



AS IT HAPPENED

BY

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ONE MAN'S WAR SERVICE

HOW IT ALL STARTED

On 17th December 1941 I joined the 10th light Horse Regiment and was involved in part-time training. After the declaration of war on Japan my regiment was called up for full-time duty. I had previously applied to join the RAAF as trainee aircrew and was due for an interview with the RAAF recruiting unit at Bunbury, Western Australia but could not obtain a release from the Army.

Later, an RAAF recruiting team arrived on our unit and I was granted permission to attend. To my surprise, they had my original application for aircrew. After processing and in company with 58 ex-army colleagues, I was accepted into the RAAF as trainee aircrew on 13th October 1942. Sixty of us, including one civilian recruit, Archie Gilmore, were posted to Recruit Training Depot at Bausleton, Western Australia.

RAAF TRAINING BEGINS

Aircrew trainees in the RAAF commenced their service at the lowest Air Force rank of Aircraftman Second Class (AC2). At Recruit Training Depot, Chief Drill Instructor (DI) Flight Lieutenant Dave Smyth and his staff had an easy time because we were all Army trained except for Archie who was drilled day and night so that he could catch up with the rest of us. In addition to aircrew trainees, WAAAF recruits were also stationed at the base.

One day, while we were resting, someone said something derogatory about the WAAAF as they marched past. The Sergeant WAAAF in charge halted their flight and asked our DI if she could put us through our paces. That she certainly did. A half-hour of the most intense drilling we had ever experienced. Boy! was she good at it! At the end she pronounced us pretty good but we knew we weren't as good as the WAAAF.

At the end of six weeks' training I was posted to RAAF Base, Pearce (WA) as a temporary general hand. My duties were mainly concerned with keeping the base clean at the bore site. In company with other trainee aircrew waiting for the next

course I also had to attend lectures consisting mainly of refresher maths and English. Luckily, the chap in the next bed was a former schoolteacher, so I received quite a lot of private maths instruction.

In February 1942, I was posted to Initial Training School (ITS) at Victor Harbour in South Australia to undergo six weeks of pre-aircrew training at the end of which I was categorised as a Wireless Air Gunner (WAG). My next posting was to No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School at Ballarat, Victoria where I spent the next six months learning radio theory and how to operate the airborne radio set T/R 1082/83.

FLYING AT LAST

After about a month of ground training I had my first flight in an Avro Anson on 30th March 1942. By that time winter had arrived and it wasn't long before we were feeling the cold and it was cold! The westerly wind came through the cracks in the 40'X20' huts so we resorted to using newspapers to supplement our bedding, particularly under our palliasses (straw mattresses) on the floor. Because we had to fold our bedding each morning in the approved fashion, it was difficult to hide the 'illegal' paper. On reflection, I suspect that the officers making the daily hut inspections were sympathetic to our plight.

Most of our flying took place in CAC Wackett Trainers with 90 horsepower Scarab engines. The pilots had lots of fun flying them and several were court martialled for such deeds as 'shooting up' the Geelong train and making tracks through the reeds in Lake Windamere with the fixed undercarriage. I experienced two unusual situations flying in Wacketts. On one occasion shortly after take-off the engine lost power, and was blowing out black smoke. The pilot managed to turn 180° and plonked the aircraft back on the airfield. The Chief Flying Instructor (CFI) castigated the pilot for landing downwind. We both managed a silent smile. The other situation occurred while I was immersed in working the radio. When I looked up, the pilot was reading a book. The aircraft was at 5 000 feet just west of the airfield. I was appalled! I was (almost) mollified later when the pilot explained that the wind at 5 000 feet was above the stalling speed of the Wackett with its flaps down, so when he was flying into-wind with the correct throttle setting, he was able to remain stationary in sight of the airfield while I was beavering away at my radio.

Long weekends in Melbourne were a real treat. The train left our airfield station at 3 p.m. on Friday and left Melbourne at 6 p.m. on Sunday for return. I stayed with my uncle and auntie who were friends with Wing Commander Andy Swan who at the time was Commanding Officer of the Melbourne Personnel Depot and by the time I arrived in the UK, was CO of the Personnel Depot in Brighton, but more of that later.

