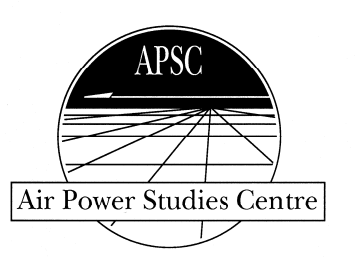
1997 RAAF HERITAGE AWARD WINNER

# SKYLARKS

## THE LIGHTER SIDE OF LIFE IN THE RAAF IN WORLD WAR II

ERIC BROWN

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# DEDICATION

I dedicate this book firstly to all those fellow RAAF members whose sense of fun in the face of the fearful odds of survival provided the material for this book, especially to those who, as we say ‘flew on’, but left their memories with us survivors. Secondly I wish to thank wholeheartedly my wife Margaret, son Paul and daughter Dianne for their constructive advice and encouragement on the book over the past five years.

**Eric Brown**

# FOREWORD

**AIR MARSHAL SIR JAMES ROWLAND AC KBE DFC AFC KSTJ**
**[CAS 1975 - 1979, GOVERNOR OF NEW SOUTH WALES 1981-1989]**

A few weeks ago, on holiday with my wife, I traversed the Kiel Canal in a ship from the Baltic to the Elbe estuary. The weather was glorious - cloudless and blue - and the lush green fields and forests on each side a sight to behold. Every now and then we passed a citizen fishing from the bank, or a bunch of kids frolicking in the water, as peaceful a summer scene as you could wish for.

I couldn't help thinking of the last time I passed that way, more than half a century earlier. Kiel was the target on our first Op as a crew - (I'd done a second-dickie trip to Frankfurt which I hadn't thought habit-forming) - and we were to go in early, about H-3 to provide flak support for the Master Bomber. The weather had been pretty mediocre all the way from England but cleared near Heligoland, which gave us a few welcoming ack ack bursts and a good pinpoint as we passed. They must have alerted their mates since things warmed up considerably as we crossed Schleswig-Holstein and ran in to bomb. Then a searchlight found and held us, then another, then another. The light was blinding: I couldn't see a thing. Head down to try to follow the instruments - must keep it straight and level. I remembered having seen an aircraft coned over Frankfurt, struggling like a giant spotlit moth in a spider web as the flak bursts closed on him. Then 'Steady ... steady ...' said my bomb aimer, when steady was the last thing I felt. After what seemed an eternity he called 'Bombs gone; bomb doors closed'. These were the sweetest words of all! Let's head for home.

One thing about the dear old Lancaster was that it would forgive sprog pilots doing the most outrageous things to it, and would even bring them home with quite large bits shot off it. So I gave it full throttle, stick forward, full rudder, full aileron, then reverse as the controls took effect. After what seemed an age of twisting and dodging, we finally lost the searchlights and set about the business of finding our way home, thinking that was enough for one night. But 'Hughie' wasn't finished with us yet. Climbing up into the cloud we soon ran into an eery violet flickering glow which none of us had ever seen before. The propellers were circles of pale fire, and little flames like those of the brandy on a Christmas pudding ran around the windscreen and along the guns of the front turret. Reaching for the throttles, my fingers drew a blue spark six inches long. 'Must be St. Elmo's Fire' said the Navigator, safe behind his blackout curtain. And then the hail started, hammering on the windscreen before my nose with a demented roar that precluded communication; then the lightning struck. 'Steer 277, I said', complained the Navigator. But it was all I could do to keep it right side up, let alone point it in the right direction!
After another eternity we suddenly broke out into a brilliant moonless night, the cloud far below shimmering in the starlight. I could see the instruments again, so switched

off the panel lights as I regained course 277, and recovered my breath and composure. ‘Watch out for fighters’, said the Navigator. ‘This is just where we’ll find them.’ I was more concerned that they would find us! But the remainder of the trip home was uneventful.

‘Did you have a good trip?’ enquired my friend David sleepily as I got back to our Nissen hut. We did. We had walked away from another one.

I suppose thousands of us could tell similar tales about squadron life, for this sort of thing, and much more hairy ones, happened most nights. In between we trained, we went down to the village pub and got to know the locals, we partied in the Mess, and if we were lucky every six weeks we had six days off - I used to go down to London. But Ops for most of us represented quite a small proportion of the time between when we joined the RAAF and our demobilisation. Someone once said ‘War is composed of long periods of boredom punctuated by moments of sheer terror’, though in our case the aeroplane itself and the weather made sure that the periods of boredom weren’t too long by providing the odd fright now and again!

This book of stories - in effect unofficial history - records just some of the many humorous off-duty ways that many of the RAAF used to relieve this boredom in that greater part of our time when we weren’t on duty.

Eric was a participant in the so-called ‘*Aquitania Mutiny’* and so writes from personal experience, but all the other events are the actual experiences of those who contributed the stories. In these, Eric sees his role essentially as a facilitator and editor. Though I have no reason to doubt the stories I have no way of checking them and can take no responsibility for their veracity, but I can say you are likely to be amazed at some of the things that did happen and I am sure you will enjoy reading about them.

# CONTENTS

# PREFACE

Several years ago the RAAF Association's *Wings* magazine published my account of the 'Great *Aquitania* Mutiny' at Cape Town, which occurred when I was returning on that ship from England after World War II. Wanting to balance my coverage with some authoritative reports of the event I wrote to all the relevant Australian and British authorities and was quite astounded to receive answers from all of them saying, in as many words, *'no information is held on the subject'*. (This is detailed in the story). All this despite the event being headline news in all the Cape Town papers for three days and also receiving minor reporting in the London and Sydney media.

Extracts from this story have recently been published in the *Northern Star* Lismore and the *Sunday Mail* Brisbane. These brought in letters from over 100 RAAF members who were also on the ship, confirming their similar experiences plus similar support from a number of residents of Cape Town with whom I have since corresponded.

Obviously then there is much that happened in the war that does not (and perhaps could not) appear in the official histories. This started me gathering accounts of many other unofficial but equally true and frequently significant events that should be told for the record and also to account for just some of probably 4/5ths or more of our time when we weren't fighting the Hun or the Jap.

I have omitted or dealt only in passing with actual operations against the enemy - the serious business of war. These have been covered in great detail in numerous excellent books, some of which were written by well-known authors who have also contributed lighter items for this collection.

Terrible as wars are they leave behind them a legacy of friendships, shared experiences and memories which can be more vivid than those of any other period in one's life.

As for the frequent reference to grog in these stories, John Dryden wrote over 300 years ago, 'Drinking is the soldier's pleasure; sweet is that pleasure after pain'. And is it any different today? It is appropriate to quote here from the Foreword to Guy Gibson VC's famous book *Enemy Coast Ahead,* written by Marshal of the RAF Sir Arthur Harris, Bart GCB OBE AFC LLd. 'Butch' Harris (as he was known to us) wrote:

> ... it may well be that references to parties and drunks will give rise to criticism and even bursts of unctuous rectitude. I do not attempt to excuse them, if only because I entirely approve of them. In any case the 'drunks' were mainly on near-beer and with high, rather than potent, spirits. Remember that these crews, shining youth on the threshold of life, lived under circumstances of considerable strain. They were in fact - and they knew it - daily faced with death, probably in one of its least pleasant forms ...

Finally I should like to point out that some 40 per cent of the contributors of these stories were awarded decorations for outstanding service in the line of duty.

To anyone who has a good story that I've missed, may I say please send it in. I will add it to others that were too late for publication with the view of a possible Skylarks Mark II.

Meanwhile I hope that this collection will go a small way to revealing the other *off-duty* and lighter side of RAAF life in a time of war.

To everyone who sent in stories I offer grateful thanks and have acknowledged them by name in the stories. Virtually all these items are published here for the first time. However some other stories, generously contributed by published authors, were extracted from their books as being appropriate for this collection. To each of them I give a special thank you and have pleasure in listing their books:

Colin Badham,
*Biscay to Balikpapan*

H.M. 'Nobby' Blundell,
*They Flew From Waddington*
*Friends On Active Service*
*467-463 Squadrons RAAF*

Don Charlwood,
*No Moon Tonight*
*Journeys Into Night*
*Take Off to Touch Down*
*Marching as to War*

Dan Conway,
*Trenches in the Sky*

Bill Dossett,
*Flying Memories*
*The Battle of Britain*

Sid Finn,
*Dark Blue*

Peter Firkins,
*Strike and Return*

Alex Gould,
*Tales From the Sagan Woods*

T. 'Bronco' Johnson,
*Before We Topple*

Syd Johnson,
*It's Never Dark Above the Clouds*

Ron Mayhill,
*Bombs On Target*

Robert Nielsen,
*With the Stars Above*

Spencer Philpott,
*Once Was Enough*

Tom Scotland,
*Voice From the Stars*
*After Voice From the Stars* (with Laurel Scotland)

Keith Smith,
*World War II Wasn't All Hell*

J. Eric Brown
Goonellabah 1997

## CONTRIBUTORS

Fred Adams
Col Badham, DFC
Nobby Blundell, OAM MID
Don Charlwood, AM
Lila Clark
Jack Collins
Keith ‘Skitchy’ Day
Frank Dick
Bill Dossett, DFM
David Drury, DFM
Noel Dwyer
Peter Firkins
Eric Germain
Doug Gordon
Alex Gould, DFC
John Grigsby
Frank Griggs, DFC* DFM
Peter Hummerston, RFD
Peter Isaacson, AM DFC AFC DFM
Os Johnson
Sandy Johnson
Syd Johnson, DFC* VM (Pol)
Ian Kirkby
Hep Klemm
John LeCornu
John Leeuwin-Clark
Bill Lewis
Harley Marks
Ron Mayhill, DFC
Tom Moore
Nev Morrison
Lloyd Mortlock
Mick Murphy
Allan Nesbitt
Bob Nielsen, DFM
Tom Noon, DFC GCofM (Pol)
Peter O’Connor, MC (Pol)
Tom Offord, RFD
Bill Pearce
Spencer ‘Flip’ Philpott
Tom Scotland, DFC
Jim Sharp DFC
Bill Shrubb
Ken Stone
John Toland
Reg Towner
Jack Van Emden
Allan Vial, DFC OAM OPR (Pol)
Ron Vidler
Mike Wallace
Viv Walsh
Keith Watson, OAM

* Bar to decoration

# GLOSSARY

| | |
|---|---|
| Adjutant | Staff Officer assisting CO |
| Airacobra | Single-engine fighter |
| AFC | Air Force Cross (officers) |
| AFM | Air Force Medal (non-commissioned) |
| AG | Air Gunner |
| AIF | Australian Imperial Force |
| ANGAU | Australia/New Guinea Admin. Unit |
| ANU | Australian National University |
| AO | Administration Officer |
| AOC | Air Officer Commanding |
| ASI | Air Speed Indicator |
| Aldis | Signal Lamp |
| AWL | Absent Without Leave |
| BA | Bomb Aimer |
| BAGS | Bombing and Gunnery School |
| Beaufort | 2-engine bomber |
| Beaufighter | 2-engine fighter-bomber |
| Blue Orchid | Derogatory term for RAAF air crew |
| Catalina | 2-engine flying boat |
| CAS | Chief of the Air Staff |
| CB | Confined to Barracks |
| CGM | Conspicuous Gallantry Medal |
| CO | Commanding Officer |
| Cookie | 4,000 pound bomb |
| CPO | Chief Petty Officer (Navy) |
| Dakota | C-47 or DC-3, 2-engine transport plane |
| DFC | Distinguished Flying Cross (officers) |
| DFM | Distinguished Flying Medal (non-commissioned) |
| Drogue | Fabric cone air gunnery target |
| DSO | Distinguished Service Order |
| DF | Direction Finding |
| EATS | Empire Air Training Scheme |
| ED | Embarkation Depot |
| EFTS | Elementary Flying Training School |
| ENSA | British forces entertainment unit |
| Erk | Derogatory term for an ordinary airman |
| ETA | Estimated Time of Arrival |
| Fairey Battle | Single-engine bomber |
| FE | Flight Engineer |
| Flack | Anti-Aircraft bursts |
| Gee | A radio navigation system |
| Good Griff/Gen | The right information |
| Halifax | 4-engine bomber |
| Happy Valley | The Ruhr |

| | |
|---|---|
| HCU | Heavy Conversion Unit |
| Hurricane | Single-engine fighter |
| IO | Intelligence Officer |
| ITS | Initial Training School |
| KIA | Killed in Action |
| Kite | An aircraft |
| Kittyhawk | Single-engine fighter |
| LAC | Leading Aircraftman |
| Lancaster/Lanc | 4-engine bomber |
| Liberator/Lib | 4-engine bomber |
| Line Shoot | A fictitious or exaggerated claimed exploit |
| Maggie | Miles Magister training aircraft |
| Matilda | A military tank |
| MHDOIF | Most Highly Derogatory Order of the Irremovable Finger |
| Mitchell | 2-engine bomber |
| MTB | Motor Torpedo Boat (Navy) |
| MP | Military Police |
| NCO | Non-Commissioned Officer |
| Nav | Navigator |
| OBE | Order of the British Empire |
| Oboe | A radio navigation system |
| OIC/OC | Officer in Command |
| Ops | Operations (= Missions (US)) |
| OTU | Operational Training Unit |
| Pitot (head) | Intake for Air Speed Indicator |
| PL | Plain language |
| PFF | Path Finder Force |
| PTI | Physical Training Instructor |
| POW | Prisoner of War |
| QDM | Request magnetic direction home |
| Queen Bee | The Head WAAF on a station |
| RAF | Royal Air Force |
| RAAF | Royal Australian Air Force |
| RAN | Royal Australian Navy |
| RCAF | Royal Canadian Air Force |
| RIMU | Radio Installation & Maintenance Unit |
| RN | Royal Navy |
| RNZAF | Royal New Zealand Air Force |
| RT | Radio Telephony |
| RTO | Railway Transport Officer |
| SAAF | South African Air Force |
| SFTS | Service Flying Training School |
| SAWAS | South African Womens Army Service |
| Screen | Aircrew screened from further operations |
| Spitfire/Spit | Single-engine fighter |
| Sprog | A trainee flyer |
| SP | Service Police |
| Scrambled Egg | Cap decoration denoting High Ranking Officer |
| Stirling | 4-engine bomber |

| | |
|---|---|
| Sunderland | 4-engine flying boat |
| SWO | Station Warrant Officer |
| Swordfish | Carrier-borne torpedo bomber |
| Tee Emm | A famous RAF Training Manual |
| TI | Target Indicator flare |
| Tiger Moth | Biplane for elementary training |
| TR9 | Pilot's radio |
| Tannoy | Public Address System |
| UXB | Unexploded bomb |
| VE | Victory in Europe (8 May 1945) |
| VJ/VP | Victory over Japan/in the Pacific(15 Aug 1945) |
| VC | Victoria Cross, the highest award for valour |
| VGO | Vickers Gas Operated machine gun |
| Verey | A signal flare fired from a Verey Pistol |
| WAG | Wireless Air Gunner |
| WAGS | Wireless Air Gunners School |
| WO | Warrant Officer |
| WOP, WOP/AIR | Wireless operator |
| U/S | Unserviceable |
| USAAC | US Army Air Corps |
| WAAF | Womens Auxiliary Air Force (UK) |
| WAAAF | Womens Auxiliary Australian Air Force |
| Wellington/Wimpy | 2-engine bomber |
| Window | Code for masses of aluminium strips dropped to confuse German radar |
| XXXX | A popular brand of Queensland beer |

# CHAPTER ONE

## THE GREAT *AQUITANIA* 'MUTINY'

## OR

## THE RAAF'S BIGGEST (UNOFFICIAL) PARTY EVER

**Eric Brown**

*Originally compiled from my own diary, this true account incorporates a considerable amount of material supplied by other RAAF members who also travelled on that voyage, plus correspondence since with a number of Cape Town residents.*

> Do you hear that? Do you hear that? All Australian personnel are again instructed that they are not to leave the ship which will not be docking alongside but will anchor in the roadstead. Any man going ashore will be charged with desertion and court-martialled.

