



TWO AIR FORCES

BY JOCK CASSELS



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To Maureen - a truly understanding, supportive and loyal Service wife.

FOREWORD The original version of this book was written for the family records and contained details of family genealogy and my early years, but as my Service friends would no doubt find the Cassels genealogy of little interest, I have omitted these details. This version only deals with my service in TWO AIR FORCES.

Let me start with some personal details

1. **Name:** Cunningham Norman McIntyre Cassels
2. **Born:** 11th August 1923 in Kirkintilloch, Dunbartonshire, Scotland
Arrived in Australia: November 1966 with my wife (Maureen), daughters (Carol and Anne) and son Charles
3. **Career:** Served 37 years in 2 Air Forces (RAF 25, RAAF 12)
Joined 1941 and Retired in 1979.

I was never blessed with a retentive memory, and being born in 1923 the advancing years haven't helped, so I can't guarantee that I will be able to recall all of the events which would normally be included in a life story. However I will do my best to reach into the past and hopefully put together, as accurately as possible, the events which make up this story.

MY SERVICE YEARS - 1941-1979

RAF -1941-1996 **RAAF - 1966-1979**

I turned 18 on 11 August 1941 and a few days later went to the RAF recruiting office in Glasgow to offer my services for pilot training. My details were taken and I was given a railway travel voucher and told to report to the Recruiting Centre in Edinburgh on 8 September to be enlisted. I reported in my Air Training Corps uniform taking with me my personal documents from the Squadron. I've forgotten all the various aptitude tests I had to do but I remember that the medical examination was quite extensive. My attestation was to be done the following morning so I stayed overnight in the Armed Forces Transit Dormitory located at the main railway station (Princes Street Station) and I think it was run by the Salvation Army. This was a huge dormitory full of two tiered bunks arranged in groups of four. I didn't get much sleep due to the noise of service men coming and going all night, also for another reason; during the night I became aware of a bearded sailor looking at me for a while then mumbling something about me moving over to join him. In spite of my lack of knowledge of the seamier side of life I knew instinctively that his intentions were less than respectable and told him I preferred my own company. Needless to say there was no more sleep for me that night and I was up early and first in the breakfast queue. An introduction to the hazards of life you might say. I completed the recruiting formalities and was duly enlisted on 9th September 1941 as 1560768 Aircraftsman 2nd Class (the lowest rank) and accepted for pilot training. The training schools were full so I was told to return home and await my callup. In the meantime I continued with my Air Training Corps training.

After 5 months my call up papers arrived and I left Scotland for the first time on 1st March 1942 travelling by overnight train to London where I reported to No 1 Aircrew Recruiting Centre(ACRC) on 2 March 1942.

ACRC Recruits were accommodated in a block of high rise flats in StJohns Wood which had been commandeered by the RAF. Messing facilities were provided in an adjacent building. The famous cricket ground at Lords had been taken over by the RAF and it was there that we underwent our initiation into the service i.e. Issue of kit, medical inoculations and vaccinations, drill and general service indoctrination. It was all very bewildering to me but my ATC training helped me adjust quickly. We were kept very busy "learning the ropes" and didn't have much time off, however what time we did get I spent wandering around the sights of central London. Coming from a small country town the hustle, bustle and sheer size of wartime London left me in complete awe.

Shortly after arriving at ACRC we were advised that we would be going overseas to do our pilot training, either Canada or South Africa or Southern Rhodesia. After completing our initial training (two weeks) I was given 7 days embarkation leave, which I spent at home saying my farewells. The next move was a troop train journey from London to No 7 Personnel Despatch Centre (PDC) at Blackpool on 1st April.

PDC In Blackpool, the very popular holiday resort in the North of England, we were accommodated in private houses leased by the RAF. In peacetime these private houses were rented by people on holiday and the landladies were only too pleased to provide

accommodation and messing to the RAF. A wartime bonanza for them. Apart from being issued with tropical kit, which ruled out Canada, we spent most of the time just hanging about waiting for the next move. An amusing episode occurred at this time. We were advised that we were likely to be on a troopship for a long time and to get our hair cut short before embarking. One recruit, a tall good looking chap who fancied himself with the girls, decided to comply with this advice and had his head shaved. Unfortunately he was taken off our Draft at the last minute, due to excess numbers, and was left behind with no hair which no doubt cramped his style with the girls for some time. Another trooptrain journey, this time from Blackpool to Avonmouth, a port near Bristol where we embarked on the "Highland Princess" a Royal Mail Line ship converted for troopship duties. As I mentioned previously this was the shipping line which I had tried to join in 1941 so I did eventually get to travel on one of their ships, not as crew but as a recruit pilot on Draft 4062. How ironic!

THE VOYAGE

Draft 4062 - UK to Rhodesia We sailed on 13 April 1942 and travelled up the Irish Sea to Scotland, anchoring just off Greenock in the Clyde estuary which was the assembly area for all the ships which were to form the convoy. The next day the convoy set sail into the North Atlantic with an escort of a number of warships. I can't recall the number of ships in the convoy but it was a large number and included several troopships as well as numerous cargo ships. We had quite a large number of escorting warships, due no doubt to the presence of the the troopships. As I found out later not all the ships were heading for the same destination for when we had been at sea for several days and well out into the Atlantic the convoy split, some ships continuing westward, presumably to America and Canada, while the remainder headed in a South West direction. I can't remember if the convoy had any air cover but I'm sure we must have had, at least until short of the half way mark across the North Atlantic which was the limit of the range of the escorting aircraft. After 3 weeks during which we must have travelled close to America and to the North of South America, we turned East for Africa and arrived in Freetown, Sierra Leone. This was a refuelling and watering stop and convoy reassembly point for all convoys sailing in the North and South Atlantic. We didn't get off the ship. I think we were there for just 24 hours then set sail again in convoy. Again we headed West and while no land was visible we must have travelled down the east coast of South America before turning East towards South Africa. Up to this point, as far as I am aware, there had been no submarine activity against our convoy but when we were south of Capetown the convoy was attacked at dusk and a couple of merchant ships were sunk. The troopships were always positioned in the centre of the convoy with the cargo ships located on the perimeter and I remember all being assembled on deck with lifejackets secure, watching the smoke from the sinking ship on the distant horizon and the warships rushing around dropping depth charges. Two days later, on 21st May 1942 we arrived at our destination which was Durban.

Before I narrate the last leg of the journey from Durban to Rhodesia a few words about the conditions on board a troopship in time of war would be of interest. We were accommodated below deck in a large mess hall with long tables and benches fixed to the deck. This is where we ate and slept. I think it was twelve men to a table and meals were collected in bulk from a central kitchen by whoever from the table was rostered for the task. At night we collected a hammock from a store at the end of the mess hall and slung the hammock from hooks located above our table. In the morning we had to roll up the hammock which had your number and return it to the store. Once all the hammocks had been slung there was not much room between them and people who

snored or emitted other noises were not very popular. After a few nights in this strange “bed” I found it quite comfortable to sleep in. Our kit bags containing our personal possessions, were located anywhere you could find a spot. Whenever we could, we spent as much time on the open decks as the weather allowed, particularly in the tropics as it was pretty hot down below. Generally the daily routine was pretty monotonous but we were given lectures on various topics suited to our situation, which helped. Apart from the attack on the convoy towards the end of the voyage it was an uneventful somewhat boring 6 weeks.

Durban to Rhodesia We didn’t spend much time in Durban, I think it was only one night, but it was marvellous to be back on dry land after nearly 6 weeks on the troopship. There was no blackout and it was strange to be walking down the street ablaze with light and the shops full of all the delightful food and confectionaries which we hadn’t seen for years. The following morning we were bundled onto a trooptrain and set off for Rhodesia. The longest train journey I had previously undertaken was from Glasgow to London (9 hours) so it was an enlightening experience to spend the three days and two nights it took to reach Bulawayo in Southern Rhodesia. On arrival we collected our kitbags and marched to the Initial Training Wing (ITW) which was located on the outskirts of Bulawayo.

PILOT TRAINING

Initial Training Wing - Bulawayo The task of the ITW is to train cadet pilots in all the ground subjects required before they start their flying. The main subjects were Navigation, Theory of Flight, Meteorology, Aircraft Engines, Aircraft Recognition, Airmanship and other Service related subjects. We couldn’t start the course immediately as there was a logjam at the flying training schools, so we spent nearly 3 months in various time-filling activities such as drilling (of course), bush survival training, lectures etc. The bush training was interesting and consisted of being dropped off in an isolated area, provided with a compass and rations and told to find our way to a designated spot, several walking hours away, where our “rescuers” would be waiting. Much more interesting than drill. I should add that the areas involved were not the normal habitat of dangerous animals, eg lions. Our off duty hours were usually spent off camp in Bulawayo enjoying the hospitality of the local populace. We, a fellow Scot, named George Gellatly, and myself, were fortunate to get to know a nice couple who made us welcome in their home and we spent many enjoyable evenings with them. The husband arranged for us to spend our two weeks leave on a farm well out in the bush where the farmer showed us how to hunt local buck, (something like a Springbok), and what isolated life was like in the Rhodesian bush. I should mention that it was at ITW that I had my first taste of alcohol when my more worldly colleagues persuaded me to have a bottle of beer in the camp canteen. I remember that it had a rather “silly” effect on me and it was many months later before I became a beer drinker.

Eventually the ITW course started and after 3 months and successfully passing the course I was posted to No. 25 Elementary Flying Training School (EFTS) in Salisbury which was the capital of S Rhodesia, about 300 miles north of Bulawayo.

Elementary Flying Training School



Tiger Moth 25 EFTS - 1942

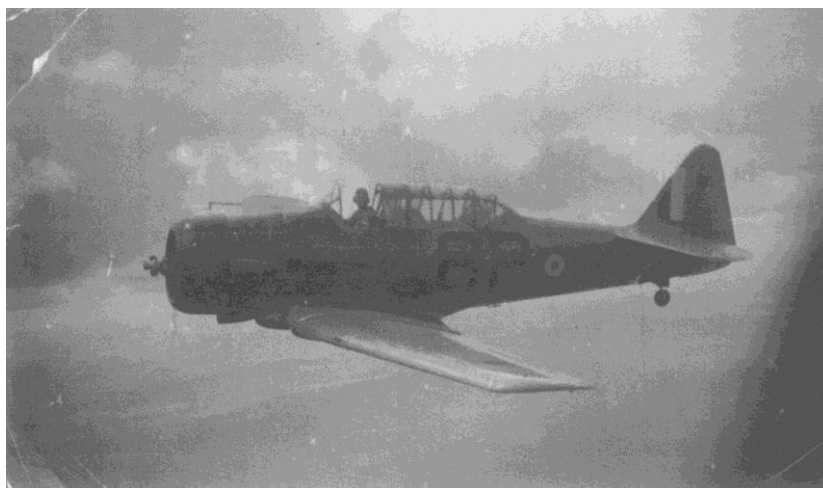


Tiger Moth Pilot 1942

December 14th 1942 saw me get into the air for the first time when I had a flight of 1 hour with my instructor in a Tiger Moth aircraft. A great experience and one which I thoroughly enjoyed and will always remember. It was expected that most students would have their first solo flight after about 10 hours dual instruction and if they hadn't gone solo by that time then their suitability to continue pilot training was examined. In my case after 9 hours my instructor, a rather grumpy Flight Lieutenant, obviously thought I wasn't ready and handed me over to a young Pilot Officer and after a further 3 hours instruction I had my solo test by an independent instructor and on 23 December I flew solo for the first time. Looking back on it now I think the first instructor was a bit impatient at my progress and I became worried in case I made mistakes, which didn't help. I was much more relaxed with the young Pilot Officer and he with me so I progressed very quickly when he took over.

My log book shows that I completed the course with 84 hours flying time and a Pilot rating of average. It also shows that I did not show any aptitude as a pilot navigator and this was the result of a silly error on my part during a pilot navigation test. Details of the trip, details such as compass heading, true heading, speed etc. is written down on a knee pad with the speed and heading columns being next to each other. When I was turning onto the second leg of the trip I put my speed (95) onto the compass instead of the heading (170). After a few minutes when my instructor asked why I was heading East instead of South I realised what I had done. A major error and the criticism I received was fully deserved, hence the poor rating. So ended 25 EFTS and on 20 Feb 1943 I was posted to 33 Course, No. 20 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Cranbourne, again an airfield just outside a major town, Salisbury.

Service Flying Training School



Harvard - 20SFTS - 1943

Advancing to a more powerful aircraft meant an advancement in rank and arrival at SFTS meant promotion to Acting Sergeant Unpaid (ASU) but it didn't mean more pay or increased authority, just made us feel more important. We lived in the Sergeants Mess but being acting and unpaid we were treated as lesser mortals by the real Sergeants.

The course was divided into two phases, initial and advanced, each phase consisting of approx 80 flying hours. The aircraft was a Harvard, a low wing monoplane in which later I was to spend a large part of my flying career. I quickly adjusted to the more complicated cockpit controls and 3 days into the course and after 4 hours dual instruction I went solo. After 2 months and 77 hours flying I completed the initial phase and had a weeks leave before starting the advanced phase. Now was the time to apply our flying to learning the more warlike activities of formation flying and bombing and gunnery, while continuing to improve our basic flying skills, and after 2 months and 81 hours I completed the course with an average rating as a pilot and pilot navigator and recommended for single engine aircraft i.e. Fighters.

The long awaited day had arrived and I received my pilots brevet (Wings) on the 10th July 1943 not as a Sergeant Pilot as had been my aim but as a newly commissioned Pilot Officer, for shortly before the course ended I had become an officer cadet and moved into the Officers Mess. My new designation now became 146889 Pilot Officer Cassels, General Duties Branch. Thinking back, I now realise that my training and conduct in the Air Training Corps must have resulted in my Squadron CO giving me an assessment as a likely candidate for commissioning.

I would like to digress for a moment to mention a non service part of my time in Salisbury. My faith was still strong and every Sunday I went to the Presbyterian Church in town and eventually decided that I wanted to be confirmed. I attended confirmation classes in the evening, when not on duty, and was duly confirmed in March 1943. Through the church I got to know the Brown family who took me under their wing and I spent many happy days enjoying their generous hospitality.

Having successfully completed Elementary and Service flying training I was now ready to proceed to the next phase which was Operational training. This was carried out at Operational Training Units (OTU's) and involved training on the aircraft on which a pilot would be flying against the enemy. In my case this was to be on single engined aircraft i.e. Fighters. There were three likely places to be sent - back to the UK, north to the Middle East or east to South East Asia. I and the other members of

the course who were commissioned were posted to the Middle East while the majority of the course, the Sergeants, were posted back to the UK. I was quite pleased with my posting for it was another new part of the world for me to see but it was with a tinge of sadness that I was leaving Southern Rhodesia, a lovely country, and the people who had been so kind and generous to me.

The Middle East! How was I going to get there - by air, by land or by sea. Well, much to my surprise it was to be by land, at least part of the way; I had assumed it would be by air. There was a contingent of African troops being moved to the north and we were to join them on the journey which was to start at Bulawayo. So on the 15th July 1943 we started our journey.

RHODESIA TO CAIRO.

These days people pay a lot of money to travel from Cape to Cairo but here I was travelling over roughly the same route and being paid to do it. Admittedly the comfort comparison is vastly different but there was a war on and we were on duty.

The journey started with train travel from Bulawayo-Victoria Falls into Northern Rhodesia - Lusaka - Broken Hill then into the Belgian Congo (now called Zaire). We detoured somewhere in the Belgian Congo (can't remember where) and then travelled by truck over some shocking tracks, which no way could be called roads, the corrugations on which gave us a real bone shaking ride. Fortunately it only lasted about 15 hours when we again had a train journey to Albertville on Lake Tanganyika. There a steamer awaited us and we set off to the northern reaches of the lake. After our train and road journeys the peace and quite of the lake trip was heaven and the day and a bit it took us to get to our destination enabled us to recuperate somewhat, for we had been travelling non stop for over a week. I can't remember the name of the place at the northern end of the lake but it was in Tanganika and we again entrained for the 2 day journey to the southern end of Lake Victoria. Again onto a steamer at Mwanza for the "voyage" to Kisumu in Kenya which took about a day. So far we had been traveling nearly two weeks and imagine our delight when we were told that the rest of our journey to Cairo would be by BOAC Flying Boat. It was here that we left the troops - where their final destination was I have no idea.

On 29 July we left Kisumu on a flying boat called "Caledonia" for a short flight to Port Victoria where we spent the night in a hotel - delightful - and on the 30th flew from Port Victoria to land on the river Nile at Khartoum in the Sudan, a flight of 8 hours. Next day, 31 July, after a 7 hour flight we reached our destination, landing on the river Nile in Cairo. An exhausting and at times uncomfortable 16 days of travel but an experience not to be missed.