After the Wireless Course, I was posted to No.3 Bombing and Gunnery School at West Sale, Victoria. Training in gunnery in Fairey Battles and Airspeed Oxfords, one particular incident stuck in my memory. The Fairey Battle was fitted with a Vickers gas-operated machine gun. One of our course members, Jack Morris, experienced a gun 'stoppage'. To clear the stoppage he put the gun in the 'stowed' position which meant that the gun folded into the aircraft fuselage. After clearing the stoppage, he pulled the gun back onto the firing position. As he did so the gun malfunctioned and a burst was fired down through the fuselage, damaging the rudder controls and the tail wheel. The pilot was able to keep control of the aircraft and land back at base. Fortunately for Jack, at the subsequent inquiry, he was able

to demonstrate that the gun was so worn that the safety catch (which was in the 'up' position when on) dropped into the 'off' or firing position when it was jarred or as in that case of being folded into the aircraft, fell into the firing position through vibration.

On completion of that training, on 17th September 1943, I received my WAG wing and was promoted to Sergeant. Following pre-embarkation leave back home in Western Australia, I was posted to No.2 Personnel Depot Bradfield Park, Sydney for posting overseas. Two weeks after arriving at Bradfield Park we were told we were posted to the U.K.

TRAVEL TO WAR

Over the years I have heard criticism from some quarters that those of us who were sent to operate in the European Theatre of World War Two should have gone instead to experience the rigours of the South-West Pacific Region. By some strange logic, those critics seem to 'blame' individuals for going where they were sent by higher authority. Our journey involved crossing two highly vulnerable oceans in dangerous circumstances, broken by the welcome relief of land travel in a country where the people appreciated that the conflict was world-wide. They also appreciated that weapons of war made in Germany and Italy were just as lethal to Australian bodies as those made in Japan. What follows in this segment is a lighthearted approach to our travel to war, rather typical of our memories.

On November 4th 1943 we boarded the Mariposa and set sail for the USA. The ship was under charter to the British Army and had been moving Italian prisoners-of-war between the Middle East and India. We were bunked on the promenade deck as the two lower decks were closed down due to contamination by lice carried by their former passengers. Altogether, there were 400 RAAF aircrew, about half of whom were to be trained in Canada. The remainder of us, having been already trained to 'Wings' standard, were bound for the UK. We were fed in shifts for two meals per day and the food was lousy, consisting mainly of fatty sausages and tinned liver. I was on the midday and midnight shifts (ugh!).

After a few days I was detailed for KP duties as a kitchen slushy helping the cooks by preparing vegetables and the like. On arrival I was asked if I wanted a meal. The next thing I knew I was sitting down to a turkey lunch with as much freshly baked bread as I could eat. Other food available included tinned fruit and ice cream. Over the next week or so I offered to do KP duties for those who didn't want to do it. I got two takers at ten shillings each, which gave me some good meals and I was a Pound richer.

We were not allowed leave in San Francisco because too many of the previous draft had gone Absent Without Leave causing all sorts of problems. However, after five days we boarded a Pullman sleeping train which was old but very comfortable. Our first stop was on top of the Rocky Mountains where we were allowed to walk around. The scenery was magnificent with lots of snow. The next stop was at a place called Waterloo, Minnesota where we were to stay for an hour. It was a typical mid-western town with the railway line running through the middle of the town. When the train stopped we piled off it to find the platform nearly deserted except for a coffee and doughnut stand near the stationmaster's office, manned by a middle-aged lady. After she had served a dozen of the boys, she asked how come we spoke English. We told her that it was our native tongue, Australia being part of the British Empire.

A look of consternation came over her face and she raced off into the stationmaster's office to return a few moments later with the man himself. After questioning us he blurted out "Good Lord, we were told that you were Italian POWs".

Within half an hour the place was crowded with townsfolk including the mayor who apologised profusely and made a speech welcoming us. Even a band turned up to see us off some two and a half hours after our arrival!

We passed through Chicago in the evening and it was lit up like a Christmas tree. The next day we arrived at Niagara Falls, the train driver stopping the train on the bridge (against all the rules) to give his precious cargo of Australian servicemen a good look at the Falls.

On arrival at New York we were taken to Fort McDowell which was on an island in the Hudson River and were given five days' leave. We visited all the sights including the Empire State Building and the Hollywood Canteen. That was so crowded that six of us left to have a look around New York at night. At about 11 p.m. we were having a cup of coffee in a diner when we noticed that Jack O'Donnell was missing. We found him outside talking to five girls and an American soldier. It turned out that they were passing when they saw the RAAF uniforms and sent the soldier in to find out if we wanted to talk to them because one of the girls had a brother in the Marines in Melbourne. The outcome was that they invited us to their home in the Bronx. We arrived about midnight, they woke up the parents who were pleased to see us and proceeded to organize a party. Neighbours, who initially protested at the noise, joined in when they established the reason and the party went on until 3 a.m. Next evening we went back and they put on a real party. As we were singing around the piano they all insisted that we sing *Waltzing Matilda* for them.