The stentorian voice of British Lieutenant Colonel E.H. Llewellyn boomed out over the Tannoy system yet gain. He was Draft Commandant of the 45,000 ton troopship, former luxury liner *Aquitania*. It was plain from his commands over recent days that he felt it necessary to be particularly strict with the Australians, to all of whom this was quite obvious and much resented. Two weeks out from Southampton and coming in to Cape Town, the announcement that the ship would not be docking was a blow to the 5,500 troops on board who were in high spirits as they had been promised leave and had just been paid. The war was over and most were returning home after up to five years service in the UK. On board were about 4,000 RAAF, some SAAF, RAN and RN, a few AIF ex-POWs from the 6th and 9th Divisions, some English Nurses and sixteen War Brides.

This was Sunday 11 November 1945 - an historic date, the anniversary of Armistice Day, World War I. But amazingly, to us, instead of docking alongside in the renowned Duncan Dock, where the *Aquitania* had docked previously, the ship anchored in the roadstead, half a mile out. Noel Dwyer of East Ryde summed up the situation most aptly:

> I well remember that event as one of the most mind-boggling happenings of my RAAF career, whether official or unofficial. Looking back it could provide the script for a tele-play or movie far transcending anything that the Americans have served up in 'Catch 22' or 'Mash'. It was obvious to me that

> the English CO of Troops disliked the Australians intensely and en masse they returned the compliment. I feel certain this mutual dislike triggered the Commandant's order that we would not dock in the newly-constructed artificial harbour but would anchor offshore whilst taking on supplies of fuel, oil and water, thus denying us leave ashore. He said that leave had been cancelled due to the swell being too great to allow safe docking. This was later vehemently refuted by both on-board and on-shore authorities.

Dressed in 'best blues' as ordered, we of the RAAF packed all decks in anticipation of the promised two days ashore with money in our pockets. About two hundred South African troops were taken ashore by lighter, while we could only look on and scheme how we might also get into the beautiful modern city of Cape Town which we could clearly see bathed in sunshine just half a mile away, nestled under the spectacular Table Mountain, now covered by the famous 'table cloth' of white clouds. The air was cool, crisp and clear giving us the classic view of this majestic backdrop to the city.

Tugs and lighters came alongside to service the ship and many private launches and yachts circled around, calling out welcomes to us. Two of our RAAF mates scrambled on to a private launch and were quickly transported to shore, giving rise to the Commandant's strident announcement. But this did nothing to stem the enthusiasm of the rest of us to get ashore. As it was Sunday a dozen or more private craft loaded with sightseers came out to look at the great ship. A few with some gorgeous peaches aboard stood in close enough to call out across the water, 'When are you coming ashore?' 'We're not', wailed the fellows miserably, 'leave's been cancelled'. 'You've got to,' they cried, 'You're all expected! The whole town has been turned upside down to entertain you.'

We knew this was true, having heard BBC broadcasts for days that the people of Cape Town would load trestle tables at the dock with food and drink and arrange local outings and tours. The town, with all these good things, so near and yet so far, was madly enticing and feelings aboard rose to fever pitch.

Several airmen claimed to have been the first to 'jump ship'. This first account is from Doug Gordon, from Northampton, WA:

> It was early evening and supply tender hoses were connected to the ship through a steel door just above the water line, with a gang plank attached. My mate Colin Vickers from Adelaide and I were idly watching preparations for the empty tender's imminent departure, hoses etc being disconnected. Another tender was nearby waiting to move in as soon as this tender moved out. I had a sudden inspiration and yelled to Col, 'I'm going in on that', and Vickers just said, 'OK, then let's go'. We dashed across the gangplank and went aboard. One of the crew looked up curiously and another, whom we took to be the skipper, just grinned. Word of our exploit spread around the *Aquitania* and within minutes a horde of our blue uniforms surged across the gang plank. The Commandant also heard about it and soon ordered everyone back on board. But no-one moved. 'OK', said one of his officers, 'stay there as long as you like but that tender doesn't leave the ship's side until everyone is back on

board'. Still nobody moved, though it did cross my mind that we'd gone about as far as we could. But I'd reckoned without the collusion between the two tender skippers, using their two-way radios. The other tender then moved alongside just long enough for a blue tidal wave of uniforms to transfer to his tender whereupon he headed straight back to port and freedom with his passengers. Our departure was heralded by an unintelligible gabble over a loud hailer from the bridge of the *Aquitania* and the brilliant white glare of a searchlight, all of which only served to add excitement to our dramatic and successful 'escape'. The tug skipper told us, 'I've just heard on the two-way that the *Aquitania* Commandant has ordered the Cape Town MPs to pick you up at the dock but I'll drop you at a different wharf, not far by sea but a long way by road, so you'll be right'. That's what he did and we never did see any MPs.

Meanwhile the Commandant continued making vociferous announcements over the Tannoy system confirming that all leave was cancelled. He was the typical English Regimental Colonel, red faced, moustached, bristling and domineering and it did appear that he singled out us Australians for special attention.

The city of Cape Town became a blaze of lights as evening approached. It was the first fully lit city we had seen in years - if we don't count a few we had seen in Germany that were very well lit up with incendiaries. The long boring wait on board finally proved too much for the troops, especially after a number had successfully 'jumped ship'.

Our first organised mass 'escape' was via ropes lowered out of portholes, men clambering down and boarding the large water tender *John X. Merriman*. Then, at about 9 pm, someone said, 'How about we let down the scrambling nets and climb down them?' These were rolled up above the 'B' deck railing. 'Let's find out.' With that a huge rope net was cut loose and crashed down to the deck of a tug, the *James Searle*, directly below. Immediately a rush of blue uniforms went over the side and down on to the tug. But the Commandant, seeing the commotion, came up on 'B' deck port and made a grab for the scramble net, which by then was chock-full of troops surging to get a foothold on it, but he was met with shouts and cries of, 'Pull y'r silly head in', 'Throw the bastard overboard', 'Can you swim sport?', 'Give a smile f' the boys Pop', and 'Make way, Commandant's going over the side'.

The Colonel continued to scream invective, his face red with rage, but his attitude only seemed to brighten our lads about to depart on the next lighter. One of them then stood up, faced the Colonel, raised his fist and shouted out the classic words, 'Cast off, Mr. Christian', bringing gales of convulsive laughter to all and sundry except the Colonel, who by now was close to an apoplectic fit.

Some Australian officers standing nearby hurriedly extricated him from the melee and reportedly led him back to his cabin and kept him there until he had calmed down. This was probably the best thing that could have happened.

Noel Dwyer again:

> This was the most exciting finish to anything I had up till then - and since - been involved in. If only Errol Flynn was alive to play a lead role for the mutineers in a film or TV portrayal of the event! I'm still musing over who would play the part of the Colonel Commandant. Unfortunately two worthy contenders are also dead - Erich Von Stroheim and possibly Charles Laughton or Conrad Veidt.

**Troops climbing down scrambling nets from the *Aquitania* into waiting tugs**

The Colonel then called a hasty conference of all Flight Lieutenants in charge of troop decks, and the few other senior officers. Keith Watson from Southport, Queensland, who had about 230 men in his charge, remembers:

> When we faced him he was furious. 'This has got to stop', he shouted, 'It's an outrage!! These are your men. You've got to control and stop them. I've never suffered such infamy and such scurrilous conduct!'

We were all mildly amused. In view of the promised leave, the senior officers were in sympathy with the troops and endeavoured to plead their cause. But the Commandant was adamant. His dignity was most offended by the fact that the troops had dared to violate his authority. 'Report back when you've put a stop to it!' he shouted. We went on deck and passed on the orders with the Colonel's compliments, to loud cheers from the boys. The position was quite hopeless, the deck so crowded with eager bodies that you couldn't move a yard. The Colonel, a born strategist, then took the handling of this matter into his own hands. His head and shoulders were seen suddenly to appear through a lower porthole and he attempted to pull a rope ladder in through it! But the lads already on the tug saw this and acting swiftly, grabbed the bottom of the ladder and gave it an almighty jerk that almost propelled the Colonel through the porthole into the sea. Next the Colonel was seen again on the top deck from which the scramble net hung. The deck was crowded to capacity with fellows waiting their

opportunity to climb down. He was pushed and jostled and quite unable to make himself heard above the shouts: ‘If you want to go ashore Colonel, please take your place in the queue!’ He stood livid with rage, his mouth open and quivering, till an AIF Digger, scrambling by, poked a cigarette in his mouth, pushed up his bottom jaw, closing his lips on it, and drawled, ‘Have a fag sport’.

We reported back that the situation was entirely out of control and all that could be done was direction and control to make the evacuation as safe as possible. Soon about five ‘escape routes’ opened up; more scramble nets, Jacobs ladders and ropes and even some men jumping from the lower loading bays; practically endless chains of reckless Aussies in a stream like rats from a burning ship. As they boarded the tugs, tenders or whatever all joined in singing in chorus ‘Don’t Fence Me In’.

It was all very funny, but although the Commandant could see that he was hopelessly outnumbered he continued making valiant attempts to stop the exodus. All ranks joined in, even our high ranking officers going over the side. The Commandant then tried to pull in the net from ‘D’ deck but against all the surging troops his efforts were futile. And so it went on. Over the side the troops went, all through the night until there appeared to be not one Australian left on board.

Up till this time the 1,500 or so English Marines had very obediently stood back but finally, as the Colonel described in detail what he would do to each and every Marine who disobeyed his order, one of them shouted out to his chums, ‘What the fook! If the fooking Aussies can do it, so can we’, and over the side he went, down the ropes, followed by every other red-blooded Pom left on the ship.

**Queues waiting to climb down the Jacob’s Ladder to the tugboat below.**

As a last resort the Colonel (he wouldn’t relent) radioed for a detachment of naval and military police to be sent to the dock entrance to turn the fellows back and force them into his hands. However when these police were confronted with the first boatload of

several hundred or more determined Aussies swarming up the dock towards the town they made only a token show of force and quickly retreated, leaving the troops well alone. Later the South African police were to prove very cooperative and helpful during the troops' stay.

> 'There was absolutely no animosity in that night's effort', recalled Doug Pretty, now living in Burnaby, Canada, 'just a determination to give an outlet to fourteen days of pent-up high spirits, to get ashore and share a little of Cape Town's well-intended hospitality'.

By about 10 pm there were long queues waiting to go over the side, now controlled only by the capacity of the boats below. Reg Towner from Wahgunyah, Victoria well remembers jumping on to a tug, which had about five hundred 'escapees' on it:

> At one stage I didn't think we had much chance of staying afloat as our vessel, the tug *T.S. McEwen*, had only about six inches of freeboard!

Other airmen told very similar stories about this grossly overloaded tug and how the men ignored the shouts of the tug captain and crew. When he relented, smiling, and took them ashore the boys cheered him loudly. This tug along with others ran an unofficial ferry service.

The boys also jumped on to water tankers, other supply lighters, small launches and any boat alongside, whose skippers had little choice but to take the 'mutineers' ashore. Everyone was in a very good humour and high spirits and the men were generally most cooperative with their senior RAAF officers who tried to limit each boat's load to be consistent with safety. It was generally understood that the whole draft would stick together and all would go ashore. While it was great fun at the time, clambering down the ropes and nets was dangerous, several chaps missing their footing and falling into the water between ship and tug or whatever. 'Chick' Henderson, slipped from the net and disappeared into the depths just as the tug swung out before again slamming against the side of the *Aquitania.* It then moved out a few feet again, when 'Chick' surfaced and was plucked out wet but unharmed just as the two vessels slammed together again.

We should also mention that there were some who hesitated and considered the consequences, like Tom Moore from Orange who recalled:

> Harley Marks and I knew it was an act of mutiny and we could face a charge. All our war-time good conduct record could go out the window with this foolish act. However thousands of airmen were going overboard and we thought there would be safety in numbers. After all, the war was over, so we finally joined the crowd and down the scramble net we went.

A couple of AIF ex-POW's were helped over the side complete with their full kits. 'We're still a bit barbed-wire happy', one said, 'Think we'll stop off here for a bit'.

They were heartily cheered by the airmen. (In the event all returned to the ship). The overall atmosphere on the decks that clear and mild Sunday evening was one of fun

and exhilaration and the feeling that this was the best night's entertainment many of us had had in years; all this before we even got into Cape Town. Bill Lewis from Croydon, NSW was very impressed with his ride ashore in a 'very flash yacht', adding that plenty of wealth was in evidence in the city - the shops were full of luxuries, silk stockings, perfumes and so on to take home and beautiful big modern cars lined the streets - and people were well dressed, particularly the girls in their bright modern frocks.

The town stretched for several miles along the harbour front and sloped upward to the foot of precipitous Table Mountain. How appropriate is its name, I thought.

Some others who decided not to rush over the side that night had their patience rewarded the following morning when the Commandant and his staff tacitly accepted the inevitable and looked the other way, allowing boats to take off - in a more orderly fashion - anyone left who wanted to go ashore. Frank Castle of Canberra was one of these. Once ashore he contacted some friends there and was treated to a picnic day on the beach before making his way comfortably back to the ship. Frank said that the main problem with the mass exodus was the draft Commandant's poor understanding of the situation and his complete failure to communicate with the men. After all, the war was over, there would be no more death and danger and the men saw the cast iron discipline and regimentation as completely out of place and unnecessary. All they wanted to do was to get back home to their families and on with their young lives. They had been at sea for several weeks, they were bored with troopship routine and discomfort, they had pockets full of money to spend and what was more the ship was as dry as the Nullarbor! Frank did not see the mass exodus as mutiny, a very harsh word in military terms, but more an example of Australian ingenuity and enterprise.

In the town RAAF blue-uniformed bodies soon thronged all the streets but being late on the Sunday evening, when most came ashore, it was important to find somewhere to sleep. Nothing at all had been arranged. A fortunate few found hotel accommodation and some found beds in a sailors' hostel. Reg Towner said that he and many others spent the night at the 'Railway Hotel' - that is, sleeping in empty carriages in the railway yards until turfed out very early next morning. Others had the delightful experience of being invited by a furniture store proprietor into his premises where he laid out brand new bedding for them to catch up on some sleep. Sandy Johnson from Warrawee remembers:

> With some others I enjoyed the friendly hospitality of the Cape Town jail. Rumour had it that one or two received this involuntarily. [He was right, as we will shortly see - Ed].