THE MIDDLE EAST

My first impressions of Cairo were of a crowded city of hustle and bustle Military and civilian vehicles all sounding their horns fighting for the right of way in the crowded streets, with the local Arab hawkers on their donkeys and carts going about their business adding to the traffic mayhem. And Servicemen by the thousands, mainly Army and Air Force, some on leave, some in transit and some based in the city. Add the typical Middle East smells, some pleasant some not so, and you have wartime Cairo.

On arrival we were sent to No 22 PTC (Personnel Transit Centre) at Almaza which was a vast tented camp on the outskirts of Cairo. There we waited for 7 days and I took the opportunity to take in the sights of Cairo including a visit to the Pyramids where I had the customary photo taken, mounted on a camel, with the Pyramids in the background.



Cairo, Egypt - 1943

The next move was to No. 1 Middle East Aircrew Reception Centre at Kasfareet beside the Great Bitter Lake just south of Ismalia. This time there were no tents but barrack type accommodation which, considering the location and times, could be considered very comfortable. This was a very frustrating period for we had nothing to do but wait for the the next move i.e. to an Operational Training Unit(OTU). I spent this time hitching lifts to Ismalia, about 20 miles distant to alleviate the boredom and keep in touch with civilisation. Part of the road to Ismalia ran beside a canal known as the Sweet Water Canal but I'm sure that wasn't the proper name but was one given to it by the occupying British forces for it stank to high heaven. Fortunately the camp was located near the Kasfareet airfield which had a cinema so we made good use of that facility. Nevertheless it was a trying period of two months of idleness which I could have done without. However, it did come to an end when I was posted to No. 73 OTU on 2nd October 1943.

Operational Training No 73 OTU was located at Abu Sueir near Ismalia and was a pr-war RAF airfield. Training was conducted on two types of operational aircraft, the Spitfire and an American aircraft the Kittyhawk. I was posted to the Spitfire flight. There were Australians on our course and they went to the Kittyhawk flight as there was an Australian Kittyhawk squadron operating in the forward areas.

To refresh our previous training we did about 20 hours on Harvards before converting onto the Spitfire. When on the ground and on the final stages of landing the forward visibility of the Spitfire was limited due to the long and wide engine, so some of our training in the Harvard had to be flown from the rear seat to simulate this reduced visibility. It didn't take long to advance to the stage when I was ready to fly the famous Battle of Britain fighter, the Spitfire. After my back seat test in the Harvard by the Chief Flying Instructor, Squadron Leader Neville Duke, himself a Battle of Britain ace, I had my first Spitfire flight on October 18.



73 OTU Abu Swier - 1943

I had just become more acquainted with my new aircraft when a week later I was involved in a motor accident and landed in hospital. For some reason, I've forgotten what it was, the course had to visit the adjacent airfield at Ismalia, about 20 miles away. We were transported in a flat top lorry with side railings but an open top. On the return journey it started to drizzle, a most unusual event in that part of the world, and the lorry got into a skid and overturned. We, about 20 of us, were flung out and as far as I can remember I was the only casualty. Apparently I went head first onto the road and was knocked unconscious. Anyway, I woke up in the RAF Abu Sueir hospital where I stayed for 2 weeks being treated for concussion. I was given 2 weeks sick leave then had a medical check before being passed fit to continue flying. This was a setback to my training as I was put back 2 courses and it was late November before I resumed flying. A quick check on the Harvard then I spent the rest of the course on the Spitfire learning how to apply the combat capabilities of the aircraft. This involved formation flying, air to air and air to ground gunnery and fighter tactics. The air to ground gunnery was interesting for it involved two aircraft using the gunnery range, which was located in a remote part of the desert. The target aircraft would fly at about 1500 feet casting a shadow on the sand at which the other aircraft would fire. Of course strict safety procedures had to be observed. It's worthy of mention, but you could always tell when a pilot was having his first trip in a Spitfire, for the undercarriage lever was located on the right side of the cockpit and to raise the wheels after take off you had to transfer the left hand from the throttle onto the control column and use the right hand to operate the undercarriage lever. This manoeuvre resulted in an unintended fore and aft movement of the control column which, because of the very sensitive elevators, caused the aircraft to pitch up and down.

I completed the course on 24 December 1944 with 23 hours on Harvards and 44 hours on Spitfires being assessed as average in the three categories - Fighter Tactics, Formation Flying and Pilot. Two days later I was posted to the Personnel Transit Centre at Almaza in Cairo, where I had been when I first arrived in Egypt. A week of hanging around then I was given my next posting, which was to another holding unit in Tunis

Egypt to Italy

On the 8th January 1944 I left Cairo in a South African Air Force Dakota and landed at Castel Benito near Tripoli. Here I stayed for 2 nights and it was here that I met my first Russians. They were a crew of a Russian Air Force flying a Dakota but why they were there I have no idea, but at this stage in the war they were on our side. I remember that their uniform was a dark shade of brown in colour and the next Russians I was to meet was under very different circumstances. My next stop was Tunis, again by SAAF Dakota, where I remained for 11 days awaiting my posting to what I hoped would be my final destination. Our accommodation this time was not in tents and was quite comfortable. I spent a lot of time in Tunis taking in the sights of this large N. African city. I took advantage of this stop to visit some historical sites which the Romans had built when, in days long ago, their empire included parts of North Africa. On 21 Jan I received my posting but to my disappointment it was not to a Squadron but to the Desert Air Force Communication Flight located at Capodochino airfield outside Naples. However, at last I was getting near the scene of action which at that time was just north of Naples. Tunis to Italy was by USAF Dakota with a refuelling stop in Sicily. Bari on the Adriatic side of Italy was where we landed and the next day I arrived at my destination, Naples.

Desert Air Force Communication Flight

The flight was under the control of the Mediterranean Allied Tactical Air Force (MATAF) the HQ of which was located in a previous Royal palace, at Caserta just north of Naples. The task of the flight was to provide air transport between base areas and the forward airfields in the operational areas. As the distances weren't great and the forward airfields were usually the small airstrips used by tactical fighters, the flight was equipped mainly with small single engined aircraft.



*Fairchild Argus
DAF Communication Flight, Naples, Italy - 1944*

I think we had 2 Fairchild Argus (four seat high wing monoplane), 1 Piper Cub (two seat very light aircraft), we also had a Boston (Twin engined Light Bomber), 1 Hurricane and 1 Spitfire but these were not used for communication purposes but were used by Staff officers from HQ for various non operational purposes. Our accommodation was a requisitioned villa about 10 minutes from the airfield. The airmen lived in the ground floor and the Officers and SNCO's in the top floor.

I was to spend just over 2 months with the Communication Flight in the rather mundane job of flying a variety of passengers from the base areas to forward airfields, mainly in the Fairchild and Piper Cub aircraft. I did however manage to keep my hand in by the occasional trip in the Spitfire and managed to convince the CO that although I had never flown the Hurricane it would be quite safe in my hands and I had a go. Nice to fly but I preferred the Spitfire.

Although most of the flying was pretty routine there was one occasion when nature provided an event which involved me in a not so routine flight. This was the eruption of Vesuvius in March 1944. For a number of days a lot of smoke had been coming from the mountain, with loud rumbling noises, before it finally erupted and large streams of lava began pouring down the mountain side. It was an awesome sight especially at night with the lava glowing red in the darkness. There was an American airfield at Cercola, near the base of the mountain, and great concern that the lava stream might reach and overrun the airfield, so HQ decided to survey the situation from the air. I was given the job to fly an American officer over the area and after this was done he asked me to land at the airfield as he wanted to view the situation from the ground. He invited me to accompany him and we drove up the mountainside in a Jeep to a village just below the advancing lava stream. It was an awesome sight to see this huge wave of lava, about 12 feet high, dull grey on top but molten red at ground level, rolling down the hill setting alight anything which could burn and crushing everything in its path, houses included. This village was one of several which were destroyed.

Another flight on a Fairfield aircraft which was memorable was one, just after I had joined the Flight, where I had to fly an RAF Wing Commander to a fighter airfield on the Adriatic coast. This was a PSP (Pierced Steel Plate) strip laid parallel to and near the beach which meant there was often a strong cross wind. This was the case on this occasion and I had difficulty in keeping the aircraft straight when we touched down. I ran off the strip into the soft edging and collided with a taxiway which tore off the wheels. While the strong cross wind was a factor I must confess that inexperience on my part was the primary cause of the accident. It was most embarrassing to find out later that the Wing Commander had been sent out from the UK to investigate the high number of flying accidents in Italy and I had provided him with a likely cause. The rest of my stay on the Flight went without drama and to my delight on 10 April I was posted to the Desert Training Flight at Madna on the East coast for refresher training on Spitfires prior to going to a Squadron.

DAF Training Flight

The task of the DAF Training Flight was to provide refresher training for pilots who had been engaged in non operational flying since leaving their Operational Training Unit. I was at this unit for 2 weeks and my log book shows that I flew 10 hours and these hours were concentrated on battle formation tactics. On 26 April I was posted to 43 Squadron which was based just north of Naples and while this involved a ride in the back of a 3 ton lorry across Italy I didn't mind for at last I was going on Operations. Had I known what lay ahead I might have minded a great deal.

No 43 Fighter Squadron

The Squadron was located at a place called Lago about 30 miles North of Naples. It was a prepared metal strip of PSP and situated close to the coastline. Like all forward airfields there were few or no buildings available so we operated from tented accommodation for all activities. The nearby coastline had previously been mined by the Germans, presumably to prevent or hinder a landing by the Allies, and at that time had not been totally cleared but the army had cleared a small area of the

beach so access for safe swimming was available. Apart from a limited amount of local produce, catering was the usual monotonous service rations with no variety, however someone in the cookhouse had established contact with “someone” who could supply eggs and vino for a modest price but the problem was that this “someone” was in Bari which was a port on the Adriatic coast about 150 miles away. The problem was solved by using a Spitfire (20 minutes each way), the eggs were carried in the ammunition bays and in a small locker behind the cockpit and the vino in an external overload fuel tank. This tank, called a slipper tank was attached to the underside of the fuselage when making long flights; needless to say a new tank was used and kept solely for the vino run. The vino run was made once a week and from memory tasted OK, not metallic in any way.

Operations.

The squadron was equipped with the Spitfire 9 a much improved version of the Mark 1 and 5 on which I had done my training. Apart from a more powerful engine the handling qualities were similar to previous models and I had no difficulty converting. I had a couple of trips getting to know the aircraft and the local area and went on my first operational sortie on 6 May. This task was providing an escort to the aircraft of General Mark Clark the Commander of the Allied forces who was visiting his forces on Anzio bridgehead. In January 1944 the Allies had made a landing on the coast at Anzio just 40 miles SW of Rome and had established a bridgehead extending a few miles inland before being contained by the Germans. After the bridgehead had been made secure a landing strip was constructed at a place called Nettuno and by April was used by fighter aircraft as an advanced airfield. However, being so close to the enemy front line and subject to their artillery fire it was only used during daylight hours, aircraft withdrawing to their main base at night.

The next two weeks involved routine patrols over and behind the front line mainly in the Mount Cassino area and providing escort to our bombers on their missions in enemy territory. These escorting missions sometime involved long flights and necessitated our aircraft being fitted with long range fuel tanks, the slipper tanks I mentioned previously. On one mission we were providing close cover while another Squadron of Spitfires which was providing top cover became engaged in a fight with 10 Focke-Wulf 190 German aircraft attempting to attack the bombers. Slipper tanks reduce the performance of the aircraft and as we were likely to become involved in the fight our leader ordered us to jettison the tanks. I had difficulty in jettisoning my tank and when I did succeed we had moved back over the top of the bombers so the tank must have dropped through the bomber formation. Fortunately it missed. We eventually did not become involved with the enemy aircraft but the other Squadron (No 92) certainly did, claiming one aircraft destroyed and seven damaged.

By the middle of May the bridgehead at Anzio had become more secure and it was decided to establish a Squadron on the bridgehead and 43 Squadron was selected. This required all the ground equipment and personnel to be moved onto the bridgehead by sea. The trucks moved to Naples on the 19th and embarked on several Landing Craft and the convoy sailed in the afternoon of the 20th May for the overnight trip. The pilots who were not flying the aircraft travelled with the ground party and I was one of them. The vessels had no accommodation so we all slept where we could, mostly on top of the equipment in the lorries. I had a rather frightening experience, for in my sleep I dreamt I was in the back of a lorry and travelling along a white dusty road, I woke up to find myself standing at the stern of the boat staring at the white wake. Needless to say, after that sleepwalk I remained awake for the rest of the night. We arrived at Anzio the following afternoon and by evening everything was ashore and our tents set up with an

obligatory slit trench alongside. The trench was necessary as the harbour was still receiving attention from the German long range artillery and I did use it on two occasions.



Spitfire IX 43 SQN Italy - 1944

Operations from Anzio

Squadron activity from Nettunio strip at Anzio was similar to that when operating from our previous location at Lago i.e. Routine patrols over the battle areas in the Anzio area and over Rome. Enemy aircraft activity was slight and mainly involved attacking our bomber formations and an occasional patrol over the battle areas. On 23 May I was on an Anzio patrol when after 20 minutes my engine had a sudden drop in oil pressure and I had to return to base. Shortly after that the patrol saw one of our bomber formations being attacked by 6 enemy FW109 fighters with one bomber on fire. On sighting the Spitfires the enemy aircraft broke off their attack on the bombers and retreated North. Three of our aircraft got close enough to open fire but did not make any claim. On 29 May I was on a Rome patrol flying No 2 to the Squadron CO when, on returning to base and still over enemy territory he decided to go down to ground level to see if there was anything to shoot at. We came across a convoy of trucks and strafed them with cannon but didn't hang around to assess the result. This was the one and only time I fired my guns as 3 patrols later my operational activities came to a halt. This happened on the 31st May.

My last Patrol

The 31st May 1944 was a beautiful Italian summer day - sunshine, blue skies and warm. I was not rostered for any flying but was on cockpit readiness at 1500 hours. I was wearing a pair of shorts and shirt under my flying overalls and a pair of ankle boots. Readiness meant sitting in the cockpit for about an hour, strapped in and ready for immediate takeoff if necessary. The aircraft I was in was scheduled to be used for the 1630 afternoon patrol and just before my readiness period was completed someone advised me that the pilot rostered for the patrol was not available and I was to take his place and fly as No. 2 to the patrol leader. We took off at 1630 hours to patrol the Rome-Anzio area in a patrol of 6 aircraft but one aircraft developed an engine problem and returned to base in company with another aircraft. The remaining 4 aircraft continued with the patrol.

We were patrolling at 17,000 feet when our ground control reported that there were unidentified aircraft at 25,000 feet in our vicinity. We immediately started to climb and had reached 20,000 feet when ground control reported that the aircraft had now been identified as enemy aircraft. Another Spitfire squadron patrolling in an adjacent area called and asked if we wanted assistance and our leader asked them to stand by. We had just completed a turn to Starboard and I was on the left side of the formation flying line abreast which enables each pilot to have a view of the other pilots blind spot, his tail area. I'll stop my narrative at this point and show what was written in the Squadron Operation Record Book about the patrol:

**“6 Aircraft. Anzio - Rome patrol 17,000ft. 2 aircraft returned early.
10 Bandits reported Lake Bracciano area at 25000ft.
F/O CASSELS was seen to spin into Lake Bracciano from 20,000ft our aircraft having just previously been bounced by Spitfires of another Squadron. Whilst orbiting the point where F/O CASSELS had spun in, the three remaining Spitfires were jumped by enemy Aircraft. The Spitfires broke and one pilot opened fire - no results seen. After the break Red 2 (W/O SAVILLE) dived South and called up Red 1 and said that he was returning to Base. There was no further R/T contact with him - he did not return to Base. F/O CASSELS and W/O SAVILLE posted as missing.”**

My observation on this entry in Squadron records is that I have no recollection of another Spitfire squadron bouncing our patrol so it must have occurred **after I was shot down**. I'll return to what happened to me.

After completing our turn I was momentarily distracted by a bright flash on the ground, far below, then I looked over my right shoulder and there was a Messerschmit 109G at very close range with his guns firing, as I saw the flashes from the tracer ammunition. I immediately took evasive action by turning into the attack (the recommended action) by applying full aileron and pulling back hard on the control column. The turn was so tight that I momentarily lost my vision because of the G force and when I regained my sight the aircraft was inverted and in a dive. I think that what had happened was that the turn was so tight that it caused a high speed stall causing the aircraft to flick roll. I can't remember if I was aware of the cannon and bullet shells hitting the aircraft but when I looked at the Starboard wing there was a huge hole just forward of the aileron. What other damage had been done I don't know but the aircraft was in a spin and I was having difficulty in regaining control, possibly because of other damage. I remember thinking that the enemy aircraft was still on my tail but now, on calm reflection, as my aircraft was in a spin this was an irrational thought. However at this stage self preservation instincts became paramount and I decided to bale out. I pulled back the cockpit canopy and stupidly pulled the locking pin of my cockpit harness before disconnecting the radio and oxygen leads to my helmet and mask. From that moment on I don't know what happened but it was sudden mayhem. I was conscious of tremendous noise and being thrown around for what seemed a long time before there was sudden calm and I remember thinking that I was dead and amazed that there had been no pain involved. I don't know how long the period of calm lasted but the next thing I remember was being aware that I was free of the aircraft and falling. I remember grasping the ripcord of my parachute but don't remember pulling it. I obviously did for above me was my opened parachute and all was quiet once more. I had no helmet and had lost my right boot but was otherwise

intact, or so I thought. Now to explain what I think happened.

