of the route to be taken, their information was very important and generally accurate. Although I was sometimes with my navigator and bomb aimer between pre-briefing and main briefing, I can honestly say that not once did I ask them or did they tell me what the target was which I respected them for. As you walked into the briefing room you saw these words,

"Through these portals walked the bravest me in the world, always be frightened but never afraid".

the words gave us a lift.

On entering the briefing room everyone headed straight to the big map on the wall to see what the target was for tonight. After the babel subsided seats were taken with crews sitting together. The briefing officer takes over, explains to the crews the reason for the route taken. Our bombing heights and time we should be over our target, opposition flak etc that can be expected going to and returning. If any spoof raids are being made dropping window to confuse the Germans trying to find the exact target, any screens shielding them and the point that must be reached before the W.O.P. can break radio silence. As the Germans were being pushed back screens were made deeper into Germany. Screens were made by planes mainly Halifaxes circling making radar screens, until the bomber force passed through the screens the Germans could not accurately detect them. The bombing officer explained the bomb load carried. The Met. Officer advising what weather to expect. The engineer and intelligence officers passing off any information held that could be of assistance.

Next step was the parachute room to pick up parachutes, helmets and all other necessary gear. A small piece of dark chocolate and chewing gum was issued to all aircrew, it was advised to keep chewing gum to try and keep the ear clear. The doctor was standing by if someone wanted advice. I once said to the Doc that my thumbs had a burning feeling getting near the target, he told me it was just nerves. He also had pills called 'Wakey Wakey Pills' in his hand which was issued to anyone requesting them. I only used them once, 24 hours later I could not get to sleep. I had no trouble keeping awake on any trip.

Next we boarded a van that took us out to the allotted plane. After going through this procedure we found ourselves dumped alongside "O" for Oboe for our 5th Operation - for a raid on Freiburg down south on the border of France and Germany. It was not considered a military target but an attempt to wipe out German troops resting from the battle fronts, where they thought they were comparatively safe. In this period civilians were also considered fair game.

The rest of the crew climbed aboard to test their equipment with the exception of the Engineer and myself. We did an outside inspection of the plane, tyres etc. and making sure the cover was removed from the air speed ventral tube so our air speed would register, we then climbed aboard to carry out our checks. To save the plane's batteries, power to start the engines is taken from a battery loaded trolley connected to the plane. Normally the right starboard outer is started first, after the thumbs up contact sign is given to the ground staff below. Then the starboard inner which controls a lot of the planes equipment, hydraulic systems etc, then in turn the port inner and lastly the port outer. When each engine is started it is checked individually by the pilot, mainly to ensure there is no mag drop when the magneto switches are turned off. During this period the engineer is able to check his instruments and make sure oil pressure, brake pressure etc are O.K. If mag drop is detected the fitter must climb up to the engine and make adjustments to correct the mag drop. We often had to go through this procedure, however, in all cases the fitter was able to make a satisfactory adjustment.

I think on one occasion I did take off with a slight mag drop on one engine, but it is not to be recommended. If the fitters are unable to correct any excessive mag drop or any other main equipment is not functioning correctly the pilot has no option but U.S. the plane and abort take off. To cover this an emergency crew was on stand by. For some reason we were never on emergency standby, but here I can say we never once failed to take off or abort a read after take off even on occasions when other crews did we may have been justified in doing so. Crews were taken to their planes up to one and a half hours before take off to carry out the above procedure. I have since heard that some pilots, to avoid going on some dicey raid deliberately made their plane unserviceable by cutting a magneto and revving the engine which then became badly oiled up and unserviceable. Also that some pilots who tried this procedure more than once were scrubbed and court martialled. I must admit then I did not know this was possible, but I am sure I would never have resorted to it.

Some pilots used '*George*' the Automatic Pilot regularly, I tried it on one occasion but was never happy using it, especially when the few seconds taken to overcome '*George*' and resort to manual use could be crucial if attacked by a

fighter, so Tobin flew manual on all his operations, even though at times I found it tiring. However, it was necessary to place the 'George' gear on standby mode before take off and I always did this in case we needed 'George' in an emergency seeing Lancasters only had one pilot.