But Doug Gordon and Col Vickers (who claimed to have been the first two off), after carousing until 2 am, by which time the leave-taking had been officially permitted, and announced over loudspeaker vans through the streets, were smart enough to catch a tug back to the ship where they had showers, a sleep and breakfast and made a then-legal return to town next morning.

The exodus which had started in earnest late Sunday afternoon went on all night and next morning until nearly 4,000 Aussies thronged the streets of Cape Town. Vans

with loud hailers roamed the streets giving progressive reports as to the state of our 'leave', and later, instructions as to when the *Aquitania* was due to sail.

By Monday morning the *Aquitania* was virtually a ghost ship. Those few who had stayed on board were mainly chaps who had been to Cape Town before or whose war movements had enabled them to shop in other cities unaffected by wartime austerity and shortages, so that Cape Town had little novelty appeal.

The welcome in Cape Town was one of the warmest most of us had ever experienced. Everywhere we were met by smiling faces and a happier day was hard to imagine. My first impression on landing was the streams of blue-uniformed figures walking up the hilly street towards the city, and a South African news camera crew filming it all. Those ashore early explored the modern city, but being Sunday it was very quiet. Naturally a large number went up to the top of Table Mountain on the cableway which had its busiest day for a very long time. Noel Dwyer described his ride:

> The 2,500 foot near vertical journey was a marvellous ride; I held my breath at the sheer drop below. The top was 4,000 feet above sea level and seemed on top of the world. We had tea at a charming little stone 'Swiss Chalet' right on the edge of the cliff.

My mates Ray Weston from Grange, South Australia, Kelson Arnold from Richmond Victoria and I were ashore early and on Ray's suggestion - he had worked in a newspaper office - we headed straight for the office of the *Cape Times*, the prestigious morning paper. We thought we might have a scoop story for them only to find they were already printing one, complete with pictures. But one of the editors, Mr. George Reynolds, befriended us and showed us over the presses as the story was being printed. The lead story headlines read:

*AQUITANIA TROOPS ASHORE*
*Hundreds Take French Leave in Tugs*
*SWARMED DOWN ROPE LADDERS*

Most of the front page plus the inside Editorial was taken up with four stories about the event but being the morning paper it had gone to press before most of the troops came ashore. The following (Monday) afternoon's paper, the *Cape Argus*, had much more complete stories and pictures, and its page one lead story and banner headlines read:

*AUSSIES SWARM ASHORE*
*4,OOO TAKE FRENCH LEAVE*
*SCRAMBLE INTO TUGS FROM AQUITANIA*

**George Reynolds, an Editor of the Cape Times, with Eric Brown, left and Ray Weston before taking them on a long drive around the Peninsula.**

The Afrikaans language daily, *Die Burger*, also fully reported the events, as did the London papers, BBC radio and, though briefly, several Australian papers.

The Mayor of Cape Town Mr. A. Bloomberg was quoted in the *Cape Times* as saying:

> I would have welcomed the visit ashore of the Australian and New Zealand troops from the *Aquitania*. They would have been most welcome. Indeed in collaboration with other authorities I had made arrangements for their reception and transport to take them around the Peninsula. As a member of the Harbour Advisory Board I know of no reason why the *Aquitania* should not have been brought alongside.

Back at the *Times* office and having finished work, our friend Mr Reynolds took us to his home on the slopes of Table Mountain for breakfast. We were becoming rather tired by then but he again came to the rescue with supplies of 'wakey wakey' tablets. This solved our problem of where to sleep. We went without sleep non-stop for thirty-six hours. (But slept for days when we returned to the ship!) Wide awake again we accepted his invitation to pick us up later in the day and take us for a drive. We left his home in early morning to behold a magnificent view of Table Mountain being lit by the first rays of the sun coming over the Devil's Peak, and looking down to Table Bay we had a spectacular view of the great ship *Aquitania* at anchor. By 7 am the city was thronged with '*Aquitania* Troops', as we were to be called, along with many native street sweepers and service workers, with almost no white people about at that hour.

We had been cautioned against familiarisation with the black and coloured races and saw many notices to that effect. Later, in the pubs we saw the blacks were at one end and the whites at the other. It was the same on the buses.

As soon as the banks and shops were opened they were besieged by our boys who then went on a buying spree. Nearly everything was to be had in unlimited quantities and free of coupons - watches, jewellery, silk stockings, perfumes, food. One surprising sight was two short side streets exclusively for florists. They were packed with stalls of flowers so fresh and beautiful that they were irresistible and many of the troops bought bunches. 'What the bloody hell are we going to do with them now?' was the general thought after the fellows made off proudly with their purchases. Most flowers found their way into the hands of impressionable young ladies working in the various stores. But one bunch found its way back to the ship, in the hands of one of the RN nurses with a big card on it reading 'For the Commandant'.

Pubs of course were well patronised, since all the boys had developed a big thirst after two weeks 'on the dry' and the voyage through the tropics. Lion Ale and Castle Lager were very popular. The Albion Hotel in Buitengracht Street and the Sir Lowry Hotel and Transvaal Bar in Sir Lowry Road, near The Castle, were crowded as were many others. Perce Yates from Sefton NSW commented, 'Grog there was amazingly cheap too. I recall shouting for a group of five of us, all mixed drinks, yet the cost was only about 18 pence! The people of the city were really A1 to us.'

The beer in Cape Town was stronger than the weak warm beer we had been used to in Britain. With the period since Southampton alcohol free and the more potent beer and spirits here, quite a few of our lads suffered the consequences. Not surprisingly by Monday afternoon there was a beer famine in Cape Town. Most of the bars, especially those in the central area of the city ran out of beer of all types by lunch time. This caused some of the troops to try the potent Cape Brandy, with disastrous results in some cases. Fortunately most were happy with it and there were some amusing sights in the streets. Some with unsteady gait and expansive grins trailed behind them a hobby horse, or a toy dog on a string.

An RAAF Warrant Officer was seen riding the MP's motorcycle outfit with the MP on the pillion seat and another in the side car. One group of chaps took over and drove a tram - not sure whether the regular tram driver was a party to this or not!

Another bunch chatted up a stunningly beautiful girl in a baby car. She said she had to do some banking so enough of them gathered around the car and lifted it bodily, with the girl still at the wheel, and carried it right into the large Standard Bank building in Adderley Street. When she asked, 'How am I going to get my car out again?' they told her 'Don't worry love, do your banking, we'll wait and carry you out again' - which they did!

Those whose position was on the point of changing from the perpendicular to the horizontal were gently wooed and seduced by the traffic police into the sidecars of their motor cycle outfits, given a once around the block and then wheeled smartly down to the docks where a boat ran them back to the ship.

There were, inevitably, one or two skirmishes in the streets. One chap had the misfortune to finish his escapade on the cowcatcher of a tram and was transferred to a hospital, not badly damaged, but enough to finish off his celebrations. Generally the MP's and Cape Town police were considerate and thorough gentlemen.

Later in the morning loudspeaker patrol cars roamed the streets advising that all Australians were invited to lunch at the SAWAS canteen in the Mayor's Garden. The Cape Town ladies had laid on a marvellous feast of those things we saw little of in England - fresh eggs and bacon, steak and vegetables, fruit, fresh milk and ice cream. Generally our chaps were well behaved but in very high spirits and the local people encouraged them to have a good time. Arthur Greenaway and Doug Pretty hailed what they thought was a taxi, but it turned out to be the chauffeur-driven limousine of the President of the Red Cross, Mrs Maskew Miller. Doug tells the story:

> Jacob the driver took us back to town where Mrs Miller gave him permission to take us on a grand tour, covering about fifty miles of headland scenery. First we drove to 'Cable House' on Table Mountain, around the mountain to Camps Bay, Haut Bay, through the National Park up to the Cecil Rhodes Memorial - he had given fifty years of his life to his country as a pioneer statesman. From this point there is a magnificent view across the headland to Simonstown and the Indian Ocean, across Cape Town to the Atlantic Ocean. Continuing our tour we passed the beautiful Cape Town University and hospital and the former residence of Field Marshal Smuts, now used only when parliament is in session. Back at the dock we said goodbye to Jacob and our beautiful limousine.

Reg Towner from Wahgunyah, Victoria tells of his 'memorable experience':

> We were doing the usual bit of sight-seeing, 'bird watching' in other words, waiting for the pubs to open, and were standing near a set of traffic lights when out of the blue, a large black limo pulled up and a very well-dressed gent asked us if we would care to join him on a trip up to Table Mountain. 'Can a duck swim?', we retorted. It turned out he was a big wheel with one of the leading insurance firms in Cape Town and was on his way to the Cape Town University to pick up his two lovely daughters. What a shame! He insisted that we stay at his home where we had a beaut couple of days, played tennis, went swimming and all in all had a ball. The hospitality was magnificent and even though we were all looking forward to our homecoming none of us would ever forget our short time in Cape Town.

Keith Watson of Southport also tells of the incredible welcome he and his four mates received as he relates:

> As we turned into the main street we were accosted by a tall well-dressed man. 'Welcome to Cape Town, lads', he said smiling, 'It's grand to see you. Come along for some drinks and refreshment.' We eyed him suspiciously and looked at each other in mute surprise. Tony shrugged his shoulders. There wasn't much else we could do just then, so we followed him, wondering. He led us to a large building where we took the lift to the top floor, stepping into a spacious club, covering the whole floor. There were tables set with food and drink, waited on by ladies. 'Crikey!' exclaimed Jim in surprise, 'What's this?' 'This is what we had arranged to receive and entertain you with last night', replied our host, 'but better late than never!'. 'You're telling us', we warmly

> affirmed. ‘The ladies will look after you now’, he said and left us. We were soon seated and tucking in to some mighty food, best of all were great plates of real ice cream, stuff we hadn’t seen for years.

Later, wanting to buy some silk stockings we were directed to a store where the girls were very helpful. Several very charming young ladies there promptly came to our aid and took us in hand. They were all smartly turned out in black, with white lace collars. After the drab utility clothing of Britain they looked stunning. I found myself discreetly looking at dozens of boxes of silk stockings. I only wanted to buy two pairs! But as box after box was opened I found myself much more interested in what was behind the counter than what was on it. She was quietly aware of the fact, and flattered. Suddenly she looked up at me, quickly uncovering her light grey eyes. For an instant they were on mine, softly, candidly and then she fluttered her splendid long dark lashes. I gave three foggy blinks, swallowed, shook my head, and opening my eyes a little wider, looked again. It was the most fascinating thing I had ever seen. She did it once more, and I was in, hook, line and sinker! ‘Quite the most fascinating creature I’ve ever seen’, I thought. ‘I’ll try and date her for dinner and a show tonight’. ‘How many of you boys are there?’ she asked. ‘Bout four thousand’ I replied. ‘That’s a bit many’ she giggled, ‘I mean you and your friends’. ‘Oh, sorry’, I grinned. ‘Five. All most desperate characters.’ ‘Would you like to come and have dinner with us?’ ‘Pardon me, but would you please say that again?’ ‘Would you like to come and have dinner with us?’ she repeated. ‘That’s what I thought you said! Fellows, would we?’ I shouted with enthusiasm. ‘Yes please!’ That was from the lot of us. ‘Anyway who’s us, besides you?’ ‘My girlfriends,’ she said, ‘There are five of us, and June has already asked three fellows’. ‘Gosh sakes, is it as easy as all that,’ I said amazed. ‘There’s an acute shortage of manpower in Cape Town’, she said with an impish grin and another short flutter! ‘Fellows, come over here and meet - say, what’s your name? Mine’s Keith’. ‘It’s Pat’. ‘Pat, I’d like you to meet my friends, Tommy, Jim, Cyril and Rex. Pat has just asked us out for tea’, I told them incredulously, ‘she and her girlfriends’. ‘Glad to know you Pat’, they chorused. That was the start of a wondrous evening of dinner and dancing to Victor Sylvester records at the flat shared by the five girls at Sea Point, one of Cape Town’s top suburbs.

But leave for some was not quite so pleasant. Lindsay Heffernan from Merimbula NSW and Paddy Grant also claimed to be the ‘first two rascals to abandon ship’, as Lindsay reports:

> It was about 4.30 on Sunday afternoon when Paddy and I jumped down to the deck of a water tanker that was replenishing the ship. That was when the fun started. Our departure from the *Aquitania* was not noticed by the Commandant until the tanker had pulled well away. We were not long ashore before the Navy Patrol had us under control and threw us in the brig. They had apparently been notified that some airmen from the *Aquitania* had gone AWOL. After we had been there a couple of hours the Navy Patrol received further word of the unofficial mass exodus from the ship and decided the fair thing to do was to release us. That night Paddy and I slept in a park only to find next morning it was in ‘District 6’ - a place known to be very big on throat cutting, bashings and robbery by the natives. However we came out untouched and soon found our way to a local hotel. While having our first

drink a British sailor came roaring in and declared he would take on anyone in the bar. Everyone politely refused his offer so when he made his way to me and proceeded to tear out a handful of my hair this led to a reversal of attitude and he and I commenced a bit of a small 'Battle of Britain'. We worked our way out into the street where a large crowd soon formed around us - even the trams banked up for a quarter of a mile - until the paddy wagon arrived.

In the meantime Paddy had taken off his shirt and offered to attack anyone who would intervene. Unfortunately Paddy was the first to be lumbered into the Police Wagon (hence the name Paddy wagon!), the sailor disappearing into the crowd. I went to Paddy's rescue only to join him, with the aid of a seven foot African cop who proceeded to give me a facial massage with his baton. After another sojourn of about two hours in police custody we were transferred to an Army jail where a massive Indian doctor sewed me up in several places. The day was rapidly slipping away when we were released from our third jail in one and a half days.

A late edition of the *Cape Argus* on Monday gave the welcome news in a stop press item that an improvised ferry service had been arranged and that 'everything that could float would be pressed into service to get the troops back to the *Aquitania* and that this service would continue all night'. Cape Town Radio also gave out announcements asking any townspeople who had boats to cooperate by seeing every Australian back to the ship before it sailed.

Many humorous dramas unfolded with the eventual and protracted return of the troops to the ship. Hordes of Aussie blue uniforms arrived at the dock in all manner of conveyances and varying states of sobriety. Many were driven down to the wharf by their hosts. One chap arrived riding a bicycle he had just bought. A taxi pulled up with five airmen who appeared to have sampled the Cape Brandy too freely. They fell out of the taxi to be helped by chaps in somewhat better condition, loaded on to a railways pushcart and trundled down to the wharf and on to one of the tugs running the shuttle service. A number of others, largely sailors, were even worse for wear. They had been transported back from the town and were out cold. The great pile of all but motionless bodies was lifted on board the tug by their arms and legs where they were unceremoniously stacked one on top of the other on the deck. The pile of arms, legs and bodies in oblivion probably knew nothing about it till next morning. Arriving back at the ship these, with many others, were hoisted aboard in cargo nets, at least one chap falling and breaking a leg. On the *Aquitania's* deck the unconscious bodies were all hosed down, much to the amusement of those already on board.