When you have control of the aircraft and in reasonably level flight the recommended method of bailing out from a Spitfire is to disconnect helmet leads, undo the harness and dive over the side onto the wing. Another method is to trim the aircraft nose heavy, keeping level by holding back the control column, then undo your harness and leads and release the control column, the aircraft will then dive sharply and you will be catapulted out of the cockpit. However in my case the aircraft was in a spin and when I released the harness locking pin I must have been partially or fully thrown out of the cockpit. In the process my helmet, with attached mask was dragged from my head cutting off my oxygen supply. The sudden loss of oxygen must have caused a short period of unconsciousness, hence the period of calm. How long it lasted I don't know but it must have been only a short period for by this time I was probably below 20,000 feet and getting sufficient oxygen from the surrounding air, enough for me to regain consciousness and resort to my parachute.

What height I was at when I opened my 'chute is only a guess but I think it would have been about 12,000 feet and looking down I saw my aircraft hurtling to the ground trailing smoke, so the engine had probably been hit during the attack. I realised that the aircraft was heading for a large lake and shortly after saw it hit the water with a large splash. It dawned on me that I was also above the lake and that was where I was heading. I remembered being told during my training days that you could control your direction in a limited way by pulling on the rigging lines. I tried to move to the right by pulling the rigging lines but this only increased the rate of descent and started an oscillating swing. I gave this up and prepared for the inevitable. The procedure for entering the water in a parachute is to release yourself from the parachute a few feet above the water so that you don't go under with the "chute still attached. It was a calm day and the surface of the lake was like glass so I had difficulty in judging my height. When I decided it was time I hit my harness release but I obviously didn't hit it hard enough and went into the lake still attached to the chute. My life jacket (Mae West) brought me back to the surface and I managed to free myself from the harness but the rigging lines had fallen on top of me and I was having difficulty in freeing myself. It was then that I noticed a small rowing boat with 2 people heading towards me. They grabbed the floating parachute and pulled me, still attached to the rigging lines, towards the boat. I got rid of the lines and with difficulty managed to climb aboard. My rescuers were an elderly couple, man and wife, and in my pidgin Italian I asked them if there were any Germans in the area. They replied in the negative but as I was shortly to find out, what they thought I had asked them was whether they were Germans.

On stepping ashore I found that I couldn't stand on my left leg and had to be helped by the old man. Just then a small group of German soldiers burst out of the bushes, led by a burly Sergeant who stuck a machine pistol in my stomach and shouted something which I didn't understand but presumed to be "hands up". I was standing on one leg, dripping wet, had no weapon and not feeling very heroic, so I complied. With the old man still helping me I was escorted to the nearby road and put into the sidecar of one of several motor bikes and taken to a small town at the North end of the lake. I was put into a room and all my clothes removed. The room had no furniture but there was a pile of grass or straw in one corner which I lay on for a while until the Germans returned with my now dry shorts and shirt but no flying overalls. I was then taken somewhere and a doctor examined my leg, encased it in a splint and indicated that it was broken just above my ankle. This must have occurred during my exit from the cockpit but I was unaware of it happening because of the mayhem of the situation. Later that afternoon I was moved to a large country mansion which had been converted

to a sort of convalescent home for recovering wounded soldiers. I had 5 German papatroopers for company in the room and although I couldn't understand what they were saying I gather they were expressing a certain amount of sympathy. A little later I heard the noise of aircraft and hopped to the window to have a look. It was a flight of aircraft at great height and was obviously from my Squadron, carrying out the last patrol of the day. Observing this the Germans laughed and from their gestures and the use of the word "Kamerad" pointed out that I would not be returning home with my "Comrades" that night. As if I needed reminding.

Later that night, under the cover of darkness, I was taken to a large hospital in the town of Tivoli, east of Rome. The move took place at night because during the day the Allied aircraft strafed anything that moved. I was in a large ward with all the German wounded and one of the staff members spoke English. When he realised that I was a pilot he mentioned that there was another prisoner, also a pilot, in the ward below mine. On the pretext of going to the toilet I managed to hop down the stairs and located this unknown pilot. To my great surprise it was Warrant Officer Saville a New Zealander from my Squadron who had been on the same patrol as myself. He was badly wounded, with his head covered in bandages, but he related his story. He had been jumped by the same flight of German aircraft that got me and had been hit in the engine. He couldn't make it back to our lines and crash landed in a field. The aircraft burst into flames on landing and he was quite badly burned. He was rescued by some Italian civilians and taken to their farmhouse. However, the Italians could not treat his burns and sought the help of the Germans. He was put into a kind of ambulance and on the way to a hospital the vehicle was strafed and he got a bullet wound in the head. I only had time to give him a brief outline of my situation before I was taken back to my ward.

The following day the Germans began evacuating the hospital and all the walking wounded and the less seriously wounded were assembled and loaded on to an assortment of vehicles. I was placed in a small bus along with a number of Germans and the convoy set off late at night under the cover of darkness, heading north. We had been travelling for a few hours when the convoy was attacked by an Allied aircraft which had dropped a parachute flare. There was great confusion and my fellow travellers evacuated the bus in great haste or as fast as their wounds allowed, I followed. I hopped into a roadside ditch and watched as the aircraft dropped another flare and attacked vehicles near the head of the convoy. The attack was over in about 10 minutes and as far as I was aware only one vehicle was destroyed. In the confusion and darkness I felt sure that my presence would not be missed if I remained in the ditch when the Germans got back on the bus and I seriously considered doing so. However, being far from mobile the risk of recapture was high so I decided to stay with my captors, become more mobile and hope that the future might present another opportunity. The convoy destination turned out to be a hospital in Perugia and after a night stop there I ended up in a hospital in Florence for two days. By this time I had been joined by several Army prisoners who were also semi mobile. We were all confined to a large room and among the Army prisoners was an Indian Army Sikh who still had his head covered in the Hindu fashion. I felt sorry for him for when we were given food, delivered in a large wooden tub and consisting of a kind of soup with vegetables and meat, he refused to eat it. The poor chap was starving but because of the meat content he refused to eat. I well remember my stay in this hospital for the day we left was the 6th June and we heard that the Allies had landed in Normandy. This was great news but I remember the German guards indicating to us that the Allied forces would soon be trapped and eventually thrown back into the sea.

Another lorry journey 100 miles north and I arrived at a large hospital at

Mantua in Northern Italy where I stayed for 10 days. Here the conditions were more civilised with a comfortable bed in a large ward. It was here that I was interrogated by a member of the Luftwaffe. He spoke very good English and told me he had lived in England for a few years before the war. He asked me the usual questions - what aircraft I was flying, what Squadron I came from, where the Squadron was located and other military matters. He then went on to ask details of my family - mothers maiden name, where I was born, my civilian job and other personal details. I refused to answer these questions and told him that I was only obliged to give my service number, rank and name. He then said that some POW's were more co-operative and showed me a form signed by an American bomber pilot which gave details of his target, bomb load and squadron details. I remember thinking at the time that that USAF pilot was a little too co-operative. A little later he produced a form with a large red cross and said that he had to fill in this form so that the Red Cross would notify my parents of my capture. Against the questions on the form, some of which had no connection with the Red Cross activities, he wrote "declined to answer" but it listed my number, rank and name. He showed me the form and said I had to sign it. Stupidly I did. He then pointed to my personal Rolex watch and said that he would have to take it from me. His friendly attitude suddenly changed and became quite aggressive. Not knowing whether he had that right and not being in a position to argue I gave it to him. He then said that he knew quite a bit about me and proceeded to tell me that I had been flying a Spitfire belonging to the "Black Falcon" squadron (the squadron mascot was a fighting cock), the name of the Commanding Officer and that we were based on Anzio. He may have had other information but he didn't disclose it. When the interrogation was over and I had returned to the ward I suddenly realised that the information he had about me would be transferred to another form with my signature and shown to other air force prisoners and they would brand me as a big mouth. I take comfort in knowing that he got nothing from me that he didn't already know, but kick myself for signing.

TO GERMANY

On 18th June I was loaded onto a hospital train bound for Germany. There was a separate carriage for the POW wounded some of whom were like me, walking wounded. The carriage was like a dining car with beds replacing the table and chairs. One chap, I think he was RAF, whose wounds were in his upper body but who was quite mobile, decided to make a break when the train was near the Swiss/Italian border. In the middle of the night when the train had slowed down to a near walking pace and the guard was either absent or asleep, with the help of a colleague he got the door open and disappeared. I'll never know whether he made it; I hope he did. We crossed the Brenner Pass and arrived in Munich on 20th June and the same day travelled to Rottenmunster Hospital in Rottweil, Germany.



Rottweil is located in South West Germany, approx. 130 miles west of Munich, 50 miles south of Stuttgart and only 40 miles north of the Swiss border. Rottenmunster was a large hospital with several floors and part of one floor was allocated to hospitalised POW's. I was in a room with six other officers - 3 British Army, 1 Australian Army and 1 American Air Force and 1 Rhodesian Air Force. We were all in the convalescence stage and were not confined to bed. The inactivity was quite boring and only two events come to mind worthy of recalling. The Australian (Bob) had been captured in Egypt in 1941 and had been in a POW camp in another part of Germany. He was sent to Rottenmunster to have an operation for haemorrhoids which was performed by a British doctor, also a POW. When he came back to the room he was not his usual jovial wisecracking self and that night I was awakened by him shouting

"Jock Jock get the doctor". Apparently he had had a tube inserted in his rectum acting as a drain and in his sleep he had pulled it out. I went along the corridor and woke up the doctor who in a somewhat irritated voice said that he was to put it back. I won't repeat his exact words but you can imagine what they were. Anyway, I relayed the message and went back to bed leaving Bob moaning about medical incompetence. The following day when things had calmed down and the matter was being discussed Bob told me that he had been dreaming that he was escaping and had just reached the barbed wire when a guard armed with a bow and arrow shot him in the bum. Naturally he pulled it out but unfortunately it wasn't an arrow.

The next event of significance in this hospital was my 21st birthday on 11 August. Bob, the Aussie, decided that it was an event to be celebrated. Without my knowledge he got the others to contribute some elements of their Red Cross parcel and somehow contacted the hospital kitchen to put the ingredients together in the shape of a cake. On the afternoon of my birthday he produced a cake of somewhat small proportions - approx 5 inches in diameter - covered in some sort of white stuff like icing. There was no decoration, only 2 chocolate coloured balls on top. There was a little accompanying note which read "Happy Birthday Jock - they drop today" The cake was divided into 6 slices and we all agreed that it was a great treat under the circumstances. It was a simple little party but one which left an everlasting impression in my mind. That wasn't the finish, for he somehow conveyed to the kitchen labourers (Russian POW's) that a little gift would be appropriate. They produced, from scrap wood, a little wooden duck suitably painted, with wheels connected to wings which moved up and down when pushed along the ground. There was a long stick attached and later that day I did several circuits of the small exercise yard pushing the duck, cheered on by my roommates and to the merriment of several of the Russians. I'll never forget my 21st birthday nor the kindness, generosity and thoughtfulness of my fellow prisoners of war.

It was now well into August, my leg had healed and as I had been mobile for some time I was awaiting transfer to a POW camp. This happened on 25 August when my escort, two German soldiers, arrived and took me to the local railway station. Our destination was Stalag Luft 3 which was located several hundred mile to the East on the German Polish border, a considerable distance away. At this stage my only clothing was still the shorts and shirt I had been wearing when I was shot down but before leaving I was given a British Army Khaki uniform (provided by the Red Cross). I was thankful for this uniform for when we travelled through the city of Stuttgart, which had been bombed 2 days earlier, the German passengers in the carriage were obviously questioning my escort about their prisoner. I'm sure my escort thought I was a soldier and I was glad I wasn't in an Air Force uniform for German civilians weren't kindly disposed to "Terror Fleigers", as the Bomber crews were called. It was a tedious journey involving a night stop at Leipzig where I was put into the station jail which I had to share with rats. My request to be moved somewhere else was refused. On 27 August I arrived at Stalag Luft 3 to join several thousand other Air Force prisoners.

STALAG LUFT 3 - SAGAN

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24 25																								
Personalkarte I: Personelle Angaben															Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke									
Kriegsgefang. Lager Nr. 3 d. Lw. (Oflag Luft 3)															Nr. <u>18019</u> Lager: <u>Kpf.-M.-Stalag 7 B</u>									
Name: <u>Cassels</u>															Staatsangehörigkeit: <u>England</u>									
Vorname: <u>Birmingham</u>															Dienstgrad: <u>PTO</u>									
Geburtsort und -ort: <u>11.2.20 mgl.</u>															Truppenteil: <u>RtF</u> Kom. usw.:									
Religion: <u>Presbyt.</u>															Zivilberuf: <u>Angestellter</u> Berufs-Gr.:									
Vorname des Vaters:															Matrikel Nr. (Stammstelle des Heimatstaates): <u>146 889</u>									
Familienname der Mutter:															Gefangennahme (Ort und Datum): <u>Halben 21.5.44</u>									
Ob gesund, krank, verwundet eingeliefert:																								
Des Kriegsgefangenen	Lichtbild										Nähere Personalbeschreibung													
											Größe: <u>1,85</u> Haarfarbe: <u>mittelblond</u>													
											Flügelabdruck des rechten Zeigefingers													
											Name und Anschrift der zu benachrichtigenden Person in der Heimat des Kriegsgefangenen: <u>Mr. Cassels</u> <u>"Roselin"</u> <u>Lewis Nr. Margm / Schell.</u> <u>61 981 C. CASSELS 18619</u>													
Beschriftung der Erkennungsmarke Nr. _____															Lager: _____ Name: _____									
Bemerkungen:																								
Personalbeschreibung																								
Figur: <u>slank</u>																								
Größe: <u>1,85 m</u>																								
Alter: <u>11.2.20</u>																								
Gesichtsform: <u>oval</u>																								
Gesichtsfarbe: <u>gesund</u>																								
Schädelform: <u>lang-oval, schmal</u>																								
Augen: <u>blau</u>																								
Nase: <u>schmal, spitz</u>																								
Gebiß: <u>gut</u>																								
Haare: <u>mittelblond</u>																								
Bart: <u>barred</u>																								
Gewicht: <u>75 kg</u>																								
Besondere Merkmale: <u>NO SPECIAL MARKS</u>																								
Deutsche Sprachkenntnisse: <u>KNOWLEDGE OF GERMAN</u>																								

POW Identity Card Stalag Luft 3 - 1944

Luft 3 was a huge camp consisting of 5 compounds named North, South, East, West and Centre. The South, West and Centre compounds housed American airmen and the North and East housed British airmen. There was another overload compound a few miles away from the main camp named Belaria which had a mixture of inmates. The main camp was located in a pine forest near the town of Sagan. The camp was the venue for several escapes but the major one was "The Great Escape" from the North compound which resulted in the murder by the Germans of 50 prisoners. But that is another well documented story.

I was sent to East compound which had six huts with 12 rooms in each hut. My address was Room 5 Hut 69. There were 11 officers in the room, 7 RAF and 4 RCAF. We slept in 2 tier bunks with wooden boards and a straw palliase as mattress. The room was 16 x 24 feet with a stove in one corner for heating. A corridor ran down the middle of the hut with a night toilet at one end and a small kitchen at the other. The room organisation was that each man had a domestic duty to perform, some internal and some external. My job was to get up early and go to the kitchen and cut our German black loaf of bread into eleven equal slices. Sounds easy but the loaves sloped at the ends so the end slices had to be a little bit thicker so everyone got an equal

portion. As prisoners we were entitled to the same rations as a German soldier but it never worked that way, usually much less. Each man was entitled to be issued with a weekly Red Cross food parcel but in my time the issue was down to one parcel to two men and later this was reduced further. This was because the Germans had difficulty in transporting the parcels from the main Red Cross depot in the North to the various camps throughout the country. The reason for this was the disruption caused to the railway system at that stage of the war by the Allied bomber and fighter aircraft.