Our main runway faced 230 degrees into the normal prevailing wind in that area. As take off time came planes were being taxied from dispersals on both sides of the runway. Pilots from each side would take alternative turns to enter the start of the runway. The pilot would then wait for the green O.K. take off signal before firmly applying the brakes and revving the four engines up to full power assisted by plus 14 super charged boost power. The Lancaster had a two geared super charger, the first stage for take off and the second more powerful boost used by the pilot to assist climbing when the engines were losing power on account of the thinner air at high altitudes. The atmosphere pressure was ideal at around 7,000 feet when the Lancaster produced their maximum power, engine power started to fall away above 7,000 feet and at about 15,000 feet it was necessary for the pilot to use the extra boost available to continue climbing. As the brakes were released the plane started slowly gathering speed, the engineer's hand was also pressed against the throttles underneath the pilot's hand a precautionary practice in case one of the throttles slipped out of the pilot's hand. The pilot's other hand had to be kept on the control column. As the plane gathered speed the engineer kept telling the pilot the changing speed of the plane. To this point the pilot controlled the planes direction by use of the throttles, but when sufficient speed was reached to enable the pilot to lift the rear wheel off the ground, the plane was controlled by the rudders and the control column. The engineer then clamped the throttles firmly in full forward position take off speed was reached at between 110-120 knots. After the pilot was in full control and plane was climbing steadily the pilot ordered the wheels up, then the 30 degree flap put down for take off taken up in stages of 150 at a time. If the flaps are taken off too quickly the plane could drop sharply. Boost is then cut to plus 7, the props in fine for take off put to coarse, throttles pulled back and revs reduced to allow the plane to reach an economical cruising speed.

As we headed for Reading our focal point to meet up with the rest of the bomber force, the pilot made every effort to fully synchronise the four engines as near as possible. Four unsynchronised engines was murder to the ears and head.

Back to Freiburg - take off was 4.05 p.m. bombed 8.05 p.m. landed back at Scampton 10.50 p.m. No opposition. Caused severe damage.

We were now sharing "W" for Willie with a F/O White and crew who were completing their tour Ex 166 Sqn. F/O White and crew developed a phobia during their tour on 166 Sqn. that was, after the bombs were dropped on the

target the rear gunner who took a brick with him would throw it out through the rear turret. When the ground crew told us about this, under no circumstances would we break the sequence, so a brick was always ready for Yorky to take with him to throw out.

When White finished his tour Willie became our plane. Willie was the oldest plane on the Squadron with thin blades and the most under powered. The newer Lancasters had paddle blades which gave greater thrust on take off. I told John Gee he gave me Willie because he did not like Aussies - Willie was O.K. when we used the main long 230 degree runway, but occasionally with a strong wind change and the shorter dissecting runway was used Willie was struggling to make take off.

This fact stands in my mind as I feel a little guilty concerning a conversation about this that took place between the engineering officer FL/LT Peter Baxter and myself at the meal table, Peter and I were very friendly and we still correspond and I had a meal with him when I visited England in 1975. Peter was always chipping me how old Willie was etc and if we had to use the shorter runway we would never get off, he knew I had already done so, but what a friend to have. Sitting near us at the table was a young officer when Peter started to sound off on the subject. I can't remember his name as I took little notice of him. I think Peter and I had a long session at the bar before tea. Later the young officer was briefed for an operation in Willie and take off was on the short runway. He never made take off from memory, he just got out and walked away from Willie, and from that moment he was no longer a pilot, but I feel that hearing our conversation was in some way to blame. Was he right for Ops? We may have saved the lives of the rest of the crew, who knows. He was possibly the officer referred to in John Gee's book who when medically examined was found to be covered in lice. I must of been very callous in those days, before he was sent away I often saw him walking around alone and I now regret I never went up and spoke to him, and not uttering one word in his defence.

Our first Operation in our own plane 'Willie' was to Ludwigs Hafen. Fifteen aircraft were sent and take off was early (ours 2.40 p.m.) in fair weather conditions, visibility was approximately 2,000 yards. We had to fly below cloud until reaching the English Channel where the cloud dispersed and we flew on to a cloud free target. Pathfinder markers were plentiful, searchlights were active but mainly inefficient. Flak was moderate, few fighters were seen. We bombed at 6.29 p.m. from 19,000 feet and landed back at base at 9.10 p.m.

Some aircraft arrived early by not allowing for an unexpectedly strong tail wind and had to circle the target waiting for the markers to go down. We actually bombed 7 minutes ahead of our estimated time. The Germans, as was their practice lit decoy fires away from the main target, a very important fuel



producing plant, but the bombers were not fooled and waited for directions from the master bomber after the markers were dropped. Target flares were in four main colours: red, green, orange and yellow and as the attack crew the master bomber would direct what colour in turn to concentrate on and so keep the attack on the main target. The Germans also tried to use decoy marker flares but for some reason could not get them the right colour of our markers.

In all attacks some undershooting occurs which can be attributed to crews who only want to get rid of their bombs soon as possible and get clear of the target, and there was no way the culprits could be identified at night time, although some questions should be asked if this happened regularly when seen after their camera photograph had been developed. On every raid with very few exceptions the Lancaster on account of its large bomb bay carried at least one 4,000 lb bomb. Well into 1943, it was discovered that crews were dropping their 4,000 lb bombs into the sea on the way to the target, to lighten the load, making the plane more manoeuvrable and easier to gain height. This procedure was nipped in the bud by installing sealed camera's in Lancasters before take off which were linked to the bomb control switch and activated the camera when any bomb was dropped. We carried the sealed camera on all our Operations, but I am certain we would never have resorted to the same tactics.