At this point the Commandant had his revenge, of sorts. He would not allow the *Aquitania's* gangways to be lowered to allow returning troops to come aboard in a civilised manner. Everybody had to come aboard the way they had absconded, by climbing up the rope ladders and scrambling nets. As there was a fair swell running between the ship and the tugs this presented a most hazardous exercise, especially as a large number of the lads had imbibed something much stronger than orange juice. In the swell bodies swung back and forth at all angles, some falling into the water between the tug and ship. Many lost their Cape Town purchases climbing aboard. One Aussie soldier, still rather under the weather, got hopelessly entangled in the

scrambling net trying to bring his bicycle aboard; he was cheered on by the boys already on the deck. Another man, carrying a crate of beer, and with perhaps a good supply inside him, lost his footing as he stepped from the barge to the ship, fell into the water, the crate sinking rapidly to the bottom of Table Bay. He was quickly rescued but was more distressed at the loss of his good crate of Lion Ale than nearly drowning and ruining his uniform with sea water.

The returning troops brought with them all manner of souvenirs, watches, silk stockings, jewellery, grog, food and wrapped presents for the families back home. Some had large net bags of oranges over their shoulders, and some of the nurses returned waving bunches of flowers, calling out 'For the Commandant'.

**The author with his souvenirs from the *Aquitania* and Freetown.**
(Photo courtesy of the *Northern Star*, Lismore)

Sandy Johnson was returning on one of the night trips on a lighter when there was a cry, 'Man overboard'. The skipper circled around in the dark, then came another shout, 'There he is', and indeed there he was, floating face down just under the surface, arms and legs stretched out like a drowned insect. One chap stripped off and swam over to him with a line. He was pulled on to the deck and the fellows stood in a big circle, as in a theatre in the round, in hushed silence, not expecting too much, while one of them applied some resuscitation. In a minute or two he stirred, got slowly to his feet, then again made a rush to the side of the tug shouting, 'I'm a torpedo!' But he didn't get far, about twenty guys jumping on top of him. So much for the effect of South African Brandy.

At the dock someone organised a collection for the tug and lighter skippers and their crews - they had been very cooperative and helpful to us. We threw all our leftover coins from our shopping spree into several large jam tins.

A reporter from the *Cape Times* who went on board one of the transport tugs at about 10 o'clock on Monday night was overwhelmed with requests from officers, NCOs and men to thank the people of Cape Town on their behalf for what was described as 'a simply marvellous show'.

When the *Aquitania* sailed we assumed that all the bods who were coming aboard, were aboard. But Alf Aiken of Roseville NSW told of some spectacular late arrivals who nearly didn't make it:

Anchors were up and the ship was gathering speed when a motor boat started chasing us. As it got closer we saw a chap in a blue RAAF uniform sitting up in a deck chair, smoking a cigar, and calling out, 'Hey, wait for me - sorry I'm a bit late'. He was quickly gathered up by our boys on the ship and pulled aboard. After a few more minutes, when by then the *Aquitania* was moving at a good clip, a speed boat chased and caught the ship and two RAAF officers leapt off and dived into one of the open loading bays in the side. The Service Police were swiftly on the scene in an effort to identify the culprits but everyone's memory seemed to have failed at that moment.

A lot of what we took to be mirror flashing came from many houses along the harbour; they couldn't shout 'goodbye', nor we, but this was one way they could say au revoir. The tugs also gave us an escort well out to sea with a 'cock-a-doodle-doo' send-off from their hooters. Our boys on deck gave them three whole-hearted cheers in an effort to show their appreciation of the help and sportsmanship they showed getting us ashore.

Next day, well out to sea, one sailor woke to find himself on the wrong ship! Dick Crossing from Bathurst NSW tells the story:

> In a pub this sailor had got very drunk and passed out. His drinking mates, assuming he was from the ship, got him back to the wharf and carried him aboard. When he woke up next day it was then discovered that he was an English sailor who had been waiting in Cape Town for a ship home, having been in Australia for two years. He ended up back in Australia again.

For the record *all* the Australian contingent returned to the ship. The first check showed that 21 of the ship's complement appeared to be missing but later *Aquitania* radioed Cape Town to report that after an exhaustive check only one man was missing. The *Cape Argus* reported on 14 November that he was a RN rating, who was apprehended by the Naval Shore Patrol for being improperly dressed!

Without doubt the local people enjoyed the break as much as we did. So we said 'goodbye' to Cape Town with the hope that we'll see it again some time, a beautiful modern city, scrupulously clean and obviously little affected by the shortages of war. What a contrast to Britain!
Despite all the drama of the highly irregular method of leave-taking by the troops, which could perhaps have been classed as a mutiny, we did not hear another word about it from the ship's officials for the rest of the voyage to Sydney or since, which is tantamount to them accepting responsibility for the gross maladministration of the

whole episode. One wonders what became of the Commandant. Perhaps he had a nervous breakdown!

Despite my repeated enquiry letters to the Headquarters of the RAAF, RAN, Army, Department of Defence, Australian War Memorial, Australian Archives, British Admiralty, UK Ministry of Defence, the UK Public Records Office and the ship's owners, the Cunard Company and others, no official report on either the voyage of the *Aquitania*, Southampton-Sydney 28 Oct - 28 Nov 1945, or of the above Cape Town 'incident' of 11-13 Nov 1945, has been forthcoming! Letters in reply from all the above authorities said, in effect, 'no information is held on the subject'. This is despite Australian Archives supplying the number (163/8/98) of a file dated 3 December 1945 on the above voyage, but followed by the statement '... it is not on the list of surviving files ... and it appears that it was destroyed some time ago'. This seems strange since they still have available reports of both earlier and later voyages of the ship!

So I really did try but by this stage I ran out of patience and time. After all I was compiling some unofficial RAAF history, and though it would have been nice to have had some official version to perhaps balance mine, this was not to be forthcoming. Possibly some private copy of an official report might come to light now that this story has been published.

In discussing the so-called 'Mutiny' one might reasonably ask, 'What provoked it?', or 'Who provoked it?' The most obvious answer appears that it was due to the complete lack of empathy with the Australians - the largest contingent on board - by the British Colonel in charge of the complete draft. It is one thing for a British Colonel or other equivalent ranked officer to be in charge of the British personnel, most of whom were clearly young 'other ranks'. The discipline exercised over British troops from their initial rookie stages until they are fully trained is usually very strict, though effective. It was an entirely different matter for that person to also be in charge of this RAAF contingent and to treat them in the same manner. On the *Aquitania*, all the RAAF were either NCOs or Officers, most of whom were well-seasoned in battle, and they believed that they deserved at least a little respect, particularly now that the war was over and they were on their way home. The Colonel's unyielding autocratic style of instruction to the Aussies (to put it politely) had been obvious since leaving Southampton two weeks before. Considering all the above it should surprise no one that the RAAF contingent, plus the few AIF, reacted as they did to the completely unjustified provocation to which they were subjected.

After the Cape Town excitement one of the boys wrote the following poem about it:

**AUSTRALIA WILL BE THERE**

One Sunday we reached Cape Town
After many days at sea,
The boys prepared for leave ashore
To break the monotony,
But we anchored in the harbour
Quite a distance from the wharf,
Then the Tannoy told the boys
We'd not be getting off.

The Heads said they were sorry
Then added one thing more,
That the swell was far too dangerous,
To take us all ashore.
So we hung around the railings
And wandered up and down,
And cursed the rotten knowledge
That we wouldn't see the town.

Then a rumour gained momentum
As troopship rumours do,
That a crowd was there to greet the sons
Of fathers they once knew.
There'd been many preparations
For the *Aquitania's* stay,
There'd be many disappointments,
If the boys were kept away.

So the boys began to realise
In the waning evening light,
That to keep their hosts up waiting
Was surely never right.
Would we disappoint the people
Or disappoint the mayor?
Like hell we would we reckoned,
**Australia will be there.**

So we scrambled down the hawsers
and defied the ship's MP's,
We slid down ropes from portholes
And swarmed around like bees.
We filled up all the tugboats
and the launches standing round.
Soon many feet were marching
high and dry on Cape Town ground.
Buying presents without coupons

was a treat in every store,
that we'd never seen in England
since the early days of war.
Cape Town girls turned out to help us
in our choice of gifts for wives,
without exaggeration
'twas the best leave of our lives.

Then we had to part these friendships,
in such short time made strong,
but we left there with a feeling
that we had done no wrong.
Though discipline was broken
we'd proved, as everywhere,
if Australia is expected
**Australia will be there!**

***(Author unknown)***

## *ACQUITANIA* - HER DISTINGUISHED CAREER

This story would not be complete without paying tribute to the wonderful old *Aquitania*.

Perhaps the most admired and successful liner of all up to that time, the RMS *Aquitania* was also one of the most beautiful, from her classic profile to her artistically discriminating interiors which, from the outset, earned her the title of 'Aristocrat of the Atlantic'.

Cast your mind back to those far off days of the 1920's and 1930's with the socialite passengers crossing the Atlantic in this luxury liner; the ladies in their long slim dresses and the men in their dinner suits would make their leisurely way up to the 'Wireless Office' on the Boat Deck to send their cables to family or friends, with messages to meet them upon their arrival in New York or Southampton, or wherever. These were also the days when the only alternative Atlantic crossing was by airship or Zeppelin.

The last of the great four-funnelled liners on the North Atlantic, *Aquitania*'s legendary career involved 442 transatlantic voyages spanning more than 35 years, with the distinction of serving admirably in both World Wars, the only major ship to do so, and carrying 1,200,000 passengers 3,000,000 miles. In all that time she was never damaged by enemy action, a quite remarkable achievement.

Launched at Clydebank on 21 April 1913 with a gross tonnage of 44,786 she had quadruple screw turbines giving a speed of over 23 knots. Passenger accommodation was 3,250 with a crew of nearly 1,000. As a troop ship she carried up to 5,500 passengers and a crew of about 800. It may be of interest to note that her funnels were 20 feet higher than Nelson's Column in Trafalgar Square, London.

The *Aquitania* had a charmed life compared with two famous comparable four-funnel ships, the *Titanic,* similar in appearance but slightly smaller, which sank after hitting an iceberg on her maiden voyage on 14 April 1912, and the *Lusitania* which was torpedoed and sunk by a German submarine on 7 May 1915.

The *Aquitania* was withdrawn from service in 1949 and broken up in Scotland in 1950. Her withdrawal marked not only the end of a ship with a remarkable and distinguished career, but also the end of an era. The last of the great four-funnelled liners and all they represented was gone forever.

**The 45,000 ton *Aquitania's* last voyage as a troopship was Southampton to Sydney 28 October - 28 November 1945, calling at Cape Town, where the RAAF led some unscheduled high jinks to take shore leave.**

## CHAPTER TWO

# STRICTLY UNOFFICIAL

### CAT AMONG THE JACARANDAS

*Despite World War II raging all around the world in 1943 the large Northern New South Wales city of Grafton still held its annual Jacaranda Festival, in September/October - but that year the war seemed a little closer as Tom Scotland of Lynwood, WA explained.*

Don Watson was the pilot of a 20 Squadron Catalina en route from Rathmines, south of Grafton, to Labuan in Borneo.

> I noticed when we were approaching Grafton that something special was going on and realised it was the Jacaranda Festival. I thought the least we could do was to join in the merriment. I could see a parade going down the main street where hundreds of Jacaranda trees were in full bloom. I thought what they need is an aerial float in that procession so I put the nose of the Cat down and did a screaming pass at about fifteen feet over the trees, scattering Jacaranda blossoms all over the marchers, and scattering quite a few of the marchers too! At the end of the run I turned the plane and repeated the low level run at nearly tree-top level, the Catalina's great outspread wings almost skimming the jacarandas and its slipstream causing another sea of blossoms to fall and carpet the parade which stopped while all eyes turned skyward to glimpse the huge (for those days) flying boat. By the time we disappeared to the north we felt that this was one Jacaranda Festival they would never forget.

A high ranking officer who had been the invited Guest of the City tried to get the offending Catalina pilot identified but without success, and the pilot remained unknown until I visited Grafton in 1967 and heard from a local man the story of the Catalina's 'shoot-up' of 1943. I had flown Halifaxes in World War II and wrote to a Catalina pilot with whom I had also flown and kept in touch, asking if he knew anything about the story I had been told of the pilot's peccadillo. Imagine my surprise when Don Watson - for he was my friend - brought the admission, 'I was that pilot!', describing the above interlude on his flight to Labuan.

'I felt sure', he added, 'that the parade would have enjoyed the swoosh of the aircraft flying so low and the blossoms carpeting the roadways'. However, had someone in Grafton identified the Catalina, Don's conspicuous contribution to the war in the Pacific might have had a different ending.

From *After Voice From the Stars*

### DANGEROUS PRISONER ESCORT

*Bournemouth, that peacetime holiday town on the south coast of England, was a holding camp in 1942 for large numbers of aircrew arriving from overseas. Several holiday hotels had been taken over to house them. 'Nobby' Blundell of Trinity Beach, Queensland, describes what happened when a group of Aussies were told it would be twelve days before their posting to squadrons or training stations.*

English troops can generally be expected to stay where they are told, not so the Aussies. After four days of idleness they were scattered all over England. I had barely got back from three days in London myself without being missed when the CO - a gnarled old peacetime officer - ordered me to detail two men to accompany me to Penzance in Cornwall where the local police had reported taking in charge one McVicar - one of our mates. He was in some sort of trouble.

So I rounded up two of my mates, Snowy and Darkie, arranged for us to be issued with side arms and travel warrants, and we got away before the Orderly Room could think of anything else.

On arrival in Penzance, which is almost on Lands End, Snowy suggested we had better put on a show for the civvy coppers so he signed for our mate, saying he was regarded as a very dangerous prisoner and we would be on our way at once. When our party arrived at the next town and left the train for a lunch break, ie. counter lunch, the 'dangerous prisoner' asked, 'What is all this bullshit about a dangerous prisoner? You blokes are supposed to be my mates, especially this long skinny corporal. With mates like you bludgers, who needs enemies?'

'Of course you are dangerous' Snowy replied. 'You don't have any money in your kick and you are sponging on our small kitty'.

With that, McVicar, the 'dangerous prisoner' sat down and removed a boot, lifted a false innersole and produced the necessary, saying, 'You don't think I was silly enough to have it where those civvy coppers would find it!'

According to the RAF Noncommissioned Officer's (NCO) manual I had with me, it stated that an escort with a dangerous prisoner was not obliged to travel during the hours of darkness. So we decided to leave the train at the next stop, Plymouth, and see what happened. To put on a show, Darkie drew his revolver to guard the now handcuffed prisoner and I demanded assistance from the RTO (Railway Transport Officer), informing him, according to the manual, he was obliged to find us accommodation in the main hotel in town, and I made sure the RTO was responsible for the bill.

As soon as we were set up in the pub, our party removed all side arms, belts and handcuffs, and hid them in a wardrobe, and then proceeded down to the bar to allow the prisoner to make up for lost time. After dinner we then went into the lounge bar where there were sufficient women to get an interesting evening going.

Later in the evening I became a little under the affluence of incohol and Darkie and the prisoner helped me up to my room, stripped me to my singlet and left me in bed. Some time later, I needed to go to the toilet and staggered in the direction of what

appeared to be the right door, but no, it was the door on to a landing overlooking the lounge full of drinkers, and in attempting to turn and leave, I tripped on the mat, overbalanced and fell, still clad in singlet only, into the lounge taking with me a large portion of the railing. The dangerous prisoner and the others of the party picked me up and returned me to bed. Next morning I woke to find Darkie in his bed but the prisoner and Snowy were missing. I shook Darkie awake to ask where Snowy and the prisoner were. Darkie replied that they had gone home with two girls from the bar, to two different addresses, but would be back in time to catch the train.