We sailed on the *Queen Elizabeth* the next day in company with about 10 000 US troops. There were bodies everywhere. We were accommodated on 'D' deck where it was so hot that we lived in our underwear despite the fact that our route took us near to the Arctic Circle. During our trip we had one emergency drill and it took us half an hour to reach the boat deck. The ship was sailing without an escort as it was faster than a battleship and it zig-zagged, changing course every twelve minutes to avoid detection by enemy submarines.

Five days after leaving New York we arrived at Glasgow on 10th December 1943 where we were put on a train for an unknown destination. During our rail journey it was so foggy, we saw virtually nothing. However, the next day we found ourselves in Brighton where our home for the next three months was the Grand Hotel which, together with the Metropole Hotel had been taken over by the RAAF as a Personnel Depot.

After a few days there I fell ill, was diagnosed as having mumps and was admitted to the local infectious diseases hospital. Some 40 or so of my fellow travellers joined me there. Apparently we picked up the disease on the *Queen Elizabeth*. On discharge from hospital I was sent for recuperation to a private home in Birmingham. Arrangements were made through the Lady Ryder Scheme, a private organization conducted by Lady Ryder and her associate, Miss Macdonald of The Isles. Those fantastic ladies arranged rest and recreation facilities in private homes for British Commonwealth service men without recompense, as a gesture of British gratitude for help in facing the evils being perpetrated by the German and Italian dictators. The head of the family with whom I was billeted was a meat inspector with the

abattoirs. To begin with I was made comfortable in front of the fire and the hostess gave me 'Gone With The Wind' to read. A few days later I was taken by car on an abattoir inspection tour which included a trip into Wales. Ten days later I was back in Brighton fit and healthy. We settled into a routine of parades and route marches and I teamed up with one Langton (Blue) Connolly who, much later, became my best man.

Shortly after I arrived in Brighton, we were paraded in the foyer of the Grand Hotel while the CO, Wing Commander Andy Swan carried out an inspection. He entered the hotel with all his retinue trailed out behind him. Suddenly he stopped in midstride and came straight over to where I was standing and said "G'day young Brandli, you haven't been up to see me yet. Be in my office at 1500 hours", then marched off. With looks of consternation from my mates who wondered what the hell 'young Brandli' had been up to, I had a lot of explaining to do. Promptly at 1500 I knocked on his door. The door of the next office flew open and a Flight Lieutenant came out saying "What do you want up here"? I stood to attention and said "I'm here to see the CO". He replied "You haven't got an appointment". At that point Andy's door opened and he said to me "Come in". Turning to the Flight Lieutenant the CO said "Two cups of tea if you please". If looks could kill I would have been dead meat.

Andy Swan had earlier been in the British Indian Army, was a stickler for regulations and was outwardly a stern disciplinarian. His appearance masked a softness of heart which loved his troops provided they lived up to his requirements. On that occasion we talked in generalities and at the end of our discussion he said "Work hard and keep out of trouble. But if ever you are in trouble, contact me". I thanked him and left. Although we had periodic chats after that, I was aware that he was keeping his eye on me.

FURTHER TRAINING FOR THE TASK AHEAD

A posting to the Radio School at Yatesbury in Wiltshire was the first step on the 'Operational Training Ladder'. The purpose was to learn how to operate the T/R(transmit/receive)1154/55 Marconi Radio fitted to RAF aircraft. That was followed by a posting to West Freugh, near Stranraer in Scotland, flying in Avro Ansons around Irish Sea routes for the training of student navigators. My sojourn at West Freugh was enjoyable. I took advantage of glorious summer weather to have a look at the surrounding countryside. It came to an end all too soon and on the 30th May I found myself at No. 20 Operational training Unit (OTU) at Bruntingthorpe where I joined a pool of 10 pilots, 10 navigators, 10 bomb aimers 10 WAGs and 20 gunners. We were expected to sort ourselves out into 10 crews to fly Wellingtons, twin engined bombers. On our first morning we were all standing around like lost souls when I saw an Australian Flying Officer pilot I thought I recognized from Initial Training School and went over to make myself known. When he turned around I realised that I had made a mistake. Later he came over, introduced himself as Dave Irving and asked me to crew up with him. The next day an RAF bomb aimer Flying Officer Bill Cooper (aged 30) from Birmingham joined us. We then asked RAF navigator Sergeant Bob Billsland (aged 22) from Glasgow to become a member of our crew. Surveying the gunners, we found them a motley lot. Dave found out that another group of gunners was due in. Looking that group over, Dave was impressed by two Rhodesians, Sergeant Bill Simpson (aged 28) an ex-British Rhodesian

policeman and Sergeant Peter Groenewould (aged 22) an Afrikaner farmer from Bulawayo, Rhodesia. Both agreed to join our crew.