To emphasise this point more strongly my bomb aimer would have refused had I given the order, I will give a further example of this later. His hatred of the Germans was intense and he was determined to make every bomb count. I later found out his only daughter was born during a German raid on England and suffered a serious birth defect.

## CHAPTER 16

### *Operations 7,8,9 and 10*

Operation - No. 7 to Osterfeld in the Ruhr Valley, called The Death Valley because it was heavily defended as it was the main heavy industrial part of Germany producing a lot of steel for the German war effort.

It was a short trip of 6 hours so we were able to carry a good bomb load. Ours one 4,000 lb, 6 1,00 lbs and 6, 500 lbs. The raid itself was a shambles, marking was poor and bombs were dropped everywhere with no concentration. We were caught in head winds of 130 m.p.h. and bombed 7 minutes late.

Operation - No. 8 to Nuremberg - it was a pleasure to be able to plaster the home of the Nazi Rallies.

Eighteen of our Squadron took off. The target area was clear and the city streets were easily identifiable, marking was clear and a concentrated attack developed. Fighter flares were seen and there were four combats luckily none of our planes were involved. We took off at 3 p.m, bombed at 7.27 p.m. and landed back at base at 11.15 p.m. One of our planes collided with an aircraft of 150 Sqn. with fatal results. Our old plane 'Willie' was lost later on a Nuremberg raid while we were on leave. We were all surprised at getting off so lightly because it was on a raid to Nuremberg the Lancasters suffered their most heavy single loss of 94 aircraft.

Operation - No. 9 to Royan in France, apart from my last operation was the easiest one.

There was a pocket of German troops hold up there which had become a bit of a nuisance. There was little opposition so we bombed from the unusual low height of 8,000 feet. Although from memory the opposition was a little stronger than we expected, and I think I tried to gain a little more height before we bombed. The weather was bad and we were more worried about icing forming on the wings. I think this was the only time after a night operation that I was able to land in daylight. I still don't know if our effort made the Germans surrender, but may have soothed some of the Frenchies who had been complaining about the Germans making forays around the countryside pinching their cattle.

Operation - No. 10 to Munich was a much more dangerous target.

Seventeen of our aircraft took off but two aborted the raid, one due to oxygen failure and the other due to engine trouble. We took off at 6.30 p.m. bombed at 10.20 p.m. at 18,000 feet and landed back at base at 2.50 a.m. The cloud was thick and no results could be seen. Fighters were seen over target but we were not attacked. The flak was accurate and appeared too close and we narrowly missed collision with another Lancaster in difficulties. Ten aircraft were shot down over the target. I started to wonder why our luck was holding out so well. We had now reached a third of the way to the 30 trips required.

## CHAPTER 17

### *Operations 11,12,13,14 and Powley*

Perhaps it is time I got away from the more serious side of Operations.

As I previously stated I was not overly fond of Canadians who were the bigger majority on 153 Sqn. after the English. However, I grew to like our Canadian Wing Commander, Powley and held him in high respect. A friendly rapport eventually developed between us. He was always at every opportunity baiting me as to how backward Australia was to Canada such as he would say to me "Tobin, how do you dip sheep in Australia?" after listening intently to my explanation. He would look at me, roll his eyes and hands and then say "Oh you are up to date out there too" and away he would go laughing like hell. Once when I was late getting away from the briefing room word came through that the Op. had been called off so I dashed down to the parachute room and started helping the staff dish out the chocolate and chewing gum before the news reached the parachute room, making sure I got my share. Once the chocolate etc was issued it was never taken back. I must of been reported because W/C Powley nailed me first chance he got with his usual "Tobin, come here", I saw his car coming but not in time to get out of earshot. He asked me why etc etc. I looked him in the eyes and said "What would you have done under the same circumstances?" He looked at me, said nothing, waved his arms and went away laughing. So can you blame me when heavy fog closed us down for four days, and beer flowed very freely and when some of the boys dumped W/C Powley flat out on the table I could not resist the temptation to get some of my own back and so poured beer down both of his trouser legs, a terrible liberty. Boy was he mad at me as he stalked off to change, he shouted at me "Tobin, if it is the last thing I do I will post you away from this Squadron tomorrow". But he gained my greater respect, he never mentioned the matter again and never changed towards me. I still can't understand why I made no attempt to apologise. Unfortunately W/C Powley was later killed on a mining raid taking John Gee's crew who perished with him.

John Gee later told me that W/C Powley had a high regard for our crew, it made me feel good as he was a great man.

Another Canadian F/O Bolton and I were good friends, he was a cocky 5' nothing and could hardly reach up to my shoulder. I remember during that fog period, him standing on a chair pouring beer over me and me standing on the floor pouring beer over him. After the 4 days no one had a decent uniform left, except me, I was cunning enough to wear my old converted Flight Sergeant uniform.