In East Compound there were around 800 prisoners from a huge variety of peacetime civilian occupations so there was a vast amount of skills available for camp activities and these skills were put to good use in alleviating the boredom of prison life. For example, debates, lectures, study, theatrical plays, handiwork classes, sporting activities, to name a few. A lot of the necessary equipment for these pursuits was provided by the Red Cross, all of course vetted by the Germans. The prisoners made a 9 hole chip and putt golf course in the sandy soil around the inside perimeter of the compound. A few clubs were provided by the Red Cross but shortage of balls was a problem so they were made from pieces of rubber inside a leather skin. No greens of course!

Generally the authority of rank was never used in the camp as prisoners considered themselves as just prisoners, however the senior ranking officer assumed responsibility for all prisoners when dealing with the Germans. He had the title of Senior British Officer (SBO) and performed the role of a Commanding Officer for the prisoners. He would co-ordinate the activities of selected officers who had the task of organising various camp activities. One of the more important responsibilities was that of security, and he and his committee would interview and interrogate all new arrivals to ensure that they were not impersonators planted by the Germans. Any plans to escape had to be vetted by both the SBO and the escape committee and help and assistance would only be provided if the plan was considered viable. Apart from the guards manning the towers on the perimeter with their guns and searchlights the compound was patrolled by Germans in overalls whose job was to roam the compound looking for any signs of escape activities. They were named "ferrets" as they would often hide and crawl under the huts, keeping a close watch on the prisoners movements. Every morning and evening we were paraded for the daily roll call. We formed up by hut numbers in rows 5 deep which facilitated the counting process. In addition to the daily counting we were occasionally subject to a "picture" parade when our identity was compared to the photo taken when we arrived in the camp.

Naturally we were constantly wondering how the war was progressing, particularly as at that time the Russians were making advances on the Eastern front and the Allies had landed in France. The German papers we managed to obtain did give us an inkling that the Germans were on the back foot. However, unknown to the Germans we had our own source of information. This was a radio which was cleverly concealed in a false compartment on the underside of a table. More about that table later. I don't know how the radio was made but the ingenuity of our expert prisoners knew no bounds, and by bribing and eventually threatening the "ferrets" the key components such as valves and other necessary bits and pieces were obtained. The method was to cultivate a few "ferrets" who had a liking for the chocolate and cigarettes in our Red Cross parcels and persuade them to bring in a few innocuous items in exchange. Once this had been done the threat of exposure to their superiors was such that the necessary key components were obtained.

Our news was obtained via BBC radio broadcasts and the person who manned the receiver would visit the huts the next day and verbally pass on the information. One day, during a picture roll call, the Germans did not have their portable table with

them so they went to a room and brought out a table. The roll call was completed without incident but little did the Germans know that it was the special table and that our radio was within inches of their hands. I believe there was another source of information; this was a coded link to some authority in the UK, I think it was the Air Ministry, and this was done through letters to prisoners but I am unaware of any details - it was not general knowledge. It was through this means that after the Great Escape in March and the favourable progress of the war that escape attempts were discouraged. Just after the Great Escape and the murder of 50 prisoners, the Germans had issued a pamphlet headed "Escaping is no longer a Sport" - briefly is said that any prisoner caught after escaping would be considered a saboteur and shot. At this stage there was general optimism that the Allies were winning and as far as I am aware there were no more attempts to escape .

As Christmas 1944 was approaching most rooms managed to save a few items of food so that we were able to celebrate Christmas with a few extras on the table while thinking of our loved ones having their Christmas dinner thinking of us. Our Christmas present was the air of optimism in the camp that the New Year would bring release and our return home. While inside the huts didn't look very seasonal the weather outside certainly did. with the camp covered in snow. By mid January 1945 we could sense that something was about to happen and we could only guess that it had something to do with the Russian breakthrough on the Eastern front. On 27th January we found out, when the Germans announced that the camp was being evacuated and we had to prepare for an immediate march.

THE MARCH

On being informed early on the 27th January of the evacuation, the camp became a hive of activity, with prisoners making rucksacks and sledges from whatever materials they could find. The Germans surprisingly produced enough RedCross parcels for an issue of one per man and what food there was in each rooms cupboard was shared among the occupants. The bitterly cold weather was a problem and prisoners donned as many items of clothing they could. I managed to make a sort of rucksack to carry what little possessions I had but for warm clothing I only had an RAF airmans greatcoat (issued by the RedCross) and my Army battledress which proved insufficient for the conditions, consequently my march was a very cold one. We left the camp in the early hours of the 28th January with the guards spaced at intervals on either side of the column walking with us and feeling the cold as much as we were. There were a few horse drawn wagons in the column loaded with the guards equipment and rations. We had to make do with what food we took with us from the camp. From a high point on the march the column looked like a black snake stretching from horizon to horizon against the snow covered landscape, not surprising as there were several thousand prisoners in the column. We marched all day and stopped at a place called Halbau where we were accommodated in a school for 2 nights sleeping wherever we could find a space - on desks, chairs but mainly on the floor. Another all day march on the 30th Jan and another night accommodated in a school at Liebe. The next day the march ended in a factory at a place called Muskau. It was here that we managed to get reasonably warm, for the factory furnaces had only recently been shut down and there was plenty of room for us to spread out. Here the weather changed and became be bit warmer with the arrival of rain. This caused a problem for the sled pullers as the snow was rapidly melting and they had to find wheels for their conveyance. Fortunately there were plenty of bits and pieces of metal and round objects which served the purpose. One more days march and we arrived at a rail junction called Spremberg. Here we were loaded onto covered rail wagons which in the 1914-18 w ar

had an official transporting capacity of 8 horses or 40 men. I can't recall how many were in our wagon but we were pretty crowded, so much so that when crouched down in a sitting position there was no clear space and it became a major difficulty to get to the small gap in the sliding doors to relieve ourselves. At this stage we had no idea where we were headed. After a very uncomfortable night and a days travel we stopped at a place called Luckenwald and detrained. I did not know it at the time but this was to be where I would end my time as a POW.

STALAG 111A - LUCKENWALD

On 4th February, 1944 we marched the short distance from the station to the camp where we were herded into a large building containing communal showers - and did we ever need a shower. The water wasn't very hot but it was heaven to be clean again. By late evening we were located in our accommodation which, compared to that at Stalag Luft 3, was very basic. Our living quarters were in large huts, not divided into rooms but with the open space filled with three tiered wooden bunks and brick flooring. I don't know who the previous occupants were but the huts were not very clean. It was a big camp with a large population including a lot of Polish and Russian prisoners. Food became a problem, or lack of it did. There were no Red Cross parcels and the food we got from the Germans was very basic - potatoes and soups made of cabbage and other unidentified things were the main items of sustenance. We were constantly hungry and I remember making a habit of eating the potatoe skins discarded by the others, to assuage my hunger. It wasn't much help but it was something to chew on. Life was very different from that in Stalag Luft 3, no activities to stimulate the mind and keep the body active, just dull and monotonous living. The only bright spot was the thought of release which now appeared a distinct possibility - but when?



My "Lounge" Stalag IIIA Luckenwald - 1945



Beds - Stalag IIIA Lukenwald - 1945

On 12th April we were again marched to the local railway where a long line of covered wagons (cattle trucks) awaited. We were loaded into the wagons as before but after a few hours with no movement we detrained and waited beside the wagons. It soon became obvious that we weren't going anywhere for there was no locomotive to pull the train. We were told that an engine would be arriving later that day. In the meantime we asked the Germans to paint a large Red Cross emblem on the top of the train to prevent a possible strafing attack by Allied aircraft. This wasn't done. We remained at the station until the next day when, as no engine had arrived, we were marched back to the camp. By now it was obvious from the behaviour of the guards who were, in the main, quite old men that something was about to happen. One night an aircraft, presumably Russian, straffed some target near the camp and had us all ducking for cover. A few days later on the 21st April we woke up to find that the guards had

vanished during the night and the camp was now unguarded. But not for long, for next day on the 22nd April several Russian tanks arrived, one tank demolishing part of the barbed wire fence to the cheers of the POW's. As they were part of the Russian forces attacking Berlin and we were in the midst of a battle area we were told to stay put and await further instructions. A couple of days later the follow up troops arrived and this time we were guarded by the Russians who were under instructions to keep us secure. We all had our opinions as to how and when the Russians would transfer us to the Americans who had stopped their advance Eastwards at the river Elbe which was about 30 miles to the West of the camp. All we knew for certain was that the Russians intended to keep us in their hands until they decided on our future.

On the morning of the 7th May an American officer arrived in a Jeep, presumably to discuss with the Russians our evacuation, but the Russians told him that they were not prepared to release us as the decision would have to be referred to higher authority. The American officer left, but before he did he mentioned to one of our senior officers that he had brought with him six American trucks which were waiting in a wood near the camp. When I heard this news I spoke with a colleague and we decided to try and get to the trucks. We got through a hole in the wire at the back of the camp and made our way, along with many others, to the wood which was about a mile from the camp. When some distance from the camp we heard rifle fire and later found out that the Russian guards were shooting over the heads of escaping POW's to try and deter them. However, we were out and eventually found the trucks and a large African American Sergeant who greeted us with words which I will never forget "Come on you guys, get your arse into gear we wanna to get outa here". Of course so did we. The first two trucks were already full and had left and we got on the third truck and soon were on our way to the River Elbe. We arrived at the river where a pontoon bridge had been erected at a place called Wittenberg, with the Russians on the East side and the Americans on the West. The Russian soldiers waved at us as we drove onto the pontoon bridge and the American soldiers did likewise when we drove off. It was mid afternoon on the 7th May 1945 and I was FREE. However, only three trucks got across. When the Russians at the camp realised what was happening they communicated with the soldiers at the bridge to stop the trucks crossing. The last three trucks were stopped and their load of POW'S returned to the camp. It was to be another 3 weeks before the Allies managed to negotiate with the Russians to release the many thousands of POW's in the camp and I understand politics at a high level was involved.

When we got over the river the trucks continued for about 30 miles on to Schonebeg where a large camp had been set up to process released POW's. Our first meal was a bit of a surprise for while we had dreamed of this moment and of the huge amount of food we would consume we were served very small portions. Apparently this was for medical reasons, as having had little food, both in quantity and quality, for several months a large nutritious meal would have been detrimental to our health. While in the Dining Hall I heard, for the first time, the loudspeakers playing a popular Bing Crosby song "Don't Fence Me In". How timely!! However that was really of no importance for the next day on the 8th May 1945 it was announced worldwide that Germany had capitulated and the war in Europe was over. The next move, on the 11 May, was another lorry trip of 60 miles to Hildesheim where after a nights stop we were flown to Brussels. It was during this flight that we saw the result of the Allied bombing of the industrial cities of the Rhur - city after city absolutely devastated. A night stop in Brussels then onto an RAF aircraft which took us to RAF Wing, an airfield North West of London where, immediatly on landing, we were lined up and deloused before showering. This was 13th May 1945 and 3 years and 1 month had elapsed since departing from the UK on the troopship from the Clyde on 16 April 1942. The

next 2 days involved Administrative details, issue of new uniforms and getting settled back into Service life. We were also interrogated regarding our period in captivity, particularly in regard to aircrew who were still listed as missing and of whom the RAF and the Red Cross had no information. I also managed to 'phone home and let my family know that I was back in Britain. I was given indefinite leave and a night journey in a very crowded train saw me arrive in Glasgow on 16 May to be met by my father and brother Jim who had just returned from 4 years service with the Army in the Middle East. A large gathering of family at my grandmothers house greeted me and I knew I was home. After a few days, while I was delighted to be home, I had a strange feeling of being unsettled and would often seek solitude in the garden. I can't really describe what the feeling was but it lasted for a few weeks before I really got round to accepting my new situation and change of lifestyle. It was a period of strange personal emotions.

AIR FORCE SERVICE AFTER THE WAR

At this time I didn't know what my future would be and the Air Force left me on indefinite leave. Demobilisation of the Armed Services started and it was a case of first in first out. I can't remember when my "demob" date was but it certainly wasn't in the near future. After several months I became a bit tired of the inactivity and I'm not sure whether I contacted the RAF or they contacted me but I indicated that I wished to remain in the RAF and eventually I was told to report to No 7 Flying Instructors School at RAF Upavon in Jan 1946 for training as a Flying Instructor .

No 7 Flying Instructors School

No 7 FIS was located at RAF Station Upavon in Wiltshire. It was one of the original RAF airfields and originated just after the first World War. It was a grass airfield and was used mainly for training purposes. The course was unusual in that the students were mainly from the French, Dutch and Belgian Air Forces and whose personnel had been fighting alongside the Allies in the latter stages of the war. In fact of the 20 students on the course only 2, myself and another officer, were in the RAF. All the instructors were, of course, RAF officers. Fortunately all the foreign students spoke very good English so I had no problem when the students had to fly together, The aircraft involved was a Harvard 11B an aircraft with which I was well acquainted, having trained on it.

Halfway through the course there was a re-organisation of Flying Training Command airfields and the course moved to Central Flying School at RAF Little Rissington. This delayed the finish date for the course and it was not until the end of June that we graduated as Flying Instructors after approx 100 hours training.

No 22 Service Flying Training School

In July 1946 I started instructing at 22 SFTS. This was located at a place called Ouston which was near Newcastle in the North of England. The students were Royal Navy officers who were training to become pilots in the Fleet Air Arm and the RAF had the responsibility for training their aircrew. Quite a number already had air experience having been Observers/Navigators in the Fleet Air Arm and were no strangers to aviation. Being single I lived in the Officers Mess, as did all the students, and in no time flat, naval jargon had me going "ashore" when I left the base. I had no idea then but this was to be the start of a 5 year period as an instructor during which I would return to where I began my flying career - Rhodesia, and where an event would occur that would alter my life.

I soon settled down to life as an instructor and enjoyed my association with the Naval types. The only interruption to normal routine was when I was sent to No 1 Beam

Approach School, RAF Watchfield in December 1946 for a weeks course in Instrument Flying using the Beam System to make an approach and let down to an airfield in bad weather. Shortly after my return to Ouston I was attached to Empire Flying School at RAF Hullavington and started an Instrument Rating Course in January 1947

Empire Flying School, RAF Hullavington

Shortly after the end of the war the RAF realised that the force had to become more proficient in flying in bad weather conditions and instituted an Instrument Rating Scheme. This involved checking pilots on their Instrument flying ability and issuing them with a Green or White Instrument Rating Card. A Green card allowed a pilot to operate in more restrictive weather conditions than the holder of a White Card. The system required training pilots to be Instrument Rating Examiners and the first course was held at EFS which was the place where all Test Pilots were trained. The course I was on was the first course.

The weather conditions for the first course couldn't have been better, or worse, depending on how you look at it. The weather at the beginning of 1947 in the UK was awful - snow, low cloud and freezing temperatures. The first indication of how bad things were, was when the first aircraft, a Harvard, tried to take off. The pilot tried unsuccessfully to lift off but couldn't and abandoned the take off, he braked and ended up sliding off the runway and ended up just short of a parked Lancaster. Examination of the aircraft found that the wings were covered in a thin film of clear ice which disrupted the airflow over the wings; this meant that there was insufficient lift at take off speed. Thereafter the wings of all aircraft were closely examined for clear ice before flight and the training continued. The emphasis on instrument flying to the limit resulted in the death of two pilots. The instructor was a bomber pilot with a DFC and the student, also a bomber pilot had the DFC and bar. They put their aircraft, a Harvard, into a deliberate spin when in cloud and failed to recover. Another student was killed when low flying in a Spitfire.

It was an unusual course in that apart from concentrating on instrument flying the students had the opportunity to fly six different types of aircraft. They were -- Harvard, Spitfire, Oxford, Buckmaster, Lancaster and the Meteor Jet. We were given the Pilots Notes (details on how to fly the aircraft) for each aircraft and where necessary some dual instruction. Having flown the Harvard and Spitfire before I only had to be given dual instruction on the Oxford and Buckmaster (similat to but bigger than a Beaufighter) but I only had one flight in the Lancaster. The Meteor was a different proposition for it had jet engines and a tricycle landing gear, both new to me. Being a single seat aircraft it was a case of reading the Pilots Notes and convincing the instructor that you knew your way round the cockpit i.e. where every switch, button and lever was located. In spite of the fact that I was a little apprehensive as I had never flown a jet aircraft and the weather was bad, I thoroughly enjoyed my first flight in a jet. The course finished at the end of March after 60 hours flying and I returned to my instructing duties at No 22 SFTS.