Later when the publican was making out the bill, he asked about the railing damaged the previous night. We explained that the dangerous prisoner had attempted to escape and the rail was damaged when they tried to subdue him and the RTO was to be billed for the damage. The publican was not very happy but he signed the form and we waited till the last minute to board the train, before I handed the RTO the hotel bill, and we were on the train and away before the RTO realised what had happened.

By the time we got back we were at least two days overdue on the journey, had not only run up an overnight accommodation bill but had caused unspecified damage at the hotel. Knowing the tough form of the Commanding Officer I was feeling more than a bit worried about what action he might take when the reports inevitably reached him. But we were saved by the bell, or more correctly the air raid siren. For the first time in months the Jerries picked that night to lay on an air raid to Bournemouth and the whole town was in a turmoil. But there was even better news. On my reporting to the Orderly Room I discovered that the Commanding Officer and his staff who were in charge when we left had been posted elsewhere and gone and a new commander was in the process of installing himself. Knowing the ropes in the Orderly Room and with a little fiddling I was able to quietly pick up the order for escorting the prisoner and other papers dealing with his arrest and dispose of the lot by inserting them into a closed file before the new staff got organised - which would not be until after the All Clear had gone.

A ‘closed file’ in the RAF was a complete enclosure and was duly returned to RAF records section at Gloucester, where it could be stored indefinitely. It would be several years before McVicar’s papers were found, if ever.

The result was that, largely thanks to the German air raid, all our worries were over, particularly including McVicar who showed his appreciation in the usual way at the Rose and Crown.

From *Friends on Active Service*

**DESERT RACERS**.

*Life in the desert could get very boring, as Ian Kirkby of Lismore relates*.

We were at Jemines, about thirty miles east of Benghazi in Libya on 178 Squadron Liberators. When our new commanding officer, Wing Commander Smythe, first joined the squadron he called a 'get together' and said, 'I'm your new CO. You can salute me first thing in the morning, but after that, unless there is any "Scrambled Egg" about, if I catch anyone saluting after that I'll break his bloody arm!' He was RAF and terribly British but he wanted to run a relaxed show.

It seemed that the telephone line to headquarters had been tapped, and messages were being intercepted, so the CO was given a Tiger Moth to fly to headquarters for operational briefings. He followed a regular pattern with this, usually being away about two hours, leaving his RAF Humber car at the airstrip. This was just a cleared strip in the desert with no buildings.

We found it deadly dull out there in the desert with only tents and no amenities, so one day, soon after we saw his Tiger take off we decided to borrow his Humber and race it against a small motorbike that someone had acquired.

Using the airstrip as a raceway we would easily outpace the bike on the straight but the bike would just as easily beat us on the turns at each end. It was a riot of fun and we turned it on several times, but one day after we had been racing only about half an hour the CO seemed to appear from nowhere and stood, watching grim-faced on the edge of our little group. This took us completely by surprise since his Tiger Moth had not returned. (We learned later that he had sent someone else to HQ for the briefing that day.) So we pulled up in his Humber in front of him very sheepishly and said, 'Afternoon sir'.

He continued to glare at us, hands on hips and then said, 'A bit bloody slow on the turns, weren't you?'
He then took his car and away he went.

After that we all said ‘Old Smythe is a right decent bloke’, and we would do anything for him. In fact while he was there an unwritten principle applied that so long as you were on duty when required you could do (almost) whatever you wanted to at other times.

## DRESSED IN PINK

*‘It is not much over a hundred miles from London to Bristol but the train that carried George and me to the west country took all night to get there’, related Syd Johnson.*

We were going to Bristol to visit an old mate and his new wife. It was pretty late when we were poured on to the train by our companions in London. As the train rattled through the night it got colder and colder while George and I tried to conquer the temperature with lubricant and the journey with brilliant conversation.

Somewhere round Bath, we discovered that the toilet at the end of the next carriage was stacked to the rafters with stuff you used to get in drapers’ shops - boxes of reels of cotton, buttons, scissors, tape and innumerable bolts of pink flannelette. On the outskirts of Bristol, the presence of all this apparently ownerless merchandise, the fact that Doug and Nancy were expecting their first born, and our mounting enthusiasm spawned a beautiful idea.

The flannelette must be very hard to procure so why leave it around at the mercy of all sorts of dubious characters when we could put it to very good use? So we took off our greatcoats and wrapped it round each other, as much as possible while keeping it invisible under the greatcoat. Two extremely obese airmen walked through the turnstiles at Bristol railway station, the ungainly walk of each being no doubt ascribed by the ticket collector, uncharitably but fortunately, to the wrong cause.

We had to wait around a bit before invading the Paterson menage which we did about eight o’clock. I had been a mate of Doug’s for about twenty years but his spouse had never laid eyes on me. When she did she must have fleetingly thought her life partner was crackers. I’ll rephrase that and delete the word ‘fleetingly’. She looked a bit startled to see these peculiar shaped specimens, but did not let the shock interfere with the dictates of politeness. After formal introductions we proudly launched the big surprise, ‘Look what we’ve brought you!’

Nancy’s eyes stood out like plums on stalks, as she started to go into shock. Doug caught her and put her in a chair, whereupon being English she asked us if we would like a cup of tea. Richard Paterson, born a few months later, lived in pink for years and no-one was charged with receiving stolen property. Still, there is no Statute of Limitations on crime.

From *It’s Never Dark Above the Clouds*

## JAPS SURRENDER TO ‘NED KELLY’

*Townsville was the Headquarters of RAAF North Eastern Area during World War II. RAAF 35 Transport Squadron was also based there. Lloyd Mortlock of Ocean Shores, NSW, who was Squadron Navigation Officer with 35 Squadron around the time of the official Japanese surrender, has provided us with some details of a most extraordinary happening - 'The Galela Incident' - which had some rather unexpected repercussions. Lloyd continues.*

Though I was not a participant in the actual operation I was aware of an unauthorised Japanese surrender to some of our chaps on Galela Island that caused a major 'flap' at Townsville as evidenced by the large number of signals about it which I saw passing through the base. I knew that in August 1945, 35 Squadron had a detachment at Morotai, just a couple of degrees off the equator, and that crews there were well aware of tiny Galela Island about twelve miles to their north with an airstrip and a Japanese garrison but which, weeks after the Japanese surrender[1] had not yet been taken over by Allied Forces. Accordingly it was 'off limits' to our personnel. However one of our planes did make an unauthorised visit there triggering not only the Townsville 'flap' but also giving rise to many vague and extraordinary stories, half-truths and exaggerations.

But what really did happen on Galela Island? The central figure in these events said nothing for over fifty years - until he finally agreed to tell the full story for the first time in this book. He is Mick Murphy, now of Maddington, WA, who at the time was a pilot on 35 Squadron flying C-47 Transports. This is Mick's own amazing story.

Why does a pilot decide to do silly things? What makes him take unnecessary risks? After fifty odd years I can't answer those questions. Most pilots in the area knew the history of the Japanese. Stationed at Galela Island, only about twelve miles off Morotai and virtually in our circuit area, they had tried to bring us in on their beacon when we were returning from missions. I was aware of this beacon on my return from the invasion of Tarakan in Borneo.

Since the Japanese Government had surrendered and there was no sign of any official surrender party I thought it would be worthwhile to fly over and pay them a visit and see what war spoils we could collect. I think one thing that motivated me was that I had missed out on all the interesting booty which invariably turned up on these occasions. I was always at the wrong place at the wrong time. The Galela visit was just a spur-of-the-moment decision. I felt I could bluff my way through, and tell the Japs, 'I have been sent over to collect your arms; there will be another visit in the near future', and so on. Bluff, bluff, bluff!

I shared my plans with twelve colleagues including my crew and we set about acquiring machine guns and ammunition and other arms in case the visit backfired. As additional precautions some of the chaps also altered their uniforms and badges to confuse the Japs. One wore an old army jacket that still had its badges on it and

[1] After the atom bombs were dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki on 6 and 9 August, Emperor Hirohito accepted an unconditional surrender with the cease-fire coming into effect on 14 August 1945. The Japanese surrender was signed in a formal ceremony aboard the USS *Missouri* in Tokyo Bay on 2 September 1945. In the following weeks Japanese outposts all around the Pacific were progressively reoccupied by the Allies. Some were not taken over until as late as 29 October. [Ed]

another chap added some unofficial decorative badges plus extra pips and stripes tacked on. They fixed these up to make it difficult for anyone to give accurate descriptions of who they were if there was an investigation later. I wore some jungle greens and my normal officer's cap but we certainly looked a motley crew.

We arranged for an air test on a C-47 that had been recently serviced and took this opportunity to put the plan into operation. After completing the normal tests the chaps changed into their specially altered 'uniforms'. Then the tension and anxiety started to increase.

On arrival over the Galela strip I did several low-level runs to survey the situation, with all twelve of us looking out to spot gun positions and any sign at all of hostility. To our amazement quite a few Japanese ran out to the side of the strip waving. They seemed excited to see us in our RAAF Dakota. The strip looked long enough to get down and off again. So I called out to the crew and others, who included some other officers, 'Will we give it a go? The strip looks OK.' We had a quick discussion and one by one they nodded, so now for the test, friend or foe? The big question was whether they had been told the war was over and had been instructed to be nice to us. At this stage I was anything but relaxed.

Amazingly we landed without incident - no obstructions, no gunfire. We taxied back to put the aircraft in the best possible position for a quick takeoff. Once on the ground our plan was for us all to disembark. I would make initial contact with a small party, then signal if everything was OK and for the others to come over except for a guard party which was to remain with the aircraft and have their machine guns at the ready.

It seemed a very long walk across that strip to make first contact and we went most apprehensively but I was astounded to see a small party of Japanese coming towards us carrying a makeshift white flag on a stick led by the Japanese Commanding Officer and the Doctor, (who acted as interpreter), together with two or three of their officers. Much to our surprise they were waiting for us, obviously expecting that any day somebody would be along.

The party stopped in front of us, bowed and saluted. I cannot remember the initial discussions but the Japs were very humble, respectful and more than willing to help us, making it easier for me to carry out the biggest bluff I ever pulled off in my life!

Our fellows quickly caught on to the situation, kept straight faces and we went through the charade of accepting the 'surrender'. I introduced myself as 'Flight Lieutenant Ned Kelly' and presented 'Flying Officer Don Bradman' and 'Major Billy Hughes' and so on, according to the dummy names they had agreed to use. We were then escorted to the Japanese Officers' Mess. They showed us every courtesy, even serving us a meal and went to the trouble of preparing special bamboo cutlery for us.

Now confident and cocky as 'Flight Lieutenant Ned Kelly', I requested the Japanese to hand over all ceremonial swords, also numerous other interesting items such as cameras, money, knives, binoculars and twelve revolvers. They also insisted that we take back souvenirs of sake jugs and bowls, cigarettes, and chickens - which were a real treat after our bully beef, baked beans and goldfish (herrings).

These trophies were all laid out on a table near one of their huts adjoining the strip. The doctor suggested to me that I should take the Commanding Officer's personal sword, rather than offend by selecting another. This I did and it was presented to me with an elaborate gesture which made him happy. We duly signed and exchanged 'documents of surrender' and after all the bowing, farewells, thanks, etc, departed as soon as we decently could.

**Above left: Mick Murphy on Galela Island with the Japanese Commanding Officer and Medical Officer; and above right, at a briefing on Morotai.**

Back in the air our relief was enormous. That feeling I will never forget. It was agreed that I would take control of all the booty until the dust had settled, then I would distribute it amongst all who had participated in the venture.

Arriving back at Morotai we knew we were overdue and there was some concern as fuel is limited on an air test. Someone might have worked out that we could not have been flying all that time. But we thought we covered up pretty well by saying we had given the plane a very extensive air test. So far so good!

The days ticked by; can't remember how long, but we got to the stage when we thought it was safe to distribute the spoils. I thought no one knew about it.
However a couple of weeks later when an official party led by high ranking officers did land on Galela Island to formally take the surrender they were told by the Japanese Commanding Officer, to their utter amazement, embarrassment and disbelief, that he and his forces had already surrendered to 'Fright Reftennant Ned Kelly' and his officers.

The sheer insolence of this deed immediately started a witch-hunt for the culprits, but not having any correct names or descriptions, they had no immediate success.

Then a little later back at Morotai, out of the blue came the request: 'Send Murphy up to see Area Officer Commanding Transport, Wing Commander Harry Purvis'. It seemed I was really on the mat. He began, 'Why would you do such a mad thing? We were just ready to mount a search for you'. Somehow the word had leaked out. He more or less knew some of the story but wanted to know where we had been and what we had done. He did seem rather intrigued by the escapade. I pleaded that I had all along missed out on picking up any booty on such occasions because of my junior rank, that senior officers had taken all the good trips; I had missed out right back since 1942. This seemed to strike a slightly sympathetic ear. However he did hand out a nominal penalty for 'exceeding the time on an air test'. He also promised to put in a good word for me without guaranteeing anything. 'Thank you Sir', and it was all over. I really thought that that we could at last relax.

But then it happened! Days later a signal arrived from Townsville saying: SEND MURPHY BACK TO BASE AS A PASSENGER STOP REPEAT AS A PASSENGER. Why would they write a signal like that: 'AS A PASSENGER'?

Perhaps I was being called for discharge? I had over five years service up. You can believe anything when you really want to.

**Mick Murphy (alias Flight Lieutenant 'Ned Kelly' in Morotai 1945) with his Samarai sword, Perth 1997.**

On arrival in Townsville 'as a passenger' I was marched into the Commanding Officer's office. He was furious and proceeded to tear strips off me, right, left and centre. 'Why, why would you do such a foolish thing? You've disgraced the squadron. Embarrassed some high ranking officers. Broken the Geneva Convention. Endangered one of His Majesty's aeroplanes and one of His

Majesty's crews. You're grounded. You'll never fly another aeroplane while you are in my squadron.' And much more. 'Be prepared for a court martial within the next three weeks. Dismissed.'

The Commanding Officer, Squadron Leader Roy Brown, was a well-built swarthy-skinned fellow with dark brown eyes. This particular day I swear they turned black! I was demoted to Duty Pilot and for the rest of my time on 35 Squadron at Townsville, was relegated to the Operations Room, wielding a stick of chalk and a blackboard.

Some weeks later, with no news of my court martial and when things appeared to be gradually getting back to normal, Headquarters phoned me to prepare an aircraft for Perth, my home town. Rather cheekily I listed myself as second pilot and was amazed when this was allowed to stand. Not only that, once on the aircraft I was moved over to the left seat as No 1 pilot!

We had a great trip to Perth and on arrival back in Townsville I was told I would resume normal flying duties. The court martial had been dropped[2], we all kept our spoils and nothing further was heard on the incident.

For a further four months I flew, evacuating many who had been POWs for years, including nurses, and even flew a courier trip to Japan. In April 1946 I was discharged after six and a half years service.