John Gee's Book makes mention of a Canadian friend Bob Purves. He was the only person on the Squadron I disliked. He was the most extroverted man I have met. There seemed to be a distinct clash of personalities between us, I think he may have misinterpreted things between W/C Powley and myself. To me he was unstable but I do not doubt he had great courage. He was on the same mining trip when W/C Powley and a F/L Winder from our Squadron were lost. I suppose the hostility between Purves and myself really started when he cut in on me one day in the circuit as we were going through our landing procedure which could of been disastrous. I caught up with him in the locker room and nearly choked him that day, I know I grabbed him by the shoulders and shook him before reason prevailed. One thing in his favour he never reported the incident.

After we lost our old 'Willie' and was given a new 'Willie' it was given to Purves to air test, why a pilot is not allowed to air test his own plane I still don't understand. During the test Purves tried to feather and unfeather all four engines, when he came to unfeather the fourth engine all the batteries were flat and some of them had to be replaced. I was pretty mad about this and told him so in strong terms.

When I met John Gee in England in 1975 and he found out I would be going to Toronto to stay with Red Maloney my mid upper gunner, he gave me Purves address in Toronto. Red drove me to his address and when he met us at the front door he said "Which one is Tobin" as if he would forget. I knew then he had not changed. For the approx. 2 hours I was with him he drank Whiskey practically non stop and his language was hard to take. He seemed to be in a world of his own. It was evident his nerves were in a very bad state and I was not surprised when John Gee told me he died in a gun accident.

The nearest I came to rebelling against John Gee was the day he made us shovel snow from the start of our runway in case of any emergency. I never knew that cold feet could be so much agony, when I saw John Gee coming towards us in his motor car I was going to tell him what he could do with his shovel, when he called out that will do chaps, saved by the bell. I hopped onto the running board (they had running boards in those days) and stayed there until he drove us back to warmer ground.

For the next two Operations we gave the towns a rest and concentrated on oil targets. It was now January right in the middle of winter.

Operation - No. 11 was to Merseberg which contained a very large oil refinery and was considered the hottest target in Germany.

Our luck started to change, our mid upper turret lines were severed, we received a hit in the port inner engine, smoke and flames started to pour out, I ordered the engineer to feather the engine and push the foam fire extinguisher button, he did not respond and wanted to try the fire extinguisher according to the manual, I thumped him on the arm and told him in very strong language to feather that so and so engine now, it got through to him and his response was immediate. He told me he could not lift his arm for a week, but I was made at him and told him if he ever disobeyed me again in an emergency we would probably part company. The searchlights were deadly, but we managed to get away from the target without further mishap. We returned and landed on 3 engines which was no problem with the Lancaster. The damaged engine had to be replaced as all the coolant had been lost and too much damage done.

Operation - No. 12 To Leitz Troglitz was another oil target.

After take off we lost our rear Turret Guns due to hydraulic failure but we proceeded to the target relying only on our mid upper gunner. Searchlights were very accurate and flak intense. We suffered small flak holes. Our photograph was plotted to show a direct hit.

Operation - No. 13 - (superstitious) was to Dutsburg in the Ruhr Death Valley.

We lost our starboard outer engine five minutes off the target but we continued on and bombed, searchlights were ineffective and little flak. The trip was a short five and a half hours and we landed safely back at base. This time I had no trouble getting the engine feathered.

Operation - No. 14 to Stuttgart was not a happy one for our Squadron.

Seventeen of our planes took off. One aborted after take off, F/L Jones and crew who took me on my second dickie was shot down, Sqn. Leader. Rippingale, O/C A Flight was attacked by a fighter and the plane badly damaged, fortunately none of the crew were injured. We narrowly missed a collision, searchlights were encountered, fighter activity was moderate, also flak was moderate to heavy. We arrived back to base with no damage.

## CHAPTER 18

### *Navigational Aids*

As the Pilot, I was unable to see our great navigational aids in operation over Germany. The bomber force used mainly *Gee* and *H2's*. *Oboe* was used by the Pathfinders and was so accurate it could pinpoint the target area within approx. 200 yards irrespective of weather. Once the area was pinpointed all the other coloured markers could be dropped accurately within the target area. Unfortunately *Oboe* and *Gee* had a very limited range, *Gee* approx. 400 miles and *Oboe* approx. 350 miles. Unlike *Gee* and *Oboe* which relied on ground stations *H2's* acted as an independent aid with unlimited range. The *H2's* scanner installed in a bulge underneath the aircraft continually scanned the ground and produced a picture on a screen so the navigator and bomb aimer could map read and identify towns, rivers and terrain below. This was a major factor in accurately locating distant targets. However, unknown to the air force then was that late into 1943 the German fighters carried equipment that enable them to locate aircraft using *H2's*. It was just as well the crews were not aware of this situation.

We were now at the halfway mark of our Tour when detailed to take part in a raid on a large oil refinery at Stettin on the Baltic coast near the border of Poland and Russia. The weather conditions were atrocious and we expected the Operation would be called off, but we later found out the Russians were nearing the town and we were honouring a promise made to destroy the refinery and so deny the Germans of their much needed fuel supplies.