No 22 SFTS

I resumed my QFI duties on return to RAF Ouston and apart from the additional task of carrying out all Instrument Rating Tests. life settled into its previous pattern. I was to remain at 22 SFTS until the end of 1947 but before I move on to my next posting I feel I should relate an incident which occurred in October of that year. At the end of the war most communities held function to welcome home the local servicemen. I was invited to attend a Welcome Home Dinner in my home town of Kirkintilloch on 29 October. Being midweek and very busy the only way I could attend was if I flew to

Abbotsfield airfield nr Glasgow. I had two student flights that morning and not having time to flight plan I asked the Navigation section to work me out a course and time to Glasgow. They left the information on the flight notice board which I memorised before hurrying to get my gear before take off. If I remember correctly the course was 329 degrees and time 41 minutes. When airborne I set course on **341** degrees. I was above a layer of cloud for most of the trip and still above cloud when it was time to let down. Through a small break in the cloud I glimpsed open countryside when it should have been city dwellings. I decided to continue on my heading for another 5 minutes and a good break in the cloud appeared so I let down through it. To my amazement I was in hilly country and in the vicinity of a large Loch. I had a feeling I had overshot Glasgow and when I saw a railway line heading South East I followed it. I saw a small railway station and lowering my wheels and flaps flew low enough to read the name on its large nameplate. It was Aberfeldy near the top of Loch Tay a long way north of Glasgow. Putting the wrong heading on my compass had taken me East and North of Glasgow. To add to a host of errors Glasgow was at the top edge of my map so I had no map for the territory I was in. Previously I had tried to call Abbotsinch control tower but had no success, no doubt due to being low and out of radio range. I knew Aberfeldy was north of Glasgow so keeping below cloud I headed South. In the distance away to my left I saw a large castle which I soon recognised as Stirling Castle. Anyway, I was now in my home territory and soon after landed at Abbotsinch after a 90 minute flight which should have taken 40 minutes. When he asked why I was late I hadn't the guts to tell the Air Traffic Control Officer the truth. Why do I go to a lengthy explanation of this episode? Well it highlights the fact that when planning a flight make sure it is done properly in accordance with procedures and not a hurried last minute unprepared event. My mistakes - I did not do any flight planning, did not check the en route weather and had insufficient map coverage. I deserve a "must do better" mark for this episode. My total flying hours while at 22 SFTS was 420.

Before I leave my time at Ouston I must also mention that I had purchased my first car. I bought it from a fellow instructor for 100 pounds during a Christmas Mess function and planned to drive home for Christmas leave the next day. It was the same age as me, a 1923 Vauxhall 14 HP two seater with a "Dickie" seat in the back. It had an aluminium body and as I found out later the brakes were not the best. I set off late in the afternoon and it was dark when I found the road blocked by a large parked lorry. I went to pass it but another vehicle was coming towards me so I had two choices - swing back to the left and hit the lorry (the bad brakes) or swing right off the road. I chose the latter and hit a large telegraph pole. They obviously built strong chassis in those days for the only damage was a busted radiator, in spite of the high impact speed. To cut a long story short the car was taken to a local garage and I continued my journey in the car of a fellow instructor who fortunately was following me. I later sold the car to one of the naval students who drove it to London and on arrival had an accident - he went over a roundabout instead of around it. Probably those brakes again!

Now onto my next posting which to my delight was to No 4 Flying Training School (FTS) in Rhodesia.

No 4 FTS, RAF Heany, Rhodesia

When I was posted to Rhodesia in 1942 I travelled by troopship and it took 6 weeks, this time I travelled first class by the Union Castle Line and it took two weeks. No need to say which voyage I preferred. On 30 December 1947 I arrived at RAF Heany which was located about 20 minutes drive from Bulawayo in the southern part of the country. It was while in Rhodesia that I bought a new car - a Morris 10, costing, I think, 400 pounds.

Flying Instruction in Rhodesia was quite different to that in the UK. Because of the heat and the resulting air turbulence, flying started at 0600 hours and finished at 1300 hours. This allowed the students better flying conditions in which to absorb their tuition. There were two stages of training at 4 FTS - Elementary on Tiger Moth aircraft and Advanced on Harvard aircraft. My duties were mainly confined to giving students their final Instrument Flying test on Harvards and examining the instructors for reissue of their Instrument Rating.

Apart from my instructional duties I had the opportunity to visit Livingstone and Lusaka in Northern Rhodesia to take part in an Air Display and to the Caprivi Strip in Namibia to search for a lost civilian aircraft. In the latter part of my posting I made quite a few week-end trips to Salisbury, landing at Cranbourne where I had gained my wings during the war. The reason for these trips I'll explain later.

On my return to Rhodesia I renewed my association with the Brown family, staying with them when on leave and whenever I visited Salisbury. This was the family who had been so kind to me during the war and I had great pleasure in meeting them again after 4 years. One of their daughters, June, was a nurse and she introduced me to her friend, another nurse named Maureen Stiles. In March I was due some leave and with a fellow instructor, Graham Baxter, we drove to South Africa in my car. One of our stops was in Durban where we spent a fair time on the lovely beaches. On return to the car one day who should be standing beside it but June and Maureen. They had recognised my car from the Bulawayo number plate and decided to wait beside it until we arrived. We had no idea they were in South Africa and neither did they know that we were also there. Talk about coincidences! We teamed up together and spent a lot of time on the beach and at dances and night functions. A very pleasant 7 days and it was during this time that I became attracted to Maureen and, I think, she to me. On return to my duties I decided to get to know Maureen a bit more, hence my frequent weekend trips to Salisbury. Through these Salisbury visits and correspondence I got to know Maureen well, so well in fact that I found myself in love with her. I drove to Salisbury on my last visit and in my car proposed to her. I can't remember how she said it but she obviously accepted and we discussed how we were going to organise our future. She wanted to finish her training as a nurse and I had to return to the UK. That's how things stood when I arrived at my next posting as an instructor at a Flying Refresher School (FRS).

Flying Refresher School

The Flying Refresher School was located at RAF Finningley just outside Doncaster. Qualified pilots who had been serving in Administrative or ground jobs and who were returning to flying posts had to be given a period of refresher training and this was done at FRS. The aircraft used were the ubiquitous Harvard and the twin engined Wellington T10 a training version of the Wellington Bomber used in the early part of WW2. There was also a Spitfire XV1 which I had the opportunity to fly and a Meteor 7 which was a twin seat version of the Meteor I had flown at EFS Hullavington in 1947. When I first flew the Spitfire and the Meteor there were no twin seat versions. I spent 5 months on the Harvard Flight and 5 months on the Wellington Flight. One of my "students" was a staff officer from Flying Training Command Headquarters and I mentioned to him about having been instructing for 5 years and that I would like a change. He said that he would contact a friend in the posting section of Flying Training Command Headquarters. Three weeks later I got a change. And what a change it was: to No 235 Operational Conversion Unit (OCU) to convert onto Sunderland Flying Boats and the start of one of the most satisfying periods in my flying career. It was all different. Flying a large 4 engined aircraft which was also a boat - no wheels !

No. 235 Operational Conversion Unit



Sunderland Flying Boat 1950 - 1953

235 OCU was based at RAF Calshot and located at the bottom end of Southampton Waters, opposite the Isle of Wight. It had been the home of all Flying Boat and Seaplane activity in the RAF for many years, dating back, I believe, to the mid twenties. It was a unit in RAF Coastal Command. My course was not due to start until May and having a couple of months to wait I was attached to the current course as supernumerary crew. This involved flying as 2nd pilot to a crew under instruction. The young pilot under instruction, who I was crewed with, was a Pilot Officer (rank) Chesworth who had just got his wings and when he finished the course was posted to a Flying Boat Squadron in Japan and served in the Korean War. I mention this for George Chesworth had a distinguished career in the RAF, retiring as an Air Vice Marshal.

My course started in May and finished in July and apart from the conversion onto type, involved operational training in Coastal Command activities such as Ship Interceptions, Radar Homings, Bombing and Gunnery. By the time the course finished I had flown about 200 hours on the Sunderland 5. and was ready for posting to a Squadron. However, before I leave the training phase I must mention the difference between operating a land based aircraft and a flying boat.

In a land based aircraft you sign the necessary papers, walk or drive to the aircraft, start up, taxi to the runway and off you go. On landing you park the aircraft, sign the necessary paper work and the flight is over and your work done. On flying boats, after signing the paper work, you take a boat trip to the aircraft, ensure the crew has disconnected the anchor chain from the mooring buoy thus leaving the aircraft secured to the buoy by the bow rope and then start the engines. As the aircraft is subject to both wind and tide these have to be taken into consideration before casting off and taxiing to the take off point. Needless to say the state of the sea is also a factor to be considered on take off. On landing the aim is to approach the mooring buoy as slowly as possible with both inner engines shut down, so that the crewman in the bow can attach the bow rope to the buoy. This is not an easy job as the outer engines cannot be stopped until the aircraft is securely moored to the buoy, for if the buoy is missed, the engines are required to manoeuvre for another approach. At night when there is a strong

wind and the tide is running at right angles to the wind, getting onto the buoy can be a really difficult manoeuvre. Once moored, some of the crew, one of whom must be a pilot, have to stay behind to refuel the aircraft. This is done by dropping back on the anchor chain a long way, to allow the refuelling boat to tie up to the buoy, and the refuelling lines are then passed to the aircraft from the stern of the refueller. Only when the aircraft has been refuelled and securely moored can the crew then call for a boat to get ashore.

The crew of a Sunderland usually totalled 10 - 2 Pilots, 2 Navigators, 2 Engineers, 2 Wireless Operators and 2 Wireless Op/Gunners. The large crew was necessary as the aircraft was employed on long range maritime duties involving flights of up to 10-12 hours. The crew was divided into watches (Port and Starboard) so that non flying tasks such as refuelling was shared. When airborne, domestic duties e.g. cooking and cleaning was usually undertaken by the off duty crew members. I found life as a flying boat pilot quite demanding, exciting, different, very satisfying and a posting to an operational squadron was exactly what I wanted. This was to be to No. 230 Flying Boat Squadron.

230 Squadron, RAF Pembroke Dock, Wales

RAF Pembroke Dock, located in West Wales and known in the RAF as "PD" , was home to two Flying Boat squadrons - No 201 and No 230. It was a flying boat base during WW2 with the aircraft operating in the Bay of Biscay and the Eastern Atlantic sea approaches to the British Isles. Anti submarine patrols and convoy protection were the main tasks.

During the war 230 Sqn had operated in the Far East being based in Ceylon and Singapore and this was reflected in the officially approved squadron badge which shows a tiger with a palm tree in the background. This was an exact copy of the insignia on the beer bottle of Tiger Breweries, the local beer company, and squadron members helped greatly in keeping the company profitable. Hence the connection.

To gain a captaincy depended on the posting out of existing captains to other units and it was 9 months before I gained my captaincy. This was in May 1952 and I was fortunate to inherit a good bunch of chaps and we stayed together as a crew for most of my remaining time on the squadron. After nearly 60 years I still keep in touch with a couple of the crew. Apart from the usual training flights around the British Isles we spent many happy times together in a number of foreign places. To Gibraltar on Navigation training trips; to Malta to exercise with the British Mediterranean Fleet; to Norway for NATO exercises and to Greenland to support the British North Greenland Expedition. A couple of anecdotes about these trips. While in Norway we were based on an American depot ship based in a fiord near Trondheim and adjacent to a town named Hell. So when we had a day off we had to catch a train and go through Hell to get to Trondheim!! While in Malta in May 1953 our exercises with the British Fleet were interrupted because of trouble in Egypt. It was urgent that a Commando Unit of Royal Marines, which was based in Malta, be air lifted to the Canal Zone and as we were the only aircraft available we were given the task of flying them to Fanara near Ismailia on the Bitter Lakes to reinforce the forces there. As we couldn't remain in Egypt we had to refuel and immediately return to Malta, it was a long day. The Squadron involvement with the British North Greenland Expedition took place in the summer of 1953 and I'll describe this in more detail later but I must go back to December 1951 when I returned to Rhodesia to attend a major event in my life - my marriage.

On my return to the UK from Rhodesia in 1950 I had continued my courtship of Maureen Stiles by mail but so far had not given her an engagement ring. As I hadn't a clue about rings we decided that I would send her money and she would choose the

ring. This she did and we considered ourselves formally engaged. Her family home was in Gwelo and I had only met her family once and that was just before I left Rhodesia when I had attended an Air Display at RAF Thornhill near Gwelo. I didn't tell them of our plans but visited them only as a friend of Maureen. It was when Maureen bought the ring that she told them of our engagement and it was then that I wrote to her father seeking permission to marry his daughter.

Getting Married

Being a serviceman the first thing I had to do was get permission from the RAF to get married which was to be on 8 December. This was done by writing a formal letter to my Commanding Officer seeking his approval - things have changed since then and this formality is no longer necessary. Of interest is the fact that my CO at the time was Squadron Leader Jimmy Higgins who had married a Rhodesian girl during the war. The next thing I had to do was get myself to Rhodesia and bring Maureen back with me to the UK. This required a fair bit of money and I had to sell my car to pay for my air fare to Rhodesia and our honeymoon boat trip back to the UK. I applied for the necessary leave and set off for Rhodesia by BOAC on 3 December. I had to leave the international flight at Livingstone, N Rhodesia to catch a local flight to Bulawayo in S Rhodesia and from there I got a lift to Gwelo in an RAF Harvard flown by a friend.

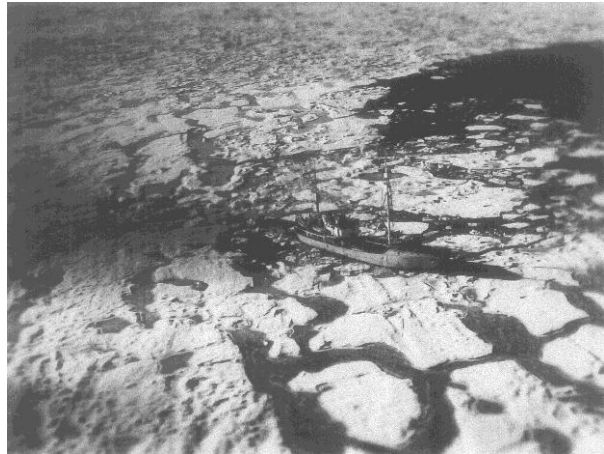
While delighted to be reunited, I suppose that it would be fair to say that not having seen each other for 18 months, and 3 days away from getting married we were both a little nervous about what lay ahead. But we were sure of our feelings for each other and when her father asked us if we were certain that we wanted to go ahead with the wedding and not cancel, even at that late stage, we assured him that we did. So we were married on Saturday 8 December 1951 at StCuthberts Church in Gwelo. None of my family in Scotland attended the wedding, mainly because of the travel expense involved, but there were many congratulatory telegrams. The best man was George Gellatly the fellow student from my training days in Rhodesia in 1942/3 and who had returned to Rhodesia after the war to continue his trade as a plumber. After the reception we left that night by train for the three day journey to Capetown. Following two days sightseeing in Capetown we embarked on the liner "Stirling Castle" and set sail for our 14 day honeymoon voyage to Southampton. We had Christmas on board and arrived in Southampton on 27 December. Another night on the train and finally I was home in Scotland introducing my new wife to the Cassels' family. As my leave was running out we only had a few days to celebrate the New Year at home before leaving to take up residence in our first home, which was a rented furnished house in Tenby, a coastal town near Pembroke Dock. I needed a car to get to and from work and I had only enough money left from the sale of my first car to buy a little old Austin 7 from a local farmer, but it served the purpose. So back to work. at 230 Squadron.

Greenland

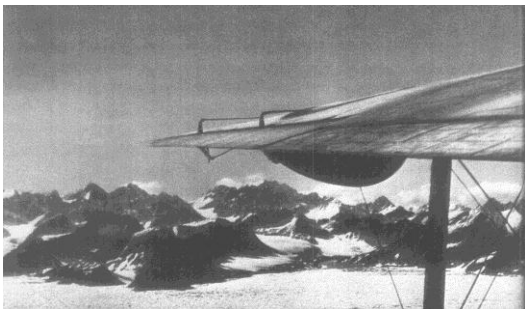
The routine activities continued until July 1952 when the squadron was given the task of supporting the British North Greenland Expedition (BNGE). The BNGE was a 2 year project whose object was to establish the depth of the Greenland Icecap, make Seismic and Gravity surveys of unexplored land and gain experience of living, travelling and operating in Arctic regions which would be of value to the Services. This was an exciting and a very demanding task for the squadron as it required operating flying boats in a remote part of the Arctic.