## LANCASTER UNDER THE HARBOUR BRIDGE – AND SHOOTING UP MANLY

*It was a very famous Lancaster bomber, 'Q Queenie', that flew under the Sydney Harbour Bridge in October 1943. Piloted by Flight Lieutenant (later Wing Commander) Peter Isaacson of Melbourne with his all-Australian crew from 460 Squadron, 'Q Queenie' had just completed a three month whistle-stop tour flying renowned dignitaries on speech-making stops and exhibiting the plane all over Australia and New Zealand to boost the Liberty Loans campaign. Over fifty years later Peter explained.*

When I flew under the Sydney Harbour Bridge this was quite contrary to regulations and after I landed at Mascot I was threatened with a court martial. Two authorities wanted to court martial me: Eastern Area in which the crime was committed and Southern Command to which I was attached at the time. I was told later there was a great fight among the bureaucrats of each of these commands as to which would court-martial me. Apparently they could not agree on which should be the prosecutor and the idea either lapsed - or maybe is still being pursued by the successors to each of these commands!

It was not an air test but was a premeditated idea of mine to 'show the Lancaster to Sydney'. Only my crew was on board, despite the many thousands who have since claimed to have been with me! None of the crew knew that I was going to do it.

[2] In retrospect the action of the local CO in punishing Murphy probably saved him from a court martial on the legal grounds that a man cannot be punished twice for the same offence.

While this flight was strictly forbidden, off-limits, verboten, prohibited and illegal, consideration should be given for the circumstances and the pressures on this crew at the time, particularly on its captain. Having barnstormed the Lanc all over Australia and New Zealand for months with relays of politicians and dignitaries, it is understandable, and might even be expected, that this captain and crew missed the excitement and even the dangers of operational flying. And in Sydney, to any pilot worth his salt, there was the ever-present challenge of defying authority by flying under the Harbour Bridge, as others had done before.

*But one key member of Peter's crew was not on board. He was Bob Nielsen, his navigator. Now living in California, Bob supplied this additional gem.*

It was certainly a spontaneous effort by the skipper. But I could not go on that flight, having been married just the day before. Joy and I were honeymooning at Manly. I learned later that Isaacson told the crew, in the air, that he was going to fly under the Harbour Bridge and then fly to Manly 'to shake Nielsen up'. He did just that. Joy and I were having a quiet breakfast at the Manly Pacific Hotel when the Lancaster arrived and proceeded to 'shoot up' the hotel. Any chance that Joy and I had of remaining incognito was immediately gone. Some people congratulated us while others looked pained at the thought I might have organised the event.

Peter omits any mention of what to most of us would be ample justification, albeit unofficial, for the perfectly harmless flight under the bridge. This was the wonderful publicity it gave the Liberty Loans tour, which was the whole purpose in bringing the Lancaster out to Australia.

As far as we know the photograph that was snapped by an alert amateur and published in the *Daily Telegraph* is the only one ever taken of this historic event.

The record-making flight, the first ever England-to-Australia from east to west, is described in detail in *With the Stars Above* by Bob Nielsen, Navigator of Q-Queenie. While Q-Queenie remains the only Lancaster to fly under the Bridge, a number of other planes have done so, dating back to 1931 when famous early aviators P.G. Taylor and Reg Annabel flew their Gipsy Moths under the arch before the bridge was even finished. During the World War II years 'fly unders' were done by a KLM DC-5, an RAF Sunderland, a USAAF B-25 Mitchell, a B-24 Liberator, and three Bell Airacobras which did it in a formation dive. Kittyhawks and a Boomerang have also been reported doing the trick. In 1945 an Avro York flew under and at about that time a Percival Proctor was also reported going under the Bridge. In 1961 two helicopters flew from HMAS 'Sydney' near North Head, dived under the Bridge and landed back on HMAS 'Sydney'.
It seems most likely that all the above flights, like Isaacson's, were unauthorised. As far as we know, for all the stunting around and under the bridge, no-one has hit it!
[I am indebted to Tim Anderson DFC of Mosman, Life President of the 460 Squadron Association NSW, for supplying much of the above information about early Harbour Bridge 'fly-unders', as well as helpful advice with other stories.]

**Lancaster bomber diving under Sydney Harbour Bridge during its flight on Friday to assist the War Loan. At right, Flight Lieutenant Peter Isaacson, pilot of the Lancaster. (Photo courtesy of the Daily Telegraph, Sydney Friday 22 October 1943)**

## PARACHUTE AUCTION IN JAVA

*Few airmen are immortalised in bronze busts at the Australian War Museum in Canberra. Liberator pilot Alan Triggs is one, despite many of his completely outlandish stunts that added spice - and danger - to the war service of this acknowledged brilliant pilot. Colin Badham of Lismore NSW, who was Triggs' navigator for a record 102 operational trips, relates one of their strictly unofficial exploits.*

It was September 1945, less than a month after VJ Day. We were in Darwin, killing time, expecting discharge any day, but instead found ourselves having to fly to Kemajoran, Batavia (now Djakarta), with a load of supplies to be parachute-dropped for just-released internees who were said to be in pretty bad shape.

En route we received a radio message cancelling the drop and instructing us instead to land at Kemajoran with the supplies. This was a bit of a worry since the Japs were still there and we were quite uncertain about the political situation in Java, although we were told that former RAAF prisoners of war had the aerodrome under control. So we landed as directed and were taken to a hotel in the middle of the filthy, sprawling city - right next door to the Japanese Headquarters! The Japs seemed to be the only ones maintaining some vestige of law and order in that part of the city. There were millions of people teeming on the streets of Batavia and unbelievable squalor. For the

first time we witnessed the incredible plight of the emaciated internees being brought in from the outlying camps, many of them white women, presumably Dutch. They were a pitiful sight.

We had a sense of imminent danger on all sides. In this atmosphere Triggs and Norm Williams, one of our gunners, decided to 'pay a visit' to the Japanese Officers' Mess next door. This seemed quite foolhardy to the rest of us to say the least. But they returned, Triggs with a magnificent Samurai sword and Williams with a variety of revolvers.

**Photo of the bronze bust of Alan Triggs in the Australian War Memorial, Canberra.**
(AWM ART27651)

We then hatched the plot to sell or auction the parachutes, since we had landed and delivered the supplies and reasoned to ourselves 'Why cart the parachutes back to Australia? The war is over.' So another trip to the Japanese Officers' Headquarters where we commandeered the biggest car we could find, a huge 1943 Lincoln Zephyr. This we drove through the crowded streets back to the heavily guarded Liberator at Kemajoran, transferred the parachutes to the car, returned to the city and in the first large open space unloaded the parachutes and set up an improvised auction stand, taking it in turns to act as auctioneer. Williams started the ball rolling, yelling in English that no-one could understand, but the locals soon caught on and an impressive and vocal crowd quickly gathered. Great volumes of money changed hands as the Dutch Guilder was almost completely worthless at that stage.
Soon it was all over. We had a car full of money and the locals had badly needed top quality cloth. We beat a hasty retreat back to the hotel, split the money with the rest of the crew, bought a few souvenirs, but obviously kept quiet about the parachute escapade for fear of some disciplinary action.

Next day we took off for Cocos Island to refuel and it was a great relief for me as navigator to find this tiny dot in a vast ocean with no radio aids of any kind. In the mess there we swapped yarns with other crews whose reaction ranged from amazement to envy when we related the parachute-selling saga. The war was a long

way from Cocos where it seemed the only danger was to be hit on the head by falling coconuts! Even the runway appeared to be made from coconut husks.

Refuelled, we returned to Darwin where there were never any questions asked as to the whereabouts of certain supply-dropping parachutes.

From '*Biscay to Balikpapan*'.

# CHAPTER THREE

# BEATING THE SYSTEM

## A CONVENIENT OIL LEAK

*Ian Kirkby of Lismore, NSW describes a fool-proof lurk his crew worked many times to attend 'do's' they had heard were coming up on other stations.*

Our Stirling, on 1657 HCU at Stradishall, had a persistent though slight oil leak from No. 2 engine, not enough to cause us any trouble but just enough to show a convincing colour trail over the wing. When ostensibly doing an air test and other exercises we would land on the station where the 'do' was to be, claiming emergency, and show the offending oil leak to the ground staff, expressing our grave concern.

We timed this for late in the day, so the ground staff would invariably say, in effect, 'It will take us a while to look into this, you might have to stay overnight'. To which we would reluctantly agree, and then head for our mates on that station and the 'do'. Next morning the ground staff would invariably tell us: 'We couldn't find a perishing thing wrong with that engine - it shouldn't give you any more trouble, just watch it,' to which we would again reluctantly agree, and take off and head home. We worked this scheme on training exercises all over England!

## BEATING THE CENSOR

*When 455 and 144 Squadrons were stationed an Vaengi, near Murmansk in Russia, their mail and cables were subject to very close censorship by both RAF and Russian authorities, to make sure no useful information was inadvertently sent out. Frank Dick of Mullumbimby particularly wanted to tell his mum in Sydney not only that he was well, but where he was. This is how he went about it.*

I had grown up with a cousin who was now a Battle of Britain pilot in England. But virtually no commentary was allowed other than 'safe and well'. So I cabled to him:

'TAKE STEPPES ADVISE MUM SAFE AND WELL'

Would you believe it? It passed both censors as OK. As soon as my cousin received it he tumbled and said,

'Good God, Frank's in Russia!'

## BLACKMARKET MEALS IN LINCOLNSHIRE

*Bicycles were particularly valuable in Lincolnshire, reported Noel Dwyer, as he describes how he and his mates supplemented their meagre mess rations.*

My bicycle provided the means of transport at night, to places of ill repute, where one could get a 'blackmarket meal'. You only had to live in England during wartime to experience hunger pangs the like of which I have never had to suffer since. There was food, but it was terrible. We rarely saw any decent meat. Breakfast would occasionally bring a serving of kippers, thin parchment-like fish with huge eyes staring at you from the plate, which were never touched but put into the pig bins. The most frequent meal was offal, such as liver, which was first served up whole, but once again put into the pig bins without being touched. We felt it must have been retrieved and then diced up and served up again, only to suffer the same fate. Finally we would get it mashed only to end up in the pig bins for a third time.

Baked beans and spam were fairly regular offerings and these at least were acceptable in the circumstances, otherwise we would have well and truly starved. Apart from that, we lived off parcels from home, Comfort Funds and the Red Cross with goodly supplies of tinned fruit and fruit cakes. At one time I had a dozen large fruit cakes most of which I had to give away to English friends as there was only so much fruit cake that one could comfortably consume.

The point is that most RAAF aircrew, like their British hosts, were on iron rations, and were alway very hungry. In Lincolnshire some bright spark discovered a distant farm house which served up lashings of bacon, eggs, chips and baked beans for the princely sum of two shillings and six pence. I well remember my first visit to such a house of gastronomic pleasure. A hard seven or eight mile ride through the countryside, arriving in pitch darkness, and then to be escorted by whispering guides to a shed at the back of a farm house. Curtains covering the front of the shed were quickly pulled open, we were pushed in and the curtains were drawn closed again. And there we were in a semi-lit room with two long rows of trestle tables crowded with RAAF aircrew chomping into large plates of forbidden luxuries usually reserved for the elite of the land.

One wonders how many other such ventures as this existed around the countryside, and how much 'contraband' food found its way to the luxury hotels and clubs of London and elsewhere. Those who frequented this isolated Lincolnshire hideaway gave no thought to such matters at the time. They merely indulged to the full and then cycled all the way back to the Station, only to find that by the time they had got back, the energy spent had brought back the same feeling of hunger they had experienced on their forward journey. In the end, there really was no winning, was there?

## CHRISTMAS DAY AT THE WORKHOUSE

*35 Squadron Pathfinders based at Graveley were briefed to mark the target at Cologne for about one hundred main force bombers. Allan Vial of Mermaid Waters, Queensland, navigator of R for Roberts (so named for the skipper) describes the less than hero's welcome that awaited the crews on their return to base.*

It was Christmas Eve, and we lost an engine on take off, but as Primary Visual Marker, and being close to the end of our second tour, we decided to 'press on regardless' using higher revs and boost. On return to base after a torrid and hectic trip to and from Cologne, all the way on three engines, we found our squadron all diverted, because of the dense fog, to West Raynham.

It was a miserable Christmas Eve as we hunted around in the sleet and snow and eventually found spare beds for the night in the huts there. We were all keen to get back to Graveley for Christmas Dinner because we had been told it was to be something really special and for young healthy guys that meant a lot as we were always hungering for 'real' food.

We got up at 0600 on a freezing cold morning with occasional snowfalls and had a meagre scratch meal in the mess. I guess they were saving up for their own slap-up Christmas Dinner there at noon! At 0700 we headed out to our aircraft only to find that all four engines were unserviceable, the other three due to the over-boosting and higher revs for over four hours the previous night. We felt quite miserable in the freezing air as we watched the other 35 Squadron aircraft take off - before we had time to hitch a ride with them. We then had to sit and wait until a crew van could be organised and an unwilling driver ordered (much against his will, since it could mean him missing *his* Christmas Dinner) to drive us back to Graveley. But the situation got even worse. I had been 'seconded' to the front seat to navigate the guy on the various back roads to Graveley - of course no sign posts in those days. After travelling only a few minutes it was obvious the wiper could not cope with the iced-up windscreen which then had to be opened forward, immediately letting in the icy blast. Despite still wearing a borrowed kapok inner and canvas outer flying suits over my battle dress plus helmet, goggles and oxygen mask and a heavy woollen scarf around all that, I soon had a big patch of ice on my chest. Brrr *I was freezing!* It was only the thought of the beaut hot roast beef and chicken and ham and the lovely hot Christmas Pud that kept the blood slowly oozing through the arteries and veins. Brrr! Our unwilling driver, a dour Scottish corporal, offered little comment on the trip except to suggest several times that since he was lost he should drop us at the next pub to put up there for the night! But we knew full well it was only so that he could get back to his station to make HIS Christmas party.

The whole countryside was covered with a thick white mantle of snow and we had really had enough of the icy travel conditions when we were dropped off at the front door of our Officers Mess at about 1300 with me looking like an icicle, being covered in ice from the oxygen mask to my waist. I was frigid!

Though we stripped off our flying gear, had a quick scrub up and were, we thought, quite presentable and ready for a great feast and a few warming strong grogs, when

we were ‘greeted’ at the dining room door by the Station Adjutant, a ‘shiny bum’ in squadron parlance, he refused us admittance until we had a shower and shave and changed into ‘best blues!’ The rest of the squadron, who had flown back, had arrived not long before us due to flying delays and were also ‘outed’. When we all got back from changing dinner was over and the good Christmas tucker all gone. About fifty of us, Aussies, Canucks, Brits and Kiwis milled around full of fiery ire for the ground-based bastards, wingless wonders, etc etc - especially on Christmas Day.

We badly wanted to ‘get square’ with the Adj and the ‘system’ and all who had eaten our share of Christmas fare, without it being ‘sheeted home’ to us. We learned that some very high brass from Bomber Command were to arrive for a Christmas Dance that night. These included Air Marshal Sir Arthur and Lady Harris, Air Vice-Marshal Don and Ly Bennett and five other quite senior officers. A substantial cold buffet dinner would be served to them at 1900.