Fifteen aircraft were detailed, we took off at 7 p.m. under the worst conditions I have ever flown in, one plane aborted owing to engine failure. The cloud base was less than 600 feet, and we were flying in dense cloud at approx 3,000 feet until we were over Denmark when the cloud started to clear as we got closer to the target. Flying in dense cloud with the possibility of colliding with another plane is very nerve racking, so I decided to disobey orders and increased our speed to get well ahead of the mainstream. Luckily the Pathfinders' marking was on time, flak was heavy but slackened as the attack developed. Passing through the target we received minor flak damage. We were briefed to fly back over Sweden irrespective of its neutrality, we must have been possibly the leading plane because when we flew over one of their main dromes at Malmao they thought we may have been in some difficulty and gave us the green signal giving us permission to land. When they found the main force was violating their territory they started firing their *ACK ACK* guns, I think it must of been for show as I did not hear of any of our planes being hit. There were two raids on Politz that night and eleven planes were shot down. The weather on return was similar, but by the time we reached England a warm front had taken over and our bases were cloud free. On the way home we encountered a very strong tail wind and we were nearly an hour ahead of our estimated time of return. When

we reached base it was in complete darkness and when I called Old Duke William to control, there was panic stations and the runway lights were immediately switched on. When we landed they were under the impression we had never reached the target, and took the unusual action of separating the seven of us to interview us separately. Luckily our bombing photo also vindicated us, but we received no apologies. The next plane to arrive back was nearly 40 minutes behind us. I don't know to this day how I managed to get back so far ahead of the others. My only explanation was that due to the bad weather we were all flying back at different heights, and I just struck the height of the strong tail wind.



## CHAPTER 19

### *Dresden*

Operation - No. 16 to Dresden has turned out to be my nightmare, every anniversary it still gets a mention in our newspapers.

My log book states, "The slaughter of Dresden can't describe it any other way".

We have been bombarded about the morality of dropping the Atom bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it makes me mad when no mention is made of the fact the Japs started it all with their cowardly attack on Pearl Harbour with thousands killed. The cruelty inflicted on every island they occupied, the humiliation torture and the executions suffered by our prisoners of war - men, women and children and the possible quarter of a million allied soldiers lives they saved by not having to invade the mainland of Japan.

Given the same circumstances and knowing the consequences I would not hesitate to fly the plane dropping the Atom bomb. The choice now I would prefer to drop the Atom bomb then being on the Dresden Raid. There were 3 times more women and children killed in Dresden than in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Dresden was a defenceless virgin target crammed full with refugees, the raid was unnecessary as the German resistance was crumbling and the Russians were close to entering the town. At our briefing I can distinctly remember seeing the briefing officer marching up and down the stage rubbing his hands together and saying "There are thousands of refugees in the town go over and kill the bastards" The fact that the Yanks went there next day and machine gunned men, women and children crowded in open spaces and everything that moved does not make good reading. The correct casualty figures will never be known.

Normally a town can expect only one raid a night but for some reason Dresden was really on the hit list, it has been suggested the allies were trying to impress their capabilities on the Russians about to enter the town. A large force of bombers started the first raid on Dresden between 10.03 p.m. to 10.28 p.m. We were scheduled to take part in the second raid in which 15 of our aircraft took part. Our take off time was 9.30 p.m. we reached Dresden at 1.40 a.m. and bombed from 17,500 feet, fires from the first raid were still burning, the bombing was concentrated and large fires were started in the centre of the town and could still be seen 150 miles away from the target.

The Dresden trip took 9 and a half hours by far the longest trip of our tour. We ran into a strong head wind on the way home and fuel became a problem. After consultation with the engineer concerning our fuel levels I decided to cut and feather the two outer engines to conserve fuel and try to make base. The tension and uncertainty of making base mounted as we neared home so I requested permission from control to make a direct approach without making the usual circuit. They were slow answering my first request so I shouted a second request in a more louder and urgent tone, a quiet voice responded O.K. William make a direct approach. Landing a near empty Lancaster on 2 engines which gave plenty of power is no problem, but making a direct approach at night takes a great amount of judgment and skill. Due to petrol shortage some of our Lancasters and others were forced to land at emergency dromes near the coast.

Most blame poor old bomber Harris, nicknamed Butch Harris for Dresden, but Dresden, the fourth largest city in Germany had been on the alternative list for a long time and lay untouched and the huge allied forces of heavy bombers which had been created could not be left idle on the airfields. The Dresden raid probably was no different in the minds of those who planned it, it was a freak combination of weather and accurate bombing that generated the fire storm that reduced Dresden to ashes with the heavy casualties.