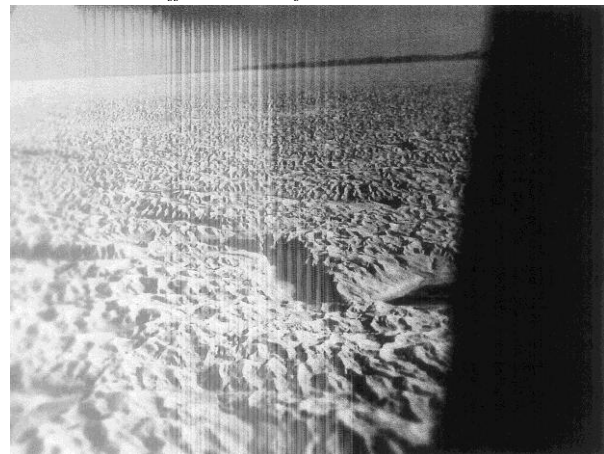
*Commander CJW Simpson RN
Leader of British North Greenland Expedition 1952-1954*



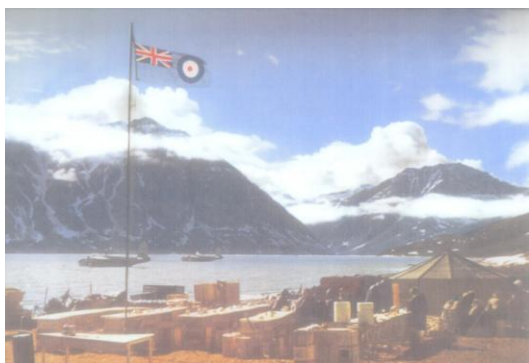
*MV Tottan
Off East Coast of Greenland 1952*



*En Route to Britannia Lake from Young Sound -
1952*



*The Barrier
Sturstrummer Glacier*



*Zachenberg - Young Sound 1952
Stores awaiting airlift*



*Meal time at Young Sound
Self & Co (backs to hut)*

Before the task of the BNGE could begin a base had to be established on the East coast of far north Greenland. In 1950 the expedition leader Commander C J W Simpson, a Royal Navy Officer, was a member of a Danish expedition exploring the East Coast of Greenland and during an aerial reconnaissance of the area, had spotted a small lake on the edge of the icecap. He established that it was usually free of ice for approx 6 weeks in the year. He named it Britannia Lake and its position was 77 N 24 W and 888 miles from the North Pole. Because of its proximity to the icecap he reckoned that this was an ideal spot to establish the base if he could get all the necessary stores and equipment transported there. The problem was that the Lake was about 50 miles inland from the coast and in between there was a glacier, the Storstrommer glacier, over which it would have been impossible to transport the heavy equipment and stores. A spot in an ice free inlet on the coast was chosen to unload all the equipment from the MV Tottan a Norwegian ice strengthened ship which had previously been engaged in Antarctic expeditions. The inlet, called Young Sound, (190 miles from Britannia Lake) was only ice free for several weeks during the summer so time was a critical factor in getting the equipment to the Lake. This is where 230 Sqn enters the story, as an airlift was essential to move the equipment from Young Sound to Britannia Lake.

The first 2 aircraft (the CO and myself) flew to Reykjavik, Iceland on 28 July and waited there for news of the arrival at Young Sound of the MV Tottan. This came through two days later and on 30th both aircraft flew up the ice strewn coast of Greenland and landed at Young Sound beside the Tottan which had already laid aircraft moorings for us. A tented camp had been established ashore by the expedition members and the unloading of the supplies had commenced. More aircraft moorings were laid and 2 days later the remaining 3 aircraft arrived. A flight over the lake revealed that the ice had not completely cleared and it was another 4 days before the Airlift commenced on 7 August. Aircraft loads were assembled on shore, taken out on a pontoon and loaded into the aircraft through the bomb-bay doors in the side of the aircraft. One load was the expeditions dogs who didn't take too kindly to the trip. Each load was between 3 and 4 tons. On the lake a pontoon had been assembled and initially the stores were hauled ashore by a connecting rope. Then a small dinghy with an outboard motor was used but this proved unsuitable in the strong winds. However this had been anticipated and arrangements had been made for a Lancaster aircraft to drop an airborne lifeboat onto the lake as it was too big to be airlifted by the Sunderland. This occurred on the 8th August but with disastrous results. The lifeboat had a parachute at the bow and stern but in this case one of the parachutes failed to open and on hitting the water the bow was torn right off and the boat was a wreck. This was a serious blow but had more serious consequences which deserves mention.

The Lifeboat Disaster

When the Lancaster arrived over the lake a strong wind, known as a Katabatic wind, swept down from the glacier lashing the exposed surface of the lake into a short steep sea which looked nasty for a small dinghy. When the Lancaster was preparing to drop the lifeboat Commander Simpson was on a moored Sunderland, captained by Flt.Lt Stavert, discussing if Stavert would be prepared to use the aircraft to recover the lifeboat if necessary. Stavert said he was prepared to use the Sunderland if there was no other way but he did not like the idea. Simpson agreed that it was vital not to hazard the aircraft and as the wind had moderated a little he thought the situation justified him using the small dinghy. When the drop took place he was in the dinghy trying to get the outboard motor started but it was wet with spray and would not start. He asked an expedition member and the aircrafts engineer, Flt.Sgt Shelton Smith, to accompany

him (the Flt.Sgt was familiar with the lifeboats engine). They rowed out to the now dropped lifeboat but not having seen the drop did not know of the disaster. When they got to within 30 metres from the lifeboat they saw that it was a wreck. Just then the wind increased and they decided to go back to the Sunderland but a curling sea broke on board and the dinghy capsized and they were all in the icy water. Fortunately they were close to windward of the lifeboat and managed to swim to it and scramble aboard. The lifeboat was waterlogged and the parachutes had failed to detach and were acting like drogues under the water holding the boat against the sea which was washing over it. Meanwhile Stavert had sized up the situation and had slipped his moorings. After several attempts he skilfully manoeuvred the aircraft upwind of the wreck and close enough to heave a line on board. The line was attached to the boat and Simpson thought that Stavert was going to tow the boat, not realizing that the parachutes were acting like anchoring drogues and line would certainly break. When the line sprang out of the water and became taut he told the other two to jump in and haul themselves to the aircraft. They managed to do so but when it was Simpsons turn the line was so taut that he thought it would break at any moment so he undid the rope and jumped in holding the rope, hoping those on board would see what was happening and haul him on board. By now the aircraft was moving fast downwind and he was dragged through the water and forced to let go. At this point I'll let Simpsons words take up the story as he described it in his book on the Greenland Expedition called "North Ice"....."**About what happened in the next ten minutes, my mind is a little blurred. I am normally a confident swimmer, but for now, for the first time since childhood, I realised that conditions were too much for me and I was near being drowned. Heavy arctic clothes drew me down and made swimming impossible. Desperately I trod water trying to keep my face above the surface, as waves washed over my head. Dimly I was conscious that the aircraft was approaching, then it sheered away again and receded. I saw the flurry of spray as a wing engine roared to turn the boat quickly. The end was very near now; I seemed to have lost all my strength and knew I could not last much longer. Once more I was conscious that the aircraft was approaching. Its bows seemed to loom overhead, and I saw that the bowman was reaching down to me with the picking-up rope. I was just able to hook my arm through the rope; then I was washed against the bow door. Hands reached out and I was grabbed by the scruff. The next instant I was landed and lay gasping like a fish in the aircraft. Once before only, in a mountain accident, have I been so near my end. Ten minutes later, in dry clothes, and wrapped in somebody's sleeping bag, I thawed out and came to rapidly, as did also the others; but for half an hour I shivered violently and uncontrollably. None of us suffered any ill effects, and a few hours later we were all back at work with the rest. But there is no doubt that we owed our lives to Stavert's skillful handling of his aircraft"**

The airlift continued for the next 2 weeks and it was a round the clock effort as we had 24 hours continuous daylight, the sun never going below the horizon. My last trip was a parachute drop of stores onto the icecap which later were to be picked up by the sledge parties on the way to establish a base in the middle of the ice-cap.



A Magnificent Job
Engine swap under difficult conditions

A few days before the airlift completion a major problem occurred when one of the aircraft had an engine failure on the No 4 outer starboard engine. This meant that a 3 engine take off would have to be made if the aircraft was to be saved. Normally this is not a major problem when the failed engine is an inner engine but directional control is impossible on take off with a failed outer engine. The solution was to remove both No 3 and No 4 engine and swap them over. Back at Pembroke Dock the aircraft would have been taken ashore and the problem easily fixed but in a remote Arctic location it was a monumental task. Using the pontoon the ground crew, operating with minimal technical facilities, somehow removed both engines and swapped them over while the aircraft was at its mooring. A truly magnificent effort on their part for if they hadn't succeeded the aircraft would have been lost when the Sound froze over. With minimum fuel on board, to reduce weight, the aircraft did get off and returned to PD via Reykjavik.

The weather, which throughout the airlift had been fine, began to deteriorate and ominously large pieces of ice began floating up the Sound. The captain of the Tottan advised the CO that we had better get out before the ice situation got worse. On 22 August there were three aircraft left and we made preparations to leave. The CO got off just before a bank of fog rolled in and prevented Flt.Lt Stavert, the Flight Commander, and myself following. The fog lifted slightly, but not sufficiently to see if the take off path was clear of ice. I positioned myself near the ship and using a gyro compass heading, taxied along my chosen take off path. It appeared clear so I returned to the ship and took off on the same heading. A few seconds after we got airborne we cleared the fog and to our amazement looked down on a huge patch of solid ice coming up the Sound. I called Stavert and advised him of the situation and what I had done and he quickly followed. A night stop in Iceland and we were back at PD the next day 27 August. I don't think I am exaggerating when I say that we got out just in time. I've gone to great lengths to describe the part Sunderlands played in the BNGE, for our involvement was critical to the success of the project and it was the first time that flying boats had operated to the extent that we did, at such high latitudes, in such a remote area and under difficult conditions.

The remaining months of 1952 were taken up with routine training and involvement in the NATO exercise in Norway. But there was a major change on the

domestic scene in November when I was allocated a married quarter and we moved onto the base. At the same time our first daughter Carol Stiles Cassels was born in the local hospital on 4 Nov 1952. So the year ended with a happy event. Another major event occurred in 1953, when to celebrate her coronation, the Queen reviewed a major fly past of the RAF on 15 July at RAF Odiham. This involved hundreds of aircraft - slow piston to fast jet - from all over the country arriving at a precise spot, precise time and in precise order and consequently required many rehearsals - 14 rehearsals over a period of 5 weeks. The squadron provided 3 aircraft, flown by the CO, the Flight Commander and myself and after the Fly Past we retired to the bar to drink the Queens health. It was my final flight with the squadron for on 1 July 1953 I had been promoted to Squadron Leader and posted to Air Ministry, London.

I've written a lot about my time on flying boats, for I left the Squadron with great regret as it was the happiest and most rewarding flying appointment of my career. While at Pembroke Dock I had flown Sunderlands to many different countries, taken part in many interesting and exciting operational tasks, loved the life of a flying boat captain and at the end got promoted. On the domestic scene my time at Pembroke Dock was also rewarding for while there I got married and had my first daughter. Altogether a rewarding and interesting period of my service career. So off to Air Ministry, but this time to fly a desk !

Air Ministry, London

I was posted to the Organisation department in the Directorate of Administration Planning with the job title of Organisational Planning 3 (OP3). The job involved maintaining the details of all airfields in regard to their structural suitability for operating various types of aircraft and which units were located on these airfields. A lot of the information was contained on large wall maps which were covered with draw curtains and because the work involved classified information access to our offices was restricted. I was like a fish out of water to start with and must confess that, while I eventually settled down and got on top of the job, I never really liked it. Also I didn't really take to my boss, a Wing Commander in the Administration Branch.

Jimmy Higgins, my old CO, had been promoted to Wing Commander and arrived at Air Ministry a few months after me so we met occasionally for lunch. One of these occasions landed me in an awkward situation for it was the habit of my Director, an Air Commodore, when he went to lunch to always leave the keys to his office with one of the officers in our secure area. This day, I forgot to pass the keys to another officer before I went to lunch, a rather long lunch with Jimmy Higgins, and when I got back my irate Wing Commander advised me that his boss, the Air Commodore, was very upset about being locked out of his office. I have no doubt that this incident was not forgotten by my boss when he filled in my annual confidential report.

While at Air Ministry pilots were expected to avail themselves of any opportunity to maintain their flying proficiency. The nearest unit for Air Ministry was the Communication Flight at Hendon where I got myself checked out on Anson aircraft. Every few months I would get a day off and have a few hours in the air. Rather than just fly around the local area I would often fly to Jersey in the Channel Islands, have lunch and return with a couple of bottle of "duty free"; On several occasions I did this trip with Jimmy Higgins. In April 1954 I returned to Pembroke Dock for 2 weeks for what was called "refresher training" and had 25 hours flying my favourite Sunderland. I looked forward to getting back in the air as it was a pleasant break from the dull routine of organising airfields.

We lived in a RAF hired civilian flat in Enfield, North London for a year but as

it was a bit damp and affecting Carols health we got permission to move to another place in Tottenham, this time to a house near an underground station with reduced the travel time to my office. Around this time I bought one of the cheapest new cars available, a Ford Popular, having sold my little Austin 7 while at Pembroke Dock, so we were mobile once again. While at Tottenham another major family event occurred when our second daughter Anne was born on 30 May 1955 at a Maternity home which had previously been the home of Gracie Fields the famous music hall singer. We weren't without friends while in London for I had an Aunt (my mothers sister) who lived in Palmers Green and a cousin, her daughter, who lived in Waltham Cross, both places very adjacent to Tottenham. We exchanged many visits with each other.

Towards the end of 1955 Maureen wanted to return to Rhodesia to see her parents and show them their first grandchildren so we arranged a return passage by boat and she left in December for a 6 month visit. I moved into RAF Kidbrook, East London, which was the nearest unit for officers working at Air Ministry. I didn't enjoy being separated from my family but I was comforted with the knowledge that my time at Air Ministry was coming to an end.

In June my posting came through and it was to RAF Habbaniya in Iraq to be Officer Commanding Flying Wing. Needless to say I was delighted that it was a flying appointment and an overseas posting. This required me to undergo a two week Jet Refresher course on Vampire aircraft at RAF Oakington which I did in July.



*Vampire Jet Refresher Course
RAF Oakington 1956*

In the meantime Maureen had returned from Rhodesia in early June to be greeted with the unhappy news that she would not be able to accompany me overseas until a Married Quarter was available at my new station. This was a bit of a blow but being part of Service life it had to be accepted. In situations like this the RAF provides accommodation at vacant Married Quarters at temporary inactive stations and we were allocated a Married Quarter at RAF Middleton St. George which was near Darlington in Yorkshire. After the Jet Refresher Course I went on pre-embarkation leave which we spent in Scotland before travelling to our new married quarter in Yorkshire. (When I said farewell to my father then, little did I realize that I would never see him again). I spent a week getting Maureen and the children settled in the new house, drove to London, quickly sold my Ford Popular, jumped on a RAF Transport plane and arrived in Iraq in the middle of September. I often reflect on this period and how unfair the

situation was - me very busy settling into my new post with lots of company and Maureen, living on her own in an unfamiliar area and having to look after two small children.

RAF Staging Post , Habbaniya, Iraq

RAF Habbaniya, located about 60 miles West of Baghdad, was an active airfield before and just after the 2nd World War but by the late forties or early fifties it became a staging post for RAF Heavy Transport aircraft flying between the UK and the Far East. From memory the route was UK - Cyprus - Habbaniya - Ceylon - Singapore. After the Suez crisis in 1956 Syria closed its airspace between Cyprus and Habbaniya so aircraft had to fly via Turkey. While glorifying in the title of OC Flying the only aircraft I had direct control over were 1 Pembroke and 1 Meteor Jet. My primary task was to ensure that the necessary staging and flying facilities for the transiting aircraft were available.



Pembroke RAF Habbaniya, Iraq - 1956 - 1958

The Pembroke was a twin engine Light Transport plane (10 Passengers) used as the station communication aircraft and the Meteor was used mainly by the CO and myself for local flying. The most frequent use of the Pembroke was flying passengers and mail between Habbaniya and Baghdad. The Commanding Officer of the station was Group Captain Hughie Edwards VC, an Australian in the RAF who eventually, when he retired as Air Commodore, became Governor of West Australia.

The base was located beside the Euphrates River and there was plenty of water for irrigation of trees and lawns so the base really was an oasis in the desert. There were plenty of social amenities available for all ranks and many sporting activities catered for. Because of the heat the working day began at 0600 hrs and finished at 1300 hrs so there was plenty of time to pursue leisure activities.

There were two airfields at Habbaniya. The original airfield was controlled by the Iraqi Air Force and the Staging Post airfield, located on a plateau beside Lake Habbaniya, was built and controlled by the RAF. The Iraqi Air Force used the "lower airfield", as it was called, as a Jet training unit (Vampire and Venom aircraft) and had several seconded RAF pilots as instructors. These pilots had no connection with the Staging Post but on a few occasions I helped out by flying their Meteor aircraft towing a target drouge for their air to air firing practice. The co-operation between the two air

forces was part of the Baghdad Pact.