We got our own back. We arranged that all our group would arrive early for the evening meal and were first in line, two deep outside the closed dining room, as was fairly normal. But we made sure that all those first in the queue were those who had missed out on their Christmas Dinner. As soon as the doors were opened at 1900 we all rushed in taking all the plates of food set out on the buffet. There was ham, chicken, beef, cold sausages, salads, bowls of sweets and fruit. Everything was taken except for one chicken which a smartarse mess corporal, seeing what was happening, managed to save so the VIP visitors would at least have a small snack. We roundly abused the corporal for his miserly actions.

We barricaded ourselves in the far corner of the mess to consume all the goodies we had snitched. Despite firm orders from the highly annoyed Adjutant, who arrived rather late on the scene, being aroused only by the clamour in the mess, we refused to give back any of the food, telling him we were only having our Christmas Dinner that he had refused us. We scoffed the lot.

The following day the Adjutant referred the matter to the Station Commander but he did nothing about it - knowing if it got to the ears of ‘The Boss’, as Pathfinder Chief Don Bennett was known, he would be far from pleased that any of his operational crews, diverted the night before, had been refused a meal on Christmas Day.

I told Don Bennett this story in 1985 and he said he would have been most annoyed about it if he had known. On the night in question he had been shielded from the fact that the VIPs had not had much of a supper. But food was not a subject he gave very much thought to. He said he had no time for incompetent people, of any rank, who upset his crews, both ground and aircrew. *(Don’t we know only too well, I hear people say! Ed.)*

## DEFENDING THE INDEFENSIBLE

*Just when one of the biggest battles of all time was at its height, about 200 miles away an RAAF pilot was being disciplined for unauthorised low flying. Syd Johnson from Trigg, Western Australia, relates this story.*

His name was Johnny Bateman and he was an officer of 75 Squadron, a New Zealand squadron based at Mepal, about twenty minutes flying time from Little Staughton. Even in the heat of battle, decorum must be preserved. A Lanc cost about £82,000 and if at that stage of the game, you lost four on ops one night, four more would trundle down the runway next morning as replacements. Nevertheless bending aircraft for fun was not considered *de rigeur*.

So Mr Bateman was for the High Jump. He enquired at RAAF HQ at Kodak House in London, and was informed that there was a legal practitioner at large on 582 Squadron at Little Staughton, so he presented himself there one day to be royally entertained mostly by my crew who tried to convince him that Perry Mason was a non-event compared with the forensic talent which oozed from yours truly.

It happened to be 4 o'clock on the afternoon of D-Day that Wing Commander Dunnicliffe, the Commanding Officer, in the course of a Night Flying Test flew me over to Mepal where I was greeted by Johnny Bateman and his fan club. He had among others a mate named Luke, who was not a physician like his biblical namesake but nevertheless had a panacea for all human ills. The prescription was good brown English ale with unlimited repeats. I wanted to do some work on the case and find out something about the Air Force Regulations which covered the matter, and waved away the proffered drinks for a while, but I seemed to be the only one taking the thing at all seriously. Finally I made the mistake of accepting a drink and then the game was on. It went on into the wee small hours. Finally Luke double-dinked me on a bike which had two flat tyres to a billet somewhere.

In the morning down came all this brass from London to administer justice. They seemed to a man to be a starchy lot, very serious, and even unhappy, in strange contrast to the general attitude prevailing on an operational station. The prosecutor was an unpleasant little man, a Squadron Leader by rank, slightly obese, with a flat hat with the cane still in it, an accoutrement a real airman wouldn't be seen dead in. He was obviously surprised to find I was the defending officer, not the accused.

Since my client had come home from his misadventure with a piece of the English countryside embedded in his wing, I saw no prospect of beating the low flying charge, but there was a second count of unlawfully damaging one of His Majesty's aircraft which I didn't like at all so I suggested to the Prosecutor that if he dropped the second charge we would plead guilty to the first. He would have none of it and regarded me with the gravest suspicion.

However, they agreed to hear the second charge first. I really did think this one a bit rough and submitted that the legislation must have contemplated an element of intent, as in sabotage, and the last thing my over-worked, over-tired and ops-weary client wanted to do was to touch the ground. The Court agreed and acquitted him, so we

then pleaded guilty on the low flying. Actually it had been carried out in a Low Flying Area, but without permission, and the CO gave evidence that had permission been sought it would have been granted, so all this fuss in the critical period of a world conflict was about the absence of a scrap of paper, said I. Nobody was impressed. I called a string of witnesses in mitigation who were so good Johnny didn't know they were talking about him. The decision as to penalty was reserved, however, and I escaped from Mepal without getting into further trouble. I believe that the Court in the first instance viewed Mr Bateman's indiscretion rather seriously but was overruled by higher authority and nothing serious happened to him. I've never seen Johnny since.

From *It's Never Dark Above the Clouds*.

## DICING AT DROGUE TOWING

*Air-to-air gunnery practice is normally firing at a drogue - a fabric cone towed behind an aircraft. Being pilot of a drogue-towing aircraft was never a highly sought-after job since novice air gunners were known to occasionally spray their fire too far ahead of the drogue, with the result that the towing aircraft sometimes landed with a few holes in its tail; a bit of a worry. But these risks were nothing compared with the experience described by Tom Offord, a WAG, from Bull Creek, WA.*

The navy had two new warships in Trincomalee Harbour, Ceylon, (as Sri Lanka was then called) and requested that our flight provide a drogue-towing aircraft for firing practice and calibration work. This meant fitting a Vultee Vengeance Dive Bomber with towing equipment at breakneck speed and giving my pilot and myself a super-short course on the peculiarities of drogues and most important of all, on the delicate art of dealing with the Navy. It was impressed on us that the utmost secrecy must prevail as the Navy was trying out new equipment.

The great day arrived. We took off full of high hopes - flew over the target area dead on time and then wham! The warships opened up with more than pea shooters and - horror of horrors - shell bursts were deadly accurate as to height, but were exploding just ahead of our aircraft, instead of about one hundred yards astern where the drogue was.

My pilot, Len Pennock, quickly handed me a scribbled message with the instructions 'Send Urgently'. We didn't have direct R/T communication for the pilot; the WAG had to transmit any messages. So I promptly transmitted Len's message in plain language morse code. It read: 'We are pulling this bloody drogue, not pushing it'.

When we got back to base the fit had hit the shan. 'Transmitting P/L is not on', the CO fumed, 'except in cases of extreme emergency'. Len replied, 'It was an absobloodylutely extreme emergency; anyway it was my decision'. Len didn't mince words. The CO relented and we later learned that the Navy had framed our message.
(After the war someone sent the story to Readers Digest, where it appeared in 'Humour in Uniform'. No, we didn't get paid for it, nor did we get the credit; 'c'est la vie', or maybe, 'C'est la guerre'.)

## DINKUM DEBRIEFING

*After an operation it was normal for crews to be debriefed to assess the results of the raid, before heading for the Mess for the customary post-op bacon and eggs. Peter O'Connor of Hove, South Australia, recalls some classic repartee which occurred during debriefing at 44 Squadron, Dunholme Lodge in 1944.*

After a long and rather hazardous operation on Munich Flight Sergeant Price, a lanky, laconic Australian, sat down with his crew at a long table before an Intelligence Officer, a Squadron Officer WAAF. She was a stunning brunette, impeccably but discreetly made up. Sitting upright in a well-tailored uniform she confirmed the expectation that she had a figure to match. Addressing Price in her veddy, veddy upper class English accent, she asked the question, 'Now tell me - ah - Price - did you actually SEE the target?'

Price, in his very Australian drawl, answered, 'See it? You couldn't miss the bastard, Miss. It was stickin' out like a bloody country shithouse!'

The Intelligence Officer with typical British reserve retorted icily, 'You've made your point, Flight Sergeant'.

## FLIGHT SERGEANT PONGO JOINS THE MESS

*At 551 Squadron on Twinwood Farm, about five miles north of Bedford, Pancho Manning bought a little fox terrier pup reported Spencer Philpott of Belmont NSW, navigator on Pancho's Beaufighter.*

Although pets were not permitted, no action was taken until 'Pongo', for that was his name, followed us into the mess. The RAF Mess Sergeant Major very smartly told Pancho that it was an NCO's mess only and Pongo would have to go.

Not to be beaten Pancho had one of the WAAF's knit a woollen jacket for Pongo, added pilot's wings and with the rank of Flight Sergeant sewn on it, Pongo was now an NCO and duly accompanied us into the mess and surprisingly, no further complaints were received about him.

## DISAPPEARING BEDS AND A RIOT

*Ground staff were working late into the night keeping planes serviced at No. 1 BAGS at Evans Head, NSW in 1942. Aircrews were being put through at a maximum rate because the war situation up north was looking grim. Engine Fitter Bill Shrubb of Lismore takes up the story.*

One evening after a night shift we returned to our barracks to find them in a state of chaos, with all the iron collapsible beds gone, palliasses and blankets strewn everywhere and personal belongings scattered. We hadn't been told anything beforehand. Some changed into their pyjamas but others would not accept the situation. When several more chaps arrived back from leave at the local pub full of beer and found their beds missing, they put on a comic turn about what they would do to the so-and-so's who took their beds. They woke everybody in the four adjoining huts - it was now about 10.30 pm - and everyone joined in. Just then the station mascot, a very popular dog called 'Slackarse' howled at the moon.

'Look, why the bastards have even taken poor Slackarses's bed', yelled one of the boys. 'Let's go and see the CO and ask him what he's up to.'

The crowd - now over one hundred - all moved off four abreast in their pyjamas down to the quarters of CO Group Captain George Boucher, chanting, 'Where are our beds, where are our beds?', threw stones on his roof and banged garbage tin lids together which brought the CO out - also in his pyjamas. Addressing the crowd he said, 'It was necessary to take your beds for the extra course of WAGs and Observer Trainees who need to study hard. I order you all back to your barracks. This is very serious, this riot must cease immediately.'

But the chant continued, 'We want our beds, we want our beds'. We then drifted back to the huts and went to bed on the floor.

Next day he paraded the maintenance staff and read the Riot Act. Unbeknown to the RAAF personnel at the time CO Boucher had called in the army with orders to shoot if the riot got out of control.

*The scene now changes to Grafton Racecourse about fifty miles south, where the 15th Australian Motorised Regiment was camped. Os Johnston of Lismore, an AIF wireless operator, tells his part of the story.*

About 10.30 pm six of our Bren Gun Carriers were told to stand by. Two hours later we were instructed to go the Q Store and be issued with live ammunition for the Bren guns, Vickers guns and .303 rifles on each carrier. We thought we were in for a stoush, that some Japs must have landed - or something equally serious. At 4 am the six Bren Gun Carriers, with three crew on each, set off for Evans Head 'because CO Boucher had a riot on his hands', said the signals. We were told to use the live ammunition if necessary 'to suppress the riot'. When we arrived there, about 3-1/2 hours later, we were given tents adjoining the camp and told to 'stand by'. We camped there three days and but there was no further action and we were then told we could return to Grafton.

*The outcome was that all the ground staff in the 'riot' were confined to barracks for a week. Bill Shrubb continues.*

What started out as a silly prank - throwing stones on the CO's roof - could have had very serious consequences because of the extreme high-handed action of the CO. But

we got the last laugh because Group Captain Boucher was posted very soon after and we got our beds back the same day.

## LANDING A TIGER - BACKWARDS

*Harewood, just east of Christchurch on the South Island, was one of New Zealand's EFTS airfields. It was under the lee of the Southern Alps, the major mountain chain running the length of the South Island. Mike Wallace of Goonellabah, NSW but previously of 20 Squadron flying Corsairs, describes what often happened when a severe cold front moved across the area.*

Under normal circumstances the weather was ideal for the activities of embryonic pilots. However, due to the geographical aspect of the Southern Alps a cold front sometime brought with it unexpectedly high winds.

While the Air Force made every effort to forecast the fronts and bring all planes back to base ahead of it, their forecasts were often, to say the least, somewhat astray with the result that frequently a number of Tigers would be airborne when the front hit the aerodrome, particularly those who had been on cross-country navigation exercises.

The wind speed on these occasions was often equal to, and in fact exceeded, the stalling speed or indeed the cruising speed, of a Tiger Moth. This resulted in the interesting phenomenon, when witnessed from the ground, of seeing several Tigers when entering the landing circuit *actually flying backwards*, relative to the ground, depending on which leg of the circuit they were on.

While the sight of an EFTS plane proceeding in reverse to its normal passage over the ground would evoke cries of wonderment to anyone witnessing this event for the first

time, there remained the serious question of how did one actually land a Tiger in the face of this extremely strong and gusty line squall.

We solved this problem by the classic use of manpower, mustering all trainee pilots who were not airborne. We would string ourselves out across the airfield in a long double line, the space between each line roughly equal to the wing span of a Tiger Moth. Our trick was as the hapless plane made its somewhat haphazard approach, and at the point when it made tentative contact with the ground, we, the ground component of this combined landing operation, would rush forward, grabbing at the wing tips before the aircraft could become airborne again. This operation was very much like landing on an aircraft carrier, without the assistance of landing hooks!

Surprisingly, the system worked well and I am not aware that any airborne and windswept Tiger was ever lost to the elements.

## MANDRAKE TAKES A SHORT CUT

*The scene is Richmond RAAF Base in the early 1940s. The narrator is Nobby Blundell*.

'Mandrake', an LAC Fitter IIA, (airframes) got his nickname after a popular comic strip of the time. In every large group of men there are some misfits and Mandrake was a classic example. In barrack hut conversation he always said that in peacetime he was a professional sparring partner, and named a well-known Sydney gymnasium where he claimed to have worked. He looked and acted the part and nobody doubted him. On the Station he spent his spare time in the gym on skipping rope and punching bag and after the day's work would still run laps around the camp. He was also inclined to push himself forward and claim more than his due.

When fitters in charge had carried out any major work on an aircraft they were usually called on to go up in its initial test flight. Mandrake was always to the forefront to fly and boasted that he was never airsick. However given the right circumstances, not many are immune from airsickness.

Mandrake and I had carried out a major inspection on one of the North American Harvards and had it ready for test. This is a two-seat aircraft from which the Australian Wirraway was developed and had separate sliding canopies over pilot and passenger. When the pilot arrived to fly the aircraft my fitters quietly suggested to him that he give Mandrake the full treatment in the hope of taking him down a peg or two.
With Mandrake aboard, the pilot took off and gained height over Richmond township and the Nepean River, staying in view of our dispersal area as planned by the pilot and fitters. Then it began. The Harvard was quite good for aerobatics and the pilot went through the full catalogue of stall turns, loops, side-slips and fishtails so it was not long before Mandrake had to slide the canopy back to vomit over the side. He also undid his safety harness to lean over enough to save himself having to clean the cockpit on return in front of our amused fitters, his workmates. But the pilot, sitting in the front cockpit, did not realise that Mandrake had unstrapped himself, and when his

passenger settled back again, the pilot, not noticing that the canopy was still pushed back, thought he was ready for more and inverted the aircraft. Of course, the law of gravity automatically applied and Mandrake fell straight out. Fortunately his parachute worked well and he landed close to the bank of the Nepean River - all in one piece.