The destruction of Dresden provoked the first open political and public outbursts in Britain and America, the end of the war was near and the "do gooders" now safe were coming out of the woodwork to make themselves heroes. Pity the voices were not there to remind them that Germany started the war, had wrought great evil on the world and resisted all demands to surrender. Bomber Harris' obsession to destroy cities by saturation bombing did not find favour in several circles, including it seems the Royal Family, as he was the only main force leader who did not receive an Earldom at the end of the war and had to be satisfied with a Knighthood. Perhaps his obsession that Germany could be defeated by laying waste her cities and breaking the morale of the German people blinded him to other factors. German history now tells us if the bombers had concentrated on the oil producing plants the war would have finished 6 months earlier. Harris once boasted for the loss of 500 bombers he could wipe Berlin off the map. After the loss of 1,000 bombers in what was called the Great Berlin Offensive, Berlin was still operating.

When I now think of Dresden I think of the German destruction of Coventry which helps to ease my conscience. History now also suggests that Churchill and his war staff knew that Coventry was the target for Germany's biggest

single raid on England but if any evacuation of the town took place Germany would of known that their secret code was known by the allies, but what a decision to make. The lives sacrificed at Coventry saved many more lives throughout the rest of the war. A well known war historian, Alexander McKee writing a book on Dresden gave it the title of "The Devil's Tinderbox".

## CHAPTER 20

### *Operations 17 - 22 and Window*

I previously referred to *Window*, I don't know how the term originated. *Window* was metal strips cut to approx 15 inches to correspond with the normal 15 metre band radio then in use. The British later was able to bring a 10 metre band radio into use. *Window* dropped gave the impression of a plane on the German radar screens. *Window* was then and still remains the most effective and simplest means of confusing a radar system. I feel our leaders failed to stress upon bomber captains the real importance of *window* towards the safety of bomber crews. I think everyone thought at the time it was just a boring chore with the engineer and bomb aimer dropping strips of *window* through chutes every few seconds. A lot of crews dumped the *window* out quick as possible, I am ashamed to admit I let my engineer and bomb aimer do the same.

The effect of *window* on radar screens was known long before it was first used, but its use was delayed because it would be equally useful to the Germans once the secret was out. However, the Germans knew all about it and followed the same course as the allies in the interest of their own security.

When bomber losses increased in 1943 above acceptable levels it was decided to use *window* as it was thought at that stage the Germans would not be able to mount a bomber offensive against England on the scale we were carrying out over Germany and our night fighters were being equipped with new radar which had much improved resistance to *window jamming*.

*Window* was first used on a raid to Hamburg in July 1943 with 800 bombers, *window* disintegrated the German night fighter system and Hamburg was wiped out. *Window* was again successfully used in August 1943 in a successful raid on Peenemunde, a very vital target which delayed the Germans much earlier use of their Buzz Bombs and Rockets. A spoof attack using *window* simulated a large bomber force heading for Berlin this deceived the night fighter controllers so most of the bombers bombed successfully before the night fighters attacked, yet we still lost 40 out of 590 bombers. However, a high priority research centre was badly damaged. *Window* made the Germans change their night fighter tactics, the fighters were simply directed towards the bombers and left to find their own individual targets, they also tried the single fighter approach over the targets which caused them high accident rates, and they were also caught in the flak barrages same as the bombers. Spoof raids with bombers dropping tinsel which helped to break up German fighter concentration in one area was carried out until the war ended.

On days the Squadron was not operating tension was still present as the Squadron was stood up on numerous occasions before the operation was cancelled. During these periods we were not allowed to be idle and we were sent up locally to air test planes and other equipment. At these times the gunners were able to practice their skill firing at rogue targets (form of windsock) trailing on lines behind the target towing aircraft.

Operations - Nos. 17 and 18 came with a rush when we were sent on consecutive nights to the Ruhr (Death Valley).

Operation - No. 17 to Dortmund, my log book reads "Fighters up in strength, combats seen over target area - Lancaster seen going down in flames, very late on target about the last to bomb, navigator sick, 21 Lancs shot down, fighters followed early bombers. Thank God!

I am sure that lack of fuel caused many fighters to break off attacks and so saved the lives of many airmen.

Operation - No. 18 was to a synthetic oil plant at Buisburg.

Nineteen of our aircraft took off. The target was clear of cloud and could be identified visually, markers were plentiful and bombing very concentrated. We were in the first wave, the searchlights were ineffective. However, two of our aircraft "D" for Dog and "A" for Able failed to return and nothing was heard from them after take off. Going to the Ruhr two nights straight made us a very tired crew.

With the allies now gaining control of the skies with their Spitfires, Thunderbolts and especially the long range Mustang fighter. The RAF started to compete with the Yanks on daytime raids.

My log book shows two operations - No. 19, I claim the first one as an Operation but the powers that be did not agree. It was a daylight to Neuss, we were sent off in bad weather and recalled before reaching the target, visibility was very bad over base on our return but as we had completed more than 12 Os. we had to land with a full bomb load. As I previously explained bombs were considered safe (perhaps) if the master bomb switch had not been activated.

My recognised Operation - No. 19 was also a daylight to Mannheim, we were well protected by our fighters. The target was obscured by cloud and the Op was uneventful for us but our 'K' for King blew up on return over England and all the crew were killed.