In December 1956 my Instrument Rating was due to be renewed and I had to go to Cyprus to be examined. As it was near Christmas and me being in Cyprus the CO gave me permission to take 2 weeks leave which enabled me to get a return ticket by civil aircraft to London and then onto Middleton St George to have Christmas with my family. It was a most welcome break and I managed to do a bit of shopping for the Group Captain, bringing him back two shirts from his London tailors. It was another 7 months before I was allocated a married quarter and Maureen and the children arrived by Hasings aircraft via Cyprus on a fairly normal 40C day. She said that as she stepped out of the aircraft it was like stepping into an oven. However, she and the children soon settled into their new abode and me to my usual service duties. Apart from flying to many areas within the country occasionally I had to fly to places outside Iraq like Jordan, Bahrain and Aden. I enjoyed these breaks from routine and on one occasion I visited Bahrain with Maureen and the children and met up with Jimmy Higgins who was now the CO of the RAF base there.

One event which got me into a spot of bother was when 3 Venom aircraft were transitting from Aden to Cyprus and night stopped at Habbaniya. Their route to Cyprus required a refuelling stop at Diyabakir in Turkey and although the formation leader was responsible for his own pre-flight briefing, as he was unfamiliar with this airfield and the route, I decided to attend and advise him. About mid morning a call from the Iraqi authorities in Baghdad advised us that they had received information that some aircraft had crashed landed near the Syrian border in northern Iraq. This was later confirmed to be the 3 Venoms. What had happened was that when they reduced altitude for landing at Diyabakir they were unable to find the airfield because of cloud so decided to climb back up and return to Habbaniya. Unfortunately, having let down and spent some time looking for the airfield they had insufficient fuel to make it back to Habbaniya so they tried to divert to Kirkuk, an oilfield airfield North of Habbaniya, but were unsuccessful and running out of fuel, were left with no option but crash land in the desert. The pilots were uninjured but at the subsequent Court of Inquiry the formation leader was held to be responsible for the loss of the aircraft. The Inquiry also found that as the weather forecasters at Habbaniya were uncertain of the conditions at Diyabakir I should have interfered to prevent the flight taking off. It recommended that I be reprimanded. The result was that I had to fly to Cyprus to receive the reprimand from the Air Officer Commanding. I have a suspicion that the AOC (an Irishman) was somewhat sympathetic towards me for after the formalities he invited me to sit down and we had a very pleasant chat about family life in Habbaniya and other generalities.

My job in Habbaniya wasn't very demanding and I had plenty of time to enjoy the social life with Maureen and the two girls. Each married quarter was provided with an Iraqi servant so Maureen had ample opportunity to engage in the camp social life and Carols education was catered for at the station school. Life went along smoothly until March 1958 when I learned of the death of my father, who died on 14 March 1958, but to my regret I was unable to return to Scotland for his funeral. A little later two other events happened. One was pleasant the other not so. The first, a pleasant event, which brought us great joy, was the arrival of our son who was born in the station hospital on 3 July 1958 and whom we named Charles after my father. The second event was an uprising in Iraq in which the pro British government was overthrown and resulted in the removal of the RAF from Iraq.

The end of RAF Habbaniya

On 14th July I went to Flying Wing Headquarters to start the day only to find Iraqi soldiers guarding the building and refusing me entry to my office. It quickly

transpired that the whole base had been taken over by the local Iraqi garrison and that we were locked in. News soon arrived that there had been a coup d'etat in Baghdad during which the King, Faisal 11, had been murdered along with his uncle the Crown Prince and that the Prime Minister Nuri a Said had fled. The coup was carried out by the Ba'ath party whose leader eventually became Saddam Hussein. Later news revealed that the Prime Minister, having fled disguised as a woman, had been caught then murdered and the body of the Prince Regent had been towed naked through the streets of Baghdad behind a Jeep with his genitals secured in his mouth. Other than being denied exit from the base and access to the airfield and certain buildings, the Iraqi soldiers did not interfere with any RAF personnel or their families. The base Armoury and the Communication Centre had been seized and contact with Middle East Air Force Headquarters in Cyprus cut. Later, communication was restored but all traffic was censored.

The Iraqi Brigadier in charge of the soldiers assured the CO that no harm would come to any personnel and that we would have to wait further negotiations. However, Hughie Edwards had a problem. Some of the airmen were becoming restless and were baiting the Iraqi troops, which was a worry, for he had 1200 men women and children to look after, keep safe and keep occupied. After about a week he called a meeting of Department heads and said he was going to hold the annual Garden Fete and that they were to keep their men busy preparing for the event. While initially being a bit skeptical about the idea we soon realised that it was the sensible thing to do and set about the task. Admin Wing had to prepare the venue on the large Sports arena, Tech Wing had to organise the swings, roundabouts, flying fox cables and side shows, and Flying Wing, my job, was to provide suitable venues for refreshments.

I obtained a large Marquee from the Equipment store, rearranged the shape and painted it to look like an English pub and called it the Prince Of Wales Arms. An appropriately large sign was erected with the POW in large letters and the rest in very small letters. A hint of barbed wire in the background finished it off. When the CO inspected our efforts he stood for a minute in front of the sign, gave me a bit of a look, stifled a small grin then walked away. With tables and chairs outside and plenty of refreshments, obtained from the NAAFI stores, ours was a pretty popular venue. In a masterful touch the CO invited the Brigadier and his officers to attend but they declined. However, all afternoon; the Iraqi soldiers were peering out from behind the bushes, no doubt wondering how these stupid British people could be having such a good time - didn't they realize that they were locked up !!

Finally, arrangements were made to allow us to be evacuated by civil aircraft from Baghdad, small groups at a time. The first to go, after about 3 weeks, were those who had been at Habbaniya the longest. My turn came shortly after but not before a rather anxious event arose. When Maureen arrived in Iraq in 1957 her passport had the names of our two daughters on it but of course not that of Charles. Normally his birth would have been notified to the British Embassy and the passport annotated accordingly. But the British Embassy had been burned down in the rebellion, so we had a problem, for we couldn't take our son out of Iraq as he was not on Maureen's passport and we had no proof that he was our son. The Swiss Embassy meantime had taken over the task of looking after British interests and luckily were in possession of the seals and stamps necessary for the certification of official documents. Permission was obtained for an officer to take the hospital certification of birth and the passport into Baghdad and the problem was solved. Our journey into Baghdad by coach was not without problems for we had to pass through a town near the base called Fallujah whose occupants were very hostile and stoned the bus. Unfortunately our aircraft was cancelled so we had to return to Habbaniya that day, ducking more stones. The

following day we repeated the process and finally left Baghdad on a Middle East Airline Vicount and got back to London via Beirut. I didn't realize it at the time but my job in Habbaniya was my last full time flying appointment in the RAF

Headquarters 19 Group, RAF Mountbatten

After a short period of leave in Scotland I completed an Intelligence Course at Air Ministry in London and took up my new appointment which was as Group Intelligence Officer at HQ 19 Group RAF Mountbatten, Plymouth. Fortunately there was a vacant Married Quarter available and we soon settled into our new abode which was at Plymstock a small village just a few miles from the base. RAF Mountbatten overlooked Plymouth Sound and was a most pleasant place to be stationed, being close to beaches and the congenial Devon countryside. Our Married Quarter was large and well furnished and suited our requirements admirably. Altogether a most welcome change from Iraq.

My job was more routine than demanding and I took every opportunity I could get to visit the 19 Group Communication Flight, located nearby, and keep my hand in by flying the Anson aircraft. I also managed to get a month's break from my desk when I attended a Joint Anti Submarine Course at Londonderry in N. Ireland. While on this course I had the opportunity to spend a day on a Royal Navy submarine on an exercise which involved the submarine, while submerged, trying to avoid detection by a searching aircraft. While it was quite an experience to be a submariner for a day I'm glad I joined the Air Force and not the Navy.

While I was not very enthusiastic about my job, from a family point of view it was a very pleasant posting and we enjoyed our two and a bit years near Plymouth and the pleasant Devon countryside. Towards the end of my tour I had an opportunity (unofficial) to speak to the posting branch at Air Ministry and casually mentioned that while my previous posting had been overseas I would be quite happy to have another overseas posting. To my great surprise when my posting came through, not only was it overseas but it was to a location which, if I had been given the chance to select, would have been my first choice. It was to RAF Kia Tak in Hong Kong which at that time was one of the better overseas postings in the RAF. My appointment was to be Officer Commanding Administrative Wing and, while not a flying appointment, it was one which I was happy to receive.

RAF Station Kia Tak, Hong Kong

This time there would be no family separation, for the appointment carried with it an ex-officio married quarter, so Maureen and the children were with me when I embarked on the troopship HMT NEVASSA at Southampton in August 1961. The ship was built as a troopship and carried 1500 service personnel and families. While the term troopship is usually associated with hardship travel, in this case the voyage for us was more like a voyage on a cruise liner, everything first class. What a difference from the troopship I sailed in on my way to Rhodesia in 1942 - six weeks in a hammock below deck. Our stops on the way to Hong Kong were at Naples, Suez, Colombo, Penang and Singapore. When in Naples I had the opportunity to show the family the house I stayed in when there in 1944 and we also climbed to the top of Mount Vesuvius and visited the ruins of Pompeii. While in Singapore I caught up with an old fellow instructor from my days in Rhodesia in 1948 who was serving at Far East HQ. Altogether a most enjoyable 4 week voyage at Government expense.

The airfield at Kia Tak was the main airport for Hong Kong and had been developed by the civil authority after the war. RAF Kia Tak was located adjacent to the main runway which was used by both service and civilian aircraft. The only RAF

aircraft at Kia Tak was a squadron of Venom fighter aircraft which were later replaced by the much more up to date Hunter aircraft. There were a few other non flying units located in the colony for which RAF Kia Tak provided administrative support. Air Force HQ Hong Kong was located on Hong Kong Island itself while Kia Tak was on the mainland at Kowloon. Although it was a non flying appointment OC Administrative Wing was a demanding job and I relished the task and thoroughly enjoyed the challenge. The fact that there was a flying unit on the Base, No 28 Squadron, was a bonus, for I had the opportunity to fly both the Venom and the Vampire aircraft although not quite as often as I would have wished.



Venom RAF KAI TAK, Hong Kong - 1961 - 1964

About 30 mins drive from the base there was a small boating harbour called Hebe Haven where I had a small 5 meter boat built which was powered by an outboard engine. We spent many enjoyable weekends sailing to nearby islands which had lovely swimming beaches. Unfortunately the boat, named Shoofiti, was destroyed by a typhoon which I will mention later. I had another boat built (Shoofiti 2) at the insurers expense and we continued our pleasant sailings. The name Shoofiti was Arabic for "have a look" which we did a lot of while in Hong Kong.

Two events occurred which resulted in the deaths of two members of the base. One was the death of a pilot of 28 Sqn who inexplicably crashed into a hillside in good weather in his Venom aircraft. The other was a young airman when he was taking part in the annual Round the Island foot race between the Services. This was a marathon run over a long hilly course and in this case during hot weather. The young lad collapsed and died on a hillside from dehydration.

Typhoon Wanda

Being somewhat isolated there was no place for unmarried personnel to go to when they had leave. This mainly affected the young airmen who would spend their time in down town Kowloon or on the Island and the dubious attractions they offered. I got permission from the CO to set up a campsite on one of the remote seaside spots where the men could spend a few days swimming and fishing in the more healthy atmosphere of the outdoors. The marine craft section was used to transport the men and supplies between the base and the campsite. The site chosen was near an old deserted stone building with no roof and because of the intervening hills communication with the camp had to be via a radio link with a Signals unit located high on a hillside near Kia Tak.

On Saturday 1 September a devastating Typhoon named Wanda swept down on Hong Kong with extremely high and destructive winds which gusted to 140 knots. Being a Saturday both the CO and myself were at home but decided the situation required us to be on hand to deal with any problems should they arise. We managed to get to the base before conditions prevented any outside travel. Later when inspecting the base in a car the conditions became so dangerous, with flying sheets of corrugated iron, that we had to retreat to the Headquarters building for safety. There was not much anyone could do except seek shelter indoors. The storm lasted well into the night and it was not until the next morning that we were able to make an assessment of the damage. While quite a bit of damage had been done it was not as severe as expected and the base got off lightly compared to the rest of the colony which suffered severely. There was tremendous damage to property, 130 people killed and over 600 injured. 20 small ships were also driven ashore.

My immediate concern was the fate of our 6 airmen on the campsite for we had had no communication from them. It was decided to send the Mountain Rescue Team, led by the station doctor, to make contact. As the route was over rugged terrain it took the team several hours to reach the camp but when they radioed their findings it was devastating news. All six airmen were dead. They were found under the collapsed walls of the stone building where they had sought shelter after their tents had been blown away. The resulting Court of Inquiry found that the deaths of the airmen was due to an accident caused by a severe weather event. The bodies of the airmen were returned to the UK. The wrath of Nature can result in terrible events and the words of Robert Burns might seem appropriate in this case when he said "The best laid schemes o' mice and men Gang aft agley" (Go often wrong).

Leaving Hong Kong

In 1961 while at HQ 19 Group in Plymouth I had been advised that I would be retiring at the age of 43 which was then the retiring age for a Squadron Leader in the GD(Pilot) Branch, unless selected for promotion to higher rank. I obviously was not being considered for further promotion - my unhappy posting at Air Ministry and the loss of the 3 aircraft in Iraq didn't help - so, before I left Kia Tak I received my final appointment in the RAF which was to be Operations 2 at HQ 18 Group, RAF Pitreavie Castle in Scotland.

I was sorry to leave RAF Kia Tak for it was one of the best posting in my RAF career. I was happy in my job and had a great social life and which my family also enjoyed. So in June 1964 back to the UK in a chartered aircraft, operated by Eagle Airways.

HQ 18 Group, Coastal Command, RAF Pitreavie Castle

As usual a new posting involved the usual problem of domestic issues; housing, schools for the children and getting settled after an overseas posting being some of the things. Fortunately we were able to stay in my sister's house for a few weeks while I negotiated the purchase of a house in Dunfermline. This was done fairly quickly, as in Scotland house purchase and mortgage is done through a solicitor, so when my leave ended we were settled in the house before I went back to work. This was the first house we had ever owned so it was with great excitement that we took possession. We bought the house from Jock Stein who was the manager of Dunfermline Athletic Football Club and who was moving to take up the job of manager of a more famous Scottish Football Club, Glasgow Celtic. The house was a fairly new bungalow style house which we partly furnished with items of furniture we had bought in Hong Kong. Once the children were enrolled in local schools in Dunfermline I was ready to

take up my new appointment.

The job was fairly routine and not nearly as satisfying as my previous appointment in Kia Tak, however it still enabled me to keep my hand in at flying as there was an Air Experience Flight (for Air Training Corps Cadets) at Turnhouse, the civil airport for Edinburgh. The aircraft were Chipmunks, a low wing 2 seat light aircraft and I spent a lot of time giving the cadets air experience. At one point I did manage to free myself from my desk when the CO of RAF Macrihanish, a small holding unit near Campbelltown on the Mull of Kintyre, wanted to take leave and I took over his job for 2 weeks. This was a nice break for I took Maureen and the children with me and they had two weeks at the seaside.

As retirement was looming I had to think of the future and what I was going to do. I still wanted to fly so I decided to get my Commercial Pilots Licence and try my luck in Civil Aviation. I had obtained my Civil Private Pilots Licence in 1965 and in early 1966 went to an Aviation school near Perth to sit the ground subjects for the Commercial Licence - Navigation, Aviation Law, Meteorology, Flight Planning, Radio Aids. I passed these subjects but had to have a flight test. I did this on a Chipmunk with an examiner and obtained my Commercial Licence just before I retired. I now had to obtain a job and I applied for two. One was with the BOAC and BEA flight training school at Hamble nr Southampton, staffed mainly by ex RAF Flying Instructors. I had an interview and was told I would be contacted later. I also applied for a job as First Officer on Vicount aircraft with BEA and after submitting my details was advised that they would accept me but the chances of promotion to Captain were unlikely because of my age I didn't fancy sitting in the co-pilots seat for years to come so I turned this down.

A few days before my 43rd birthday I was "Dined Out" of the RAF at a Dinner held in the Officers Mess and on 11th August 1966 I finally retired from the RAF after 25 years service, having enlisted on 9 September 1941. During those 25 years I had served in Europe, the Middle East, Far East, Africa and Greenland and during that time had experienced many high points and many low points but it was a great venture and I certainly had no regrets in joining and remaining in the RAF for those years. Now to continue my story.

About 2 weeks into my retirement I was reading the Sunday Express when I saw an advert about the Royal Australian Air Force "wanting pilots up to the age of 43" and offering them a 4 year Short Service Commission. I discussed this with Maureen and as she had no objection I replied and 2 weeks later I was at Australian House in London being interviewed. I had previously given the RAAF permission to access my RAF Service documents so the interview panel knew my Service history. They advised me that should I be accepted I might have to serve a tour of duty in Viet Nam. I replied that while I would not volunteer, if I was posted there I would of course go. About 3 weeks later I was advised that I had been accepted and given the choice of proceeding to Australia by air or by sea. I chose the latter. In the meantime I had received a 'phone call from the Flight Training School at Hamble offering me the flying instructors job which, of course, I couldn't accept.