After two weeks ground training, learning about Wellingtons, we went to satellite airfields at Bitterswell (the home of the Frank Whittle jet engine) to actually fly the aircraft. Dave insisted on good crew discipline whilst flying - no idle chatter and no christian names, identification being by crew position. We returned to Bruntingthorpe to do cross-country exercises and on 18th August 1944 we did a diversionary trip known as a 'Bull's-eye' to the coast of France where we saw hostile flak for the first time. The plan was to send about ten Wellingtons pretending to be a bomber force by throwing out lots of 'window' (strips of metalized paper) which confused German radar and made a small number of aircraft look like a much larger force, drawing off night fighters while the main force headed into targets by a different route. It was our first taste of the real war, initiated by Air Chief Marshal (Bomber) Harris as a 'bleeding' of trained aircrew.

Our next posting was to Heavy Conversion Unit at Wigsley to fly the Stirling, an obsolete four engined bomber built like a battleship. That conversion was an introduction to four engined bombers before going onto Lancasters. We managed that interlude without incident, although Dave confessed that he didn't like Stirlings very much. At Wigsley we were joined by RAF engineer Jack West (aged 19) from Findon in the Midlands. The crew now consisted of two Australians, two Englishmen, two Rhodesians and one Scotsman. You will notice that the narrative has changed from the first person singular to plural. From this point, whatever happened to one happened to all seven whilst airborne. We arrived at No. 5 Lancaster Flying School at Syerston to convert onto Lancasters. What a beautiful aircraft, especially compared with the Stirling. Once again we finished our conversion without incident. Shortly after our training, Lancaster Flying Schools became Heavy Conversion Units and the Stirling was cut out of the training cycle.

We were posted to No. 44 (Rhodesian) Squadron on 12th November 1944. It was based at Spilsby, about five miles west of Skegness. We were very excited as the squadron was part of 5 Group, the premier Group in RAF Bomber Command. At the same time we were a bit apprehensive because we were about to face the real thing after about eighteen months of training.

On a cold, foggy day we piled into the back of a truck and were taken to Spilsby. Our first sighting of our new home was a shock to the system. The place looked wrecked. The main hanger had a lean on and the other buildings near the control tower and the control tower itself didn't look much better. We thought Jerry had bombed it but we were to learn that a few days earlier, one of our own aircraft lost an engine on take-off, crashed into a visiting Halifax and caught fire. The only casualty was a Canadian who was hit by a piece of debris while trying to shift a second Halifax. We were shown to our Nissen huts which were located well away from the airfield main buildings. After a period of settling in and flying training, we were considered ready for the big moment - our first operational trip.

OPERATIONS (OPS)

4th December 1944 was the 'big' day, following briefing for an attack on the marshalling yards at Heilbron. To say that there were seven nervous bodies climbing into the aircraft is the understatement of the year. After some three hours of

uneventful flying, we approached the target area. It was well defended with both high and low flak (anti-aircraft fire), fighter flares, night fighters and search lights. The target was well marked with coloured flares so we had little difficulty on our bombing run. Bombs were already bursting on the target when we released ours. After two minutes of straight and level flying which was required to obtain a photo of our bomb drop, we hightailed it out of there. We were a much-relieved crew when we landed back at Spilsby after some seven hours of flying. David was very tired as, being the only pilot on board, he had to 'hand fly' for the whole trip. Our next target, on 6th December, was an oil refinery at Guissen. It was very much a repeat of the first trip except that we saw several aircraft shot down on the approach to and over the target.

A daylight raid on Heinbeck marshalling yards followed. That trip was memorable because when returning from our sortie, we discovered that most of the airfields in northern and central England, including Spilsby were closed due to fog. We were diverted to Thornie Isle, a base for Mosquitos, on an island just off Plymouth. We returned to Spilsby next day. On 31st December we went to Houffalize to give support to the Americans during the Battle of the Bulge. The weather over Europe was so bad that it was classed as not fit for aircraft to fly. However, the importance of the mission was so great that No. 5 Group was tasked to attack the German build-up which we did successfully.