Operations - Nos. 20 and 21 and 22 were carried out in the space of 4 days with only 1 days' rest, so I and the crew were starting to feel the strain.

In one case landing back at 2 a.m. after de-briefing and a meal it would be approx. 3.30 a.m. before getting to bed and deep sleep did not come easy in those days, after tension and the drum of 4 engines still ringing in your ears. I have met so many aircrew since the war who suffer hearing disabilities, my navigator being one of them.

Operation - No. 20 to Chemnitz, 13 of our aircraft took off.

We took off at 4.45 p.m. Bombed at 9.48 p.m. from 15,000 feet. Returning to base at 2 a.m. We had bad icing conditions going to the target and returning home found it impossible to keep to briefed heights. Conditions due to cloud were poor over the target, marking appeared insufficient and erratic, as we approached the target the master bomber changed the coloured marker aiming point several times, and I then had to rely on the directions of the bomb aimer left left, right right, he was then situated in the perspex nose of the plane and had a good view of the coloured markers. The bomb aimer would be aligning his bomb sight on the target spot and at the appropriate time give the order bomb doors open, and to the pilot steady steady an attitude that must be retained until the wonderful news of bombs away is heard from the bomb aimer. The bomb aimer checks that all bombs had left the wracks before giving the order bomb doors closed.

I previously explained the procedure adopted should a bomb fail to release. Over the target the flak was heavy and the Germans used plenty of Scarecrows. The devil's number 13 was converted to 12 as one of our aircraft 'X' for Xray was not heard from again after take off. The loss of 2 aircraft in a short space of time did nothing for our moral. Tension for the first ten Ops. is high, but for the next 10-15 Ops you seem to be able to shut out many thoughts from your mind but when you get to the final countdown 25,26,27,28,29,30(finish) tension seemed to mount again much higher than before.

Operation - No. 21 was to Dessau, 14 of our aircraft took off.

We were sent on a suicide route to this target right through the Ruhr when not quite dark and we went practically up to Berlin before turning south to target. Fighters and flak were extremely active between the Ruhr and the target, fighter combats were seen all way along the route and overall 38 Lancs were lost. We narrowly avoided collision with fighter crossing steam in front of us. I felt as though I could just about shake his hand as he whistled past. Luckily none of our Squadron were involved in combat and all returned safely.

Operation - No. 22 to Kassel was very uneventful which were thankful for as we were feeling the strain of 3 ops in 4 days.

Fighter flares were shot up at turning points but there was no sign of fighters. The raid appeared successful, but the weather was bad over England on return and we landed in heavy rain, I nearly dropped a wing on landing which could of been disastrous, but luckily I was able to correct with use of throttle. We were looking forward to a rest and actually we were given 3 whole days to recover.

## CHAPTER 21

### *Operations 23,25 and 26*

Operation - No. 23 to Dortmund - We were now back on daylight raids.

Due to my good navigator we had the honour of riding starboard in the Leading the V.

Good navigation on daylight are essential to meet the fighter escort on time to conserve their fuel. Some Yanks flying Thunderbolts seemed much too close above, spectacular but not efficient. Prefer our boys in Spitfires and Mustangs flying higher above with a better overall view of any possible attack.

I think at this stage the German fighter boys were happy to keep out of trouble however, one of our planes 'D' for Dog did not return. The attack appeared successful, we received some splinter damage on our bombs. We did not know then that this would be our last trip. Seventeen in all in the gallant old plane 'W' Willie. We were due to go on leave and whilst away Willie was lost in a raid over Nuremberg.

What if we had not gone on leave?

How do you judge fate?

After 17 trips and never once failing to take off in Willie I was puzzled when told that the crew when briefed for their first Operation in Willie failed to take off and then when again briefed in Willie for an attack on Nuremberg, were never heard from again after take off.

While waiting for a new 'W' Willie replacement we were put in Lancaster 'O' for Oboe on a daylight operation to Hildesheim. Fifteen aircraft were detailed and we took off before lunch at 11.10 a.m. Conditions were reasonable at times the gaggle was off course and the leaders were slow in realising we were behind time. We were worried by flak to and from target. Some pilots were acting like bloody fools playing around in gaggle. We were reported for dropping bombs whilst another plane was in a dangerous position. Our photograph disproved the allegation.

It is very hard to describe a gaggle on daylight, Lancasters flew willy nilly all over the sky, sometimes you would come very close to another plane and sometimes you would see one of your own squadron and give them a wave.



The biggest trouble was fighting the other planes slipstreams with your wings continually been knocked down. I usually arrived back from a daylight tired and with aching arms. Due to the unusually heavy flak in accurate form six of our aircraft were damaged but none seriously. The attack appeared successful but I was glad when we re-crossed the Rhine.

Operation - No. 25 - the count down for our crew was now starting - a daylight to Harpeneweg.