With the gratuity from my Service in the RAF I settled the loan on the house and had no trouble in selling it, making a slight profit in the process. We sold some of our furniture and the remainder of our possessions were packed for uplift and transportation to Australia by the RAAF. All our travel costs were provided by the RAAF. After our farewells to all the family in Scotland we left Glasgow on 31 October 1966 for Southampton via London. I had to report to Australia House to officially join the RAAF and on 1 November I became Flight Lieutenant Cassels, RAAF (0316966). and posted to RAAF Base Richmond. That afternoon we travelled to Southampton and sailed on the P & O liner ORIANA.

Voyage to Australia

As a family we were no strangers to a long sea voyage and we soon settled down to life aboard. Maureen and I shared a large two room cabin with Anne and Charles and Carol was in a separate cabin with another girl. The voyage took 3 weeks calling at Naples, through the Suez Canal to Colombo then onto Australia calling at Fremantle, Melbourne and disembarking in Sydney. After 3 weeks by boat and 90 minutes by car we finally arrived at our destination, Richmond, a town 70 kilometres NW of Sydney where the RAAF had booked us into a hotel.

AUSTRALIA

RAAF Base Richmond - 38 Squadron



Caribou 1966 - 1970
38 SQN - RAAF Richmond
35 SQN - Vung Tau Vietnam

I was posted to the training flight of No. 38 Squadron for conversion onto Caribou aircraft which was a twin engine, short takeoff and landing aircraft built by de Havilland of Canada. After conversion I began operational duties with 38 Squadron which mainly involved tactical air support to Army operations within Australia. The Squadron also had a detachment based in Port Moresby in New Guinea which provided air support for the Government of New Guinea. I spent 2 months in New Guinea, which, because of the mountainous terrain and weather conditions in that part of the world, I considered it to be a very dangerous place to fly. With the limited radio aids on the Caribou at that time, we avoided clouds like the plague. Flying in 38 Squadron was never dull or routine, there were many detachments to various parts of Australia, the downside being the many weeks spent away from home. In April 1970 there was one 3 month detachment overseas which I enjoyed. This was to West Kalimantan, the Indonesian part of Borneo, and at a place called Pontianak which was located right on the equator. The task was to support the Australian Army Survey team which was mapping the area for the Indonesian Government and involved us making frequent trips to Singapore, a 3 hour flight away to the RAF base at Changi. Our living conditions were rather spartan (Army style), being a tented camp near the airfield, so the trips to Singapore were a welcome break and I must confess that we contrived, as much as possible, to make them a night stop, staying at RAF Changi and exploring Singapore. An interesting detachment

When Prince Charles and his sister Anne visited Australia in 1970 he wanted to pay a visit to his old school at Mansfield and 38 Sqn had to fly them from Melbourne

to a small airstrip near his school (30 min flight) As on these occasions everything has to have back- ups so two aircraft were tasked so that in the event of the lead aircraft having engine problems and failing to start the passengers are immediately transferred to the back-up aircraft. Both aircraft were provisioned with identical refreshments - sandwiches, drinks etc. I was flying the back-up aircraft but as there was no problem I didn't get to fly the Royals. On return to Melbourne the catering staff removed all the drinks from the aircraft (lots of miniature bottles of alcohol) but left the sandwiches. On the way back to Richmond the other aircraft called me to ask how we were doing and we told them that we were having a great time eating the royal sandwiches.

35 Squadron - Vietnam

In August 1968 my posting to No. 35 Sqn in Vietnam came through but the CO told me that if I wished he would arrange for someone else to go. I told him what I had said at my interview in London, i.e. that if I was posted I would go. Fortunately in July I had bought a block of land and was having a house built so Maureen and the children would be settled in a permanent home before I left. Up to this point I think Maureen had been a bit unsettled with our move to Australia but was happy now that she was in her own home. We moved into the house in mid September and I only had 2 weeks to clear away the builders rubble and make some sort of garden before I left for Vietnam. While leaving the family was a bit of a wrench I was happy that Maureen had her new home to organise and that the children were settled in their new schools. I mentioned the making of a garden, in fact there was little I did and it was Maureen who undertook that task and she did a great job of it on her own.



176 Francis St, Richmond

My appointment on the squadron was as Flight Commander and I soon settled into the job. The Squadron operated as part of a United States Air Force Transport Wing and we were tasked by that formation. The tasks involved flying set routes carrying military personnel and supplies to various units throughout the Mekong Delta and other parts of southern Vietnam. A lot of our time was spent carrying fuel for helicopters operating in the more remote operational areas. The fuel was carried in 44 gallon drums and while this was a highly volatile load when they were full, it was even more so when they were empty and we were conveying the drums back to source. I didn't like flying with a load of empty drums full of fuel vapour! While there was no enemy aircraft to contend with, care had to be taken when flying into and out of remote

air strips, for the VietCong (VC), the enemy, would often target low flying aircraft with rifle fire. While on the ground the aircraft were particularly vulnerable to VC attack. One aircraft was totally destroyed when hit by a mortar attack. Another received a near miss and although damaged managed to immediately take off, however the damage to the hydraulic lines meant that the wheels could not be retracted and finding more damage when airborne the aircraft had to land at the nearest major airfield. On another occasion a pilot was wounded when just after take off a rifle bullet entered the cockpit ricocheted off the nose wheel steering control and struck the pilot on the cheek.

The tour of duty in Vietnam was 12 months with one weeks leave back in Australia, half way through the tour. This was a welcome break and most appreciated by all. We also had the opportunity to occasionally take a Caribou to the RAAF Base at Butterworth in Malaya (a 4 hour flight) to perform a Compass Swing on the aircraft. This provided a week-end break of 4 days to relax in a pleasant environment and I managed to do this twice. It was during my tour in Vietnam that I applied to transfer to the Administrative Branch for I knew that when my 4 year Short Service Commission in the General Duties (Flying) Branch ended in August 1970 my flying days would be over and I would be retired at the age of 47. I had no desire to seek employment in civilian life and wished to remain in the service, using the experience I had gained in my Administrative appointments in the RAF. Much to my relief I was granted a Permanent Commission in the Administration Branch wef 12 August 1970.

While in Vietnam I flew 880 hours (1499 Operational Sorties) without incident, which was in complete contrast to my previous period in a war zone when I flew 31 hours (30 Operational Sorties) on Spitfires in Italy with 1 very major incident (described earlier). My tour of duty in Vietnam ended in August when I was posted back to No. 38 Squadron at Richmond, much to the relief of myself and my family. Later, in March 1970, I was awarded a Mention-In-Despatches for my service in Vietnam. This came as a bit of a surprise for as far as I was concerned all I did was my job.

No. 38 Squadron

On return to Richmond and after a spot of leave I resumed normal flying duties in September and spent the next 10 months on routine tasks and various detachments including the 3 months overseas detachment to Indonesia in April – June 1970. But my flying days were coming to a close and my final flight was from Broken Hill to Richmond on 10 August 1970. On 11 August, my 47th Birthday, I took up my new appointment as Admin 1 at No. 2 Aircraft Depot and my flying days were over.

No. 2 Aircraft Depot, Richmond

No 2 AD was a unit which provided major technical support to the flying squadrons based at Richmond. The senior Administration Officer was a Wing Commander who was my boss. My job of Admin 1 was akin to that of an Adjutant and it didn't take long to settle in although I found the job a bit boring, particularly compared to my previous flying appointments. However it was a job and I had a family to support. At that stage I still had not returned my flying clothing, so one morning I donned my flying overalls, my flying gloves and flying helmet (Bone Dome) and sat at my desk to await the arrival of the Wing Commander. To his question "What the bloody hell are you doing Jock", I replied that I was "flying my desk". Being ex aircrew himself (Navigator) he saw the funny side and after a good laugh suggested that maybe it was now time to return my flying gear to the Equipment Store. As I said the job was somewhat boring and routine and I was glad when nearly a year later, and quite out of the blue, on 19 July 1971 I was posted to Base Squadron Richmond

Base Squadron, Richmond

My appointment was Admin 1, with duties similar to those I had at 2 AD but with a little more variety, so it didn't take much effort to settle in. The good point about this posting was that, like my move from 38 Sqn, I remained at Richmond so there was no disruption to my family and the children's schooling. While at Base Squadron I sat the 'C' examination which was a requirement for promotion to Squadron Leader. This bore fruits for on 27 November 1972 I was promoted to Sqn. Ldr and posted to Headquarters Support Command in Melbourne to take up an appointment in the Air Force Recruiting Office.

Headquarters Support Command, Melbourne

My task within the Recruiting Office was to run a small team responsible for visiting Secondary Schools, to give lectures and presentations on life in the RAAF and the many opportunities available in the various trades, both on the ground and in the air. It was an interesting job, but still a desk job, although I did have the opportunity to get out of the office quite often. The big snag was that I had to leave my family in Richmond because of the children's schooling, and I found the separation from my family quite trying. I lived in the Officers Mess at RAAF base Tottenham, a non flying base about 20 minutes drive from my office in HQ Support Command, and commuted daily by a bus provided by the Service. I decided that I would go home every week-end, in spite of the distance involved (600 miles), rather than live a complete bachelors existence. It was an overnight journey, leaving Melbourne by a COBB & CO coach at 19 00 hours, but I didn't travel all the way to Sydney; I got off the bus at Camden, (30 minutes drive from Richmond) where Maureen would meet me in the car. I would arrive home about 10 o'clock, have Saturday night at home and on Sunday afternoon Maureen would drive me back to Camden where I would catch the overnight bus to Melbourne. While sleeping at the back of a bus, or trying to, for 2 nights every week was hardly an ideal situation, I accepted it, for my week-ends at home were important to me. Occasionally I managed to get a lift to Richmond by a Service aircraft on a Friday afternoon, but not very often and never from Richmond back to Melbourne.

I can't say I enjoyed my time at HQSC, mainly because of the separation, and it was with great relief that in April 1974, and after 17 months in Recruiting, I was posted to RAAF Headquarters in Canberra to take up the post of Commanding Officer Headquarters Support Unit.

Department of Air, Canberra (DEFAIR)

Being posted to Canberra was a great relief as it meant that I was only a 3 hour drive from home and I could spend every week-end with my family without having to endure two 12 hour bus journeys to do so. The adjacent RAAF station at Fairbairn provided accommodation for unaccompanied members at DEFAIR so I moved into the Officers Mess at Fairbairn and continued my separation,

My duties were similar to the ones I had when I was OC Administration Wing at RAF Kia Tak in Hong Kong so I had no difficulty in settling in. While at Canberra I was attached to RAAF base Point Cook for 5 days to attend a short course in Air Force Law. At this stage, having spent over 32 years in the Air Force, and having served in command positions in the RAF, I considered this unnecessary. I didn't learn anything new but it was a break from routine. After I had been in the job for 12 months I found out that a friend of mine, who was the CO of the Operational Command Headquarters Unit at RAAF Glenbrook, near Penrith, was shortly retiring from the RAAF. RAAF Glenbrook was only 20 minutes drive from my home so I took advantage of the fact that

I worked adjacent to the Officers Postings Branch at DEPAIR and let it be known (unofficially) that I would love that job. My lobbying paid off, for in July 1975 I was posted to RAAF Glenbrook to be CO of the Operational Headquarters Unit. At last the separation from my family was over.

Headquarters Operational Command, RAAF Glenbrook

As I have said, HQOC at RAAF Glenbrook was only 20 minutes drive from Richmond, so after nearly 3 years I could at last live at home and drive daily to work. Needless to say I was delighted with this posting and the prospect of living a more normal life, particularly as I was approaching retirement. The job was similar to that which I had in Canberra in that I was CO of a unit providing Administrative support to a Command Headquarters which in this case commanded all the Operational aircraft in the RAAF ie. Fighter, Bomber, Maritime and Transport aircraft. The Headquarters was located in a large building which had in previous years been a Hotel (The Lapstone Hotel) and the rooms had been converted into offices. My unit was housed in huts adjacent to the main building. While serving at Department of Air in Canberra civilian clothes were worn but at OPCOM Headquarters I felt I was back in a Service environment, as uniform was worn while on duty and I held a unit colour hoisting parade once every month. I enjoyed my time at OPCOM Unit, for while the work was fairly routine it had its interesting moments but the big bonus was being able to live at home. While at Glenbrook the Air Officer Commanding Air Vice Marshal Robey visited Lord Howe Island to open a memorial to the crew of a Catalina Flying Boat which just after the war, crashed into a hill when attempting a landing in the islands lagoon. He himself had previously flown Catalina's and knowing I had been a flying boat pilot he gave favourable consideration to my request to accompany him. We flew to Lord Howe by a Caribou aircraft and over the week-end, when the Ceremony was over, I had the opportunity to explore this isolated island in the Pacific.

During my time at HQ OPCOM Unit there was a change of the Air Officer Commanding and AVM Robey was replaced by AVM Adams known in the Air Force as "Bay Adams". This was the second time I had served under Bay Adams when, as a Group Captain, he was the Base Commander at Vung Tau in Vietnam while I was on 35 Squadron. He flew fighter aircraft during the 2nd World War so we had something in common and we spent many evenings chatting over a beer. At that time, if my memory serves me correctly, I think we were the only RAAF pilots at Vung Tau who had served during the second world war. I was the Flight Commander on 35 Sqn. and quite often had to make sure that I included "Bay" on the flying programme. On one trip I made to Butterworth (Malaya) he insisted being on the crew as co-pilot but it was he who did all the piloting while I did the navigating. He was being treated for Gout at that time but it didn't deter him and we had a very pleasant time in Penang.

It was while I was at HQ OPCOM that my daughter Anne got married and I requested permission from the President of the Officers Mess Committee (PMC) to hold the reception in the Officers Mess. It was on 10th September 1978 and being a Saturday there was little normal activity in the Mess so the PMC gave me approval to liaise with the Mess Sergeant to arrange the function, with the stipulation that there was to be no confetti showers at the Mess entrance when the married couple departed. The Mess Sergeant and staff provided a first class function, with band, and the guests, including the PMC, were most impressed. It was with pleasure that I settled the bill, making sure that Confetti was not on the menu. No doubt when the Mess was the Lapstone Hotel it was the scene of many similar functions.

Prior to discharge in the RAAF members were given 28 days resettlement leave during which they could attend a course of training to facilitate their transition to

civilian life. As I planned to do some renovations to my home and to gain some building experience I elected to work with the builder who had built my house in Richmond. He of course was only too pleased to have an “apprentice” for a month at no cost. I was due to retire from the RAAF on my 55th Birthday (11 Aug 1978) but was asked to delay my retirement until January 1979 to fit in with the RAAF promotions and postings schedule, which normally took place at the end of the year. I agreed to this and I was formally discharged on retirement on 15 January 1979. Thus ended my Air Force career which had begun on 9th September 1941. A career of 37years and 4 months.

RETIREMENT

While I had been serving in Vietnam I had saved a bit of money and on return I purchased the adjacent block of land and extended the house. Later, when I did retire, I had a further extension built by my builder, and under his supervision I worked on this extension. Boldened by my building activities I went solo and added two verandas to the house and my final effort was when I designed and built a family room with the help of Carols husband Derek. The garden of course took up a fair time of my retirement and under the supervision of Maureen, a knowledgeable gardener, we did quite a bit of landscaping. However, grass cutting and digging holes was my main contribution. Travel was high on the retirement agenda and we made several trips to the UK (mainly Scotland) and Europe. On one visit to Germany I managed to visit Stalag 7 at Luckenwald, the camp which the Russians over-ran and from where I ended my POW days. Unfortunately I had to view it from a distance and only managed to see a few of the huts but little of the camp as I knew it. Our travels also took us to many other parts of the world – North and South America, China and several countries in South East Asia and the Pacific. Needless to say we have spent quite some time exploring Australia by train, plane, bus and caravan and still have many parts to see.

Conclusion

I'm ashamed to say that this narrative of the events in my life has taken several years to complete. Originally my only intention was to put on record my knowledge of the family tree for the benefit of future generations but I then realised that as I was the link between the old family in Scotland and the new family in Australia a more detailed explanation would be required. That link was of course the Air Force, or rather two Air Forces. It is now June 2015 and it is time to investigate how I can get it turned into a small book before the 92 year old computer between my ears gives up. Finally let me say that my career in the two Air Forces was one of fulfilment, travel and excitement, with both good times and bad times, but a career I am glad I experienced and over which I have no regrets.



RAF
1941 - 1966

RAAF
1966 - 1979