We continued to attack targets by day and night until our last raid which was a daylight attack on Hitler's redoubt at Berchtesgaden. Take-off was at 0800 and our route took us over northern Italy. It was a perfect day - not a cloud over Europe, and the Alps were a magnificent sight with snow-covered peaks and fog in the valleys. As we were on our bombing run the aircraft next to us, almost wing tip to wing tip, dropped a 12 000 pound (5443 kilograms) bomb at the same time as we dropped our load and we were able to watch it fall all the way to the target.

Other targets included a 1000 bomber raid on Essen. Wherever one looked, the sky was filled with aircraft. We targeted Dresden, the 'V-Bomb' factory at Penemonde, and a total of 22 marshalling yards and oil refineries. On 14th April 1945 we were tasked to drop mines in Kiel Bay. The technique was totally different to bombing. Only about 12 aircraft were tasked for that target, so we were virtually individual lone targets. To drop the mines we had to navigate by airborne radar (H2S), fly in from the sea up the bay, maintaining straight and level flight for 6 minutes to enable the bomb aimer to get a good picture on the radar. Each of those minutes seemed an hour long and it was a much relieved crew when Bill called "Mines away".

HIGHLIGHTS - GOOD, BAD AND UGLY

We had ferried a crew to the USAF Base at Honnington to pick up a Lancaster which had been repaired there. Within minutes we were surrounded by curious American personnel. They parted when the Commanding General arrived with his retinue. He asked if he could look through the aircraft. Dave escorted him and the rest of the crew had a Colonel in tow. It was the first time they had seen a Lancaster close-up. They were fascinated by two things. Firstly, that we were able to find the target at night by ourselves and secondly, by the size of the bomb bay and the fact that we could carry 8000 pounds (3630 kilograms) compared with the Flying Fortress' capability of 5000 pounds (2268 kilograms). When it came time for us to depart,

Dave asked if he could do a 'shoot up' of the runway. He got the General's permission. On take-off, he held the aircraft on the runway until past flying speed then pulled the control column back hard into a steep climb, circled back in a very tight circuit and flew down the runway at 'dot' feet. Very naughty!!

Returning early one morning, we were circling the airfield awaiting our turn to land when Dave suddenly burst into song:

"Mareseatoats and Doeseatoats and Little Lambs Eativy"....!!

On another occasion we were last to land in a heavy cross wind. Dave dropped the aircraft in and failed to correct in time, much to the chagrin of the gunners who were jolted around. "You think I can't land this thing when I'm tired"? came from Dave. "Kirbchain this is Marchtune Victor. May I do a circuit"?

"What's the problem, Victor"?

"I want to test an engine" Dave replied.

"OK Victor".

So we did another circuit. This time Dave did a perfect 'greaser'. Not a word was said.

In Lancasters, the Pilot couldn't leave his seat to relieve himself, so he was provided with a 'piss tube' attached to the front of his seat. This had a metal funnel which, at temperatures of up to -40ø was uncomfortable to use. He and Jack decided that in future they would use a jam tin. The first time it was used, Jack emptied it out of the side window. The next thing, Peter from the mid-upper turret asked "Skipper did we fly through a cloud? There's ice on my turret". "No, mid-upper" said Dave. After that, the contents were poured down the window chute in the nose.

One day we were scheduled to do a fighter affiliation exercise with a Spitfire. We were asked if we would take an Air Training Cadet with us. He sat in the seat next to me. Even before the first exercise I noticed him going green around the gills. It wasn't long before he was violently airsick, so we put him on the rest bunk. After 10 minutes or so, I checked on him and found that he had passed out. Dave got permission to return to base to offload him, then continue with the exercise. After landing I took him to the back door and opened it. Dave kept the engines running because we were going to take off again. I pointed to the open door and said to the Cadet "You can get off now". He took one look, shrank back and said "But I don't want to jump". It took some time to convince him that we were on the ground.