We supplied 10 aircraft among 80 picked crews to bomb an oil target only 250 yards square that was supplying German tanks holding out in the Ruhr. We were told no fighter aircraft was available for our protection as the allies would attempt to cross the Rhine at the same time and all the fighter aircraft was needed for their protection and the German fighters would be too busy to worry about us. On the way to the target it was interesting to see fighter combats taking place some miles to the left of us.

I foolishly tried to get up front to obtain a good photograph before bombing started and in doing so overshot the target. I ordered the bomb aimer to drop the bombs anyway but he flatly refused my order, I previously told you of his hatred for the Germans when his daughter was born during an air raid on England and suffered a birth defect, so he refused to waste one bomb.

We had to circle around again and were the last to bomb. Ground defences consisted of very accurate moderate to heavy flak and I saw two aircraft shot down. After bombing the rest were miles ahead of us and I had to push the engines a bit to catch up. Wing Commander Powley was also on the raid, his last before being killed on a mining trip. Sqn. Leader Rippingale aborted due to engine failure and another aircraft 'A' for Able was badly damaged by flak losing two engines and most of its fuel. The pilot F/L Wheeler made a forced landing at Eindhoven in Holland and by his quick action saved both aircraft and crew.

The Rhine seemed 100 miles wide that day and I arrived back at base badly shaken and promptly lost my liking for daylight raids. However, we managed to get a real good photograph of the damage and it was considered that the target was wiped out.

Operation - No. 26 to Nordhausen was another daylight.

A brand new 'W' Willie R.F. 205 had been received, air tested, brought up to operational standard and was handed over to us for its first operation. From the

oldest plane on the Squadron we now had the most modern one, with more thrust and more power and better instrumentation, but in spite of this I think we had mixed feelings in comparing it with our other old reliable 'W' for Willie and hoped it would bring us the same amount of good luck.

We finished the rest of our tour in the new Willie 5 in all, I doubt if it would have done more than 12-15 trips before the war ended and so was surprised to see a report that it was scrapped in May 1947.

Ten planes took off for Nordhausen but the trip turned out to be a shambles.

The target was obscured by thick cloud, the master bomber panicked and called us down to 8,000 feet, then back up again to as high as we could get, the markers were bursting in cloud and we managed to reach 14,000 feet before the master bomber told us to bomb on best navigational aids, possible, under these circumstances the crews got rid of their bombs soon as possible, bombs were dropped everywhere and dangerously. At briefing we were warned that there was a concentration camp in the vicinity and bombing needed to be accurate, however, we followed the rest of the mob, dropped our bombs and straggled home. This was to be our last daylight raid.

## CHAPTER 22

### *Mining Trips*

*Gardening* the term used for mine dropping in the sea lanes of the north sea area was a very dangerous operation and on these trips casualties were high. The main reason given for this was that most of the German air force fighter training bases were in that area and a lone Lancaster bomber was easy game for the many budding fighter aces in the area. There were no separate mining squadrons as this would create a great moral problem. To counter this mining duties were passed from Squadron to Squadron, normally a squadron would do only 5 mining trips before the erroneous task was passed onto the next detailed squadron.

It was the practice to put the most senior crews on mining trips which I never considered as fair, imagine feelings of crews with their tour nearly completed having their heads placed on the chopping block. The Squadron had already completed 4 mining trips with several casualties making mining a moral problem. For some reason or other which I can't remember our crew missed the first 4 trips. When our fifth and last trip was detailed I had by then completed 27 operations and we were the most senior crew.

However, when the operation was first detailed my navigator had ear trouble and was not cleared by the doctor. On the first stand up 7 planes were detailed and a F/L Winder and his crew were put on in our place. To help morale W/C Powley also put himself on the trip taking John Gee's crew with him. The operation was cancelled 3 times due to weather. When they eventually did take off 5 planes were sent off instead of the original seven. By this time our crew was again operational but F/L Winder was left on the battle order in our place. W/C Powley also left himself on the battle order. John Gee later told me that between cancellations W/C Powley had said to him "He had a premonition that he would not be coming back, but he could not take himself off now as it would set a bad example to the other aircrews. As a W/C Powley was not obliged or under orders to take part in any operation, it was his own choice, and if he had made himself one of the crews taken off the original battle order, I doubt if the rest of the air crews would have taken any notice.

Squadron records show that W/C Powley and F/L Winder and crews never returned.

I often wonder what our fate would have been if we had of been in F/L Winder's place. The remaining 3 crews reported seeing at 12,000 feet an air to air tracer and an aircraft which caught fire immediately continued to fly level for a short period and then dived steeply disappearing in flames through clouds, and at 15,000 feet seeing air to air tracers by an aircraft on fire which dived steeply and exploded at sea level. Our gunners tried to give a good account of

themselves, but they were out gunned by superior fire power and distance, at this stage our gunners were using .303 ammunition against cannon shells, and at this time the German fighters had upward firing cannons so virtually they could attack a bomber unseen. These reports left us in no doubt about the fate of W/C Powley, F/L Winder and their crews.

My tour finished with raids on Lutzkendorf, Plauen, Berlin and Heligoland.