There were two particular occasions when we came close to 'buying it'. The first was when we were approaching the target and another Lancaster flew over the top of us. I was looking out the astro dome on the top of the fuselage when I saw four engine exhausts drifting over us. I was speechless as was Peter in the mid-upper turret. Peter was the first to recover to say "That was close"! Later we discovered that the other aircraft's propellers had cut the fixed aerial which ran between the top of the cockpit and the starboard tail fin. The second was on the way home after bombing a target. We were coned by searchlights near Hamburg. Dave immediately dropped his seat and pulled the blind over the instrument panel to fly by instruments because of the blinding light. During debriefing, there was a crew being debriefed at the next table and Bob heard the navigator say "At (such-and-such) time near Hamburg we saw an aircraft shot down by flak after being caught in a searchlight cone". Bob checked his log (navigator's logged time and place of incidents) and said "That was us and we weren't even hit". The next-door navigator

replied "That's impossible". Bob retorted "Don't you believe in miracles and guardian angels"?

A flight to Brussels on 21st May was memorable. We were to pick up about 12 RAF aircrew POWs and bring them back to the UK. Most of them had never seen a Lancaster close up before. They were in high spirits because most of their German guards had fled the camp two days before the Americans arrived, so they raided the officers' quarters and took whatever they could carry and claimed it as 'acquired salvage'.

The 3rd June 1945 stays in our respective memories as the day when all Australians on the squadron were told to be ready to move to RAF Station Skellingthorpe by afternoon. It was quite a shock to us because not only did we have to get our clearances and pack our gear, but Dave and I both had motorcycles so it was a real panic. The hard part was that it left us little time to say our farewells to the rest of our crew and other friends. Once we arrived at Skellingthorpe we handed in our gear and were sent on leave.

REFLECTIONS

To break up a crew which had experienced the traumas of war was a sad situation. Why did we survive when so many others didn't? Lady Luck certainly played her part, but other factors must be taken into account. Skill, dedication and determination to survive were also important elements. Every individual in the crew had those attributes and some of the skills must be revealed. The gunners on several occasions saved us from fighter attacks and their observation skills helped us avoid the very lethal predicted flak. After about 6 ops we were designated as a 'windfinding crew'. Because meteorological reports from Europe were sketchy, Bomber Command asked for wind reports from a small number of aircraft as they neared the target. The average of those winds was broadcast for aircraft to set on their bombsights. Our designation was a credit to Bob the navigator who was able to obtain GEE fixes (a ground-based short range triangulating radio system) long after most crews had lost the signal.

Bill the bomb aimer was a very competent Airborne Radar (H2S) operator which aided his bombing skills and led to our selection as a mine dropping crew. Despite Dave's contention that he couldn't fly aeroplanes, time was to prove otherwise. Only his abilities saved us over Hamburg and he never lost his skill even after 10 hours of hands-on flying (no automatic pilot in those days). As well as being the pilot, he was also the Aircraft Captain ('Skipper'), therefore our leader, being responsible for the crew as a whole. Dave soon showed that he had the attributes of a born leader through both example and knowledge, an open mind, fairness and dedication. Not bad for a 22-year-old! The record speaks for itself - no aircraft damage and no engine failures.

BACK TO THE FIRST PERSON SINGULAR

On 3rd July 1945 I went with Dave first to Skellingthorpe then to Garisten and eventually back to Brighton to await repatriation. That meant a stay of three months and apart from reporting once a fortnight (pay day) we were free to go and do as we pleased. I spent quite a bit of time in London. Pinewood Studios offered bit parts in

such films as Caesar and Cleopatra with Michael Tate in the lead role. In addition to being fun, the pay was good.

With five of my old WAG mates I went to Killarney for ten days via the Gresham hotel in Dublin. A terrific time was had sightseeing around the lakes and of course, having a few ales and a drop of Guinness in the local pubs, as well as huge steaks. I sailed on the Aquitania via Freetown and Cape Town on 22nd November. On reaching Cape Town, the Ship's Commandant (a British Major) ruled that there was to be no shore leave. We were anchored in the roads outside the harbour and within a short time, there were several large private launches alongside waiting to take us ashore. When told that no-one was allowed ashore, they were very upset and were more than happy when someone dropped the landing nets over the side of the ship. Quite a few of the blokes went down into the launches which promptly headed for shore. The Ship's Commandant stood on the deck and issued threats to all who went ashore. So began the famous or infamous (depending on your point of view) 'Aquitania Mutiny'. Chaos reigned supreme for the rest of the afternoon until the Commandant agreed to a two-day pass for everyone, submitting primarily to local pressure. I went ashore the next morning and spent 24 hours shopping and sightseeing around Cape Town.

Arriving in Freemantle on 26th November a terrific reception was given to us. As I was on 'Home State' soil, I immediately went on leave for a month. On 28th February 1946 I joined the Interim Air Force for a period of two years and eventually the Permanent Air Force, but that's another story.