When the pilot discovered he was one passenger short he panicked and called control on the radio and the ambulance dashed out to look for the casualty. They soon found Mandrake under where the worried pilot was still circling; he had the rolled ‘chute under his arm and was walking in circles looking intently in the grass. The ambulance men thought he had been knocked silly and went to help him, but he only protested, ‘Don’t stand around there doin’ nuthin’; give us a hand to find me tobacco tin, it must have fallen out o’me overalls pocket on the way down’. That was all he was worried about!

Later, after 456 Squadron arrived in the UK, Mandrake and I were in a party of servicemen who were being shown over Windsor Castle and in one section the guide was signalling the party to be very quiet, as the house staff were attending church in the Castle Chapel, through which we would pass. Mandrake, as usual, managed to be different. He blundered into a stand on which stood a large brass bowl of flowers - the bowl crashed to the flagstone floor with enough noise to be heard back at the camp.

Shortly after that Mandrake retrained as an air gunner and was transferred to a Sunderland Squadron at Pembroke Dock. The squadron records state that the crew which Mandrake joined was on patrol in the Bay of Biscay and Base was receiving RT transmissions from them regarding an attack by enemy aircraft. The transmission stopped abruptly in the middle of a word. The aircraft and crew were listed missing.
Vale, Mandrake. He was as clumsy and punch-drunk as nature and boxing could make him, but spoke no evil of anyone and always went out of his way to help his mates.

From *Friends on Active Service.*

**SNOWPRINTS IN WESTPHALIA**

*Alex Gould of Bundanoon, NSW spent four years as a POW in Germany and recently published a book 'Tales From the Sagan Woods', describing some of those experiences. He recalls one particular activity he and his mates got up to when a POW. This was the dreadful 'affluence of incohol', as he describes it.*

About fifteen of us, RAF and RAAF, being guests of Adolph H. at a filthy army camp called Warburg, formed a syndicate and secretly made some potent grog to have a few toasts for Christmas 1941.

At this camp we had as Senior British Officer one Douglas ('Tin-Legs') Bader. There was one occasion when we were goon-baiting on an appell (roll call) and the Hauptmann Lager Offizier - frothing at the mouth - pulled his Luger at Bader who had been particularly insulting, but 'Tin Legs' didn't bat an eyelid.

But to get back to the grog. We had to use whatever ingredients we had. The brew was made mostly from spud peelings, yeast and rotten turnip tops and it stank so we decided to 'pasteurise' it down a tunnel we had been digging. At this stage of the brew's production, the tunnel air conditioning gave us 3-day headaches. (Chemical types said it was $CO_2$ ingestion as we sucked air through a cinders pathway.) Anyhow after the third distillation all odours had been removed and we ended up with a colourless liquid. Adding some ersatz orange colour we had our booze for the salutations. At midday so-called 'Xmas dinner', the thaw had resulted in bloody mud everywhere. We went through all the toasts so that, then feeling rather sleepy, I collapsed into a bottom bunk. In late afternoon it had snowed heavily yet some sunlight had filtered through. Outside the hut a part-thaw had left icicles hanging down from the roof. This next part is from hearsay: I was told that shortly after I collapsed on the bunk there was an appell which I apparently attended with the assistance of a mate on each elbow to hold me up. (They also claimed I was able to pee). I didn't remember a thing for the next three days but had no hangover! During

this time a pom I'd flown with, Peter Tunstall, had blown - on that appell - a cornet right in my ear. The decibels from that blast apparently registering by eyesight some trouser legs and footprints in the snow! I do remember seeing the footprints in the snow but don't remember anything else about it! A good thing he was later sent to Colditz and I was left in peace for the next half dozen purges all over Germany and Poland.

**Alex Gould at Spangenburg Schloss POW camp, early 1941.**

The Warburg brew was only one of many we played around with. They were all different but this Warburg job was one that's always rattled me. But lost forever is the formula for those wood-alcohols - three days and no hangover!! But I do remember only seeing footprints in the snow!

## SYNAGOGUE JACKPOT

*Peter Isaacson of Toorak, Melbourne tells about the unexpected outcome of a jackpot competition that 156 Pathfinder Squadron used to run.*

At the briefing before an operation, each crew would put 14 shillings (two shillings per crew member) into a kitty. The winner of the jackpot would be the crew whose automatic photograph of their bomb drop over the target was closest to the aiming point.

On this operation when we went to Milan, on 14th February 1943, my crew won the jackpot and was presented with the prize by the Commanding Officer, Wing Commander Tommy Rivett-Carnac (widely known as 'nuts and bolts Carnac'), with the comment, 'Isaacson's crew won the jackpot again tonight. This time their bombs were plotted as falling directly on the Synagogue in Milan. May God have mercy on Isaacson's soul!'

## THE BLENHEIM THAT FLOATED

*As combat aircraft normally float like bricks (that is, straight down) Nobby Blundell's story of a Blenheim that did not sink made some kind of history, as he tells it.*

Snowy and I and a Squadron Leader Pilot were in a Blenheim flying out of 456 Squadron at Valley, North Wales. We were over the Irish Sea when engine failure forced us to ditch near Rhosneiger on the coast of Anglesea, some two hundred yards short of the beach. All three of us were shaken up but the pilot was knocked unconscious.

We scrambled out on to the wing, and as the plane began to sink, Snow helped me wrestle the pilot out through the hatch and we then prepared to swim ashore with him. It was winter and so cold that large blocks of ice were floating in the water. Snow asked, 'Why hasn't the bloody aircraft sunk?' I replied, 'Let's worry about that later. I'll jump in and take him and you help me swim ashore with him'.

As soon as I jumped in off the wing the mystery of the floating aircraft was solved. The water was only up to my neck. The aircraft had been resting on the bottom.

The cold water shocked the pilot into consciousness. After reaching the beach several people who had witnessed the crash landing from the pub at the top of the cliffs had brought some brandy for first aid. This was quickly downed by the three of us, who were then able to take stock and realise that apart from being very wet and cold we had made history by surviving the first 'floating Blenheim'.

From *Friends on Active Service*.

## HOW TO WIN FRIENDS IN CANADA

*In August 1942, No. 2 Wireless School in Calgary, Canada, received with their fiftieth entry, the largest batch of Aussies the Commanding Officer had ever seen. He quickly noted that they did not respond to his strict discipline. The Aussies were quite unfazed at coming in through the fence when late back from leave and it didn't help matters when they disarmed the guard who accosted them. Allan Nesbitt from Bathurst, carries on with this story.*

The CO came down heavily on the three flights of RAAF whenever any 'incidents' occurred. He had built-up such a negative reputation with our chaps that they decided something should be done to 'help' him.

At the time of our graduation, right after we had been presented with our WAG's wings, we had arranged, through a third party, for a messenger to march up to the dais and quickly present the CO with a book, which the messenger did, smartly saluting and turning about, then just as quickly marching away, to be lost in the large crowd of onlookers. The unwrapped book, which could be seen by all on the official stand was none other than Dale Carnegie's *How to Win Friends and Influence People.*

For once the CO was lost for words at the time, although he showed his disapproval later. But having graduated, we were soon posted, out of his clutches.

**THE FLYING PORTER**

*Who will ever forget the interminable paper war we fought once we of the RAAF became attached to the RAF when overseas? Tom Offord of Bull Creek, Western Australia, reports this skirmish.*

Our introduction to the paper war was at Port Tewfik when we stepped off HMTS *Queen Mary* in November, 1941. A little fresh-faced Pommie RAF Corporal bustled up to our rather listless bunch of Australian NCOs and informed us that a Personnel Record sheet must be completed for every member. But instead of issuing a sheet to everyone he decided that he would do each sheet himself. Remember this was his big day - a Corporal wielding his authority over all these Australian Sergeants.

All went well until he came to Clancy Harris, a long, lean, lanky, typical Australian farmer type from the outback of Queensland. Clancy had had a good education and I believe his family were well off, but he loved the open life and his bronzed skin and bull-like voice fitted the character to a 'T'.

Came the usual questions - name, next of kin, age, religion, etc. But when it came to 'civilian occupation' Clancy answered, correctly, 'Jackeroo'. Pommie Corporal: 'What's a Jackeroo?', looking very puzzled. Clancy: 'Boundary Rider'. Pommie Corporal: 'What's a Boundary Rider?', looking more puzzled. Clancy: 'God Almighty - a cow cocky - a station hand'. Pommie Corporal (the light dawning): 'Ah, I see, thanks Sarge', and wrote down 'Porter'. From then on we called Clancy 'The Flying Porter'.

**THE NAVY GETS EVEN**

*Cooperation between the Services was officially encouraged, to improve morale and overall effectiveness. This was usually done in a quite friendly fashion which sometimes had unexpected results, as Ian Kirkby of Lismore relates.*

Our Liberator Bomber squadron at Foggia in southern Italy, not far from Naples, needed to lighten some Libs so we took out the .5 inch guns from the nose and ball turrets. These, together with all their spares were to go into indefinite storage, when our skipper had the bright idea of giving them to the Royal Navy Motor Torpedo Boat (MTB) boys at Manfredonia on the Adriatic coast, about an hour's drive away. We were quite friendly with them. They were chuffed at adding the .5's to their MTB's. Over some refreshments, provided by the navy, several asked how we performed evasive action on Liberators. Our skipper immediately replied, 'Come over tomorrow and we'll show you'.

So we took six of them up in a Lib, having made a point of showing them in the 2 inch thick aircraft manual that the maximum allowable angle of bank was sixty degrees. But our skipper had other ideas. He really 'turned it on' for the navy, including ninety degree banks with a dead engine down and all manner of other aerobatics. To say that the MTB crew was impressed was a vast understatement. Those who were not sick were deadly quiet. When we landed they seemed various shades of green and white but thanked us and went their way.

Next time we went to Manfredonia to drink at the MTB's ward room, they greeted us with, 'We've run out of grog, but Bill's got his submarine in, we'll go down and have a snort there'.

So we all drove down to where the sub was moored, and after a few friendly drinks, we were invited on board and shown over the sub. None of us had ever been inside a submarine before and we were impressed with how crammed it seemed to be. While we were talking to the skipper down below the chief engineer came up and said, 'I think I've got that clutch fixed skipper, but I'd like to do a short run across the bay to check'.

'Do you chaps mind?' asked the skipper. 'It'll only be a short run'.

'No, we don't mind'. What else could we say?

We sat and watched as engines were started, the crew took up their positions and from the deck above we heard 'Cast off bow, cast off stern; we're away'.

Of course inside a sub you can't see a darned thing, except for the three operators, called planesmen, sitting at the diving panel with its instruments moving, operating switches and levers and passing cryptic instructions and replies to each other. It was all very exciting, we felt, having this unexpected sub ride.

After we appeared to have been under way for about ten or fifteen minutes, the engineer reported back to the skipper who asked him, 'How's that clutch now?'

'Seems OK, but we really should do a short dive to be sure'.

Again the skipper asked us, ‘Are you sure you chaps won’t mind?’

‘No, go ahead, we’re enjoying the trip - quite different to flying in a plane’.

With that the skipper started shouting orders like ‘Periscope down, conning tower closed,’ and a loud klaxon warned everyone we were starting to dive.

The engines took on a different note, and we could see on the control panel, some distance away, what appeared to be depth gauges, with the needles moving, while the sub seemed to go into a shallow diving attitude, then a few minutes later there was a bump.

‘That’ll be the bottom,’ said the skipper.

This was followed by many queer noises from the engines and men running along the narrow passageways. After a while he came up to us and said, ‘It seems we’re a bit stuck on the bottom, but don’t worry, we’ll get her out’.

We weren’t very impressed and were already starting to feel disturbed by the claustrophobic atmosphere. Then someone called out, as near as I can remember it, ‘Blow after ballast tanks,’ and ‘full astern both engines; all hands for’d to shift weight’. This was bad enough but when the skipper called, ‘Test all watertight bulkheads and report any leaks,’ some of our boys wore very long faces but said nothing. After much more noise from the engines, apparently manoeuvring, there was a cry from the diving panel crew, ‘It’s OK sir, she’s coming free’.

The skipper then said, ‘Well that’s a great relief. We’ll take her straight up now’.

‘Blow tanks 1 & 2,’ called someone, and then ‘blow tanks 5 & 6,’ followed by more instructions and activity at the diving panel.

Again we could see the hands moving around the dials, but we were not close enough to read what they measured.

‘We’ll be right now; soon be on the surface’, said the skipper. ‘I suppose you boys would be looking forward to a breath of fresh air?’

‘Would we ever!’ we replied.

‘As soon as we break the surface, I’ll open the hatch and you can go up the conning tower and have a look around as we cruise back to the quay’.

All the crew politely stood back to let us up first. We shot out of that hatch like corks from champagne bottles, to see, to our absolute amazement, that we were still very much tied up to the wharf where we had boarded the sub! *It had never left the wharf!* Were our faces red! All the dummy action and sound effects had been specially put on for our benefit by the navy boys.

After these two episodes - the navy in the Liberator and us in the sub - each group had a much better appreciation of the other Service's job. And we all had a supply of 'line shoots' that would last us for years.

## TOO MANY BODIES FOR BREAKFAST

*These gruesome events took place in early February 1942 on 456 RAAF Night Fighter Squadron at RAF Station Valley, Isle of Anglesey, North Wales. Nobby Blundell of Trinity Beach, Queensland tells the story, which is not for the faint-hearted.*

At this time the weather was atrocious, with heavy rain, wind and thunder storms, and I was Duty Sergeant for the day. The Halifax II aircraft in use by 408 RCAF Squadron based at Linton-on-Ouse had gained a nasty reputation for the phenomenon of tail stall in such bad weather conditions and during the night a Halifax II had crashed near Holyhead, hitting the face of the sheer rock cliffs. It had slid-tumbled down to the narrow beach area and was in an unrecognisable mess. The civilian police from nearby Holyhead station on top of the cliff were soon on the scene and a message was sent to RAF Valley, the nearest RAF base. When the message was received at about 7 am I was instructed to take a truck from transport section, with a WAAF driver, and pick up a party including a medical orderly, a corporal and two other orderlies from medical section as well as a supply of zip-up canvas body bags. The Halifax was reported to have twelve bodies and no survivors.

Before leaving the medical section the bumptious medical officer gave us an ear-bashing on the method of recovering bodies. One was supposed to lay out the body bags and place the recovered parts in the bag. The bumptious MO insisted that the parts must match; he didn't want to open a bag later and find a red head with black pubic hair and two left feet etc.

Following a hasty breakfast, the party arrived at the gory scene of the crash, took one look and soon found that their rushed breakfast had proved a waste of time; I promptly retreated behind some rocks and lost mine.

After considerable trouble we got the truck close to the wreckage, laid out the bags and started following the MO's instructions. We also found a number of mail bags and a considerable amount of money in Sterling, which we gathered, and used another body bag to hold it.

All this time I was using a clip-board to record what we recovered - mail, money and bodies. Thinking that the idle WAAF driver would be a help with the clip-board, I approached the driver's door and asked for her help. Well, it wasn't easy! She was in a state of shock and almost helpless. Catching her breath she said, between tears and gasps, 'Please sergeant, don't ask me to do that, I have already lost my breakfast and several meals before that'. And she really looked it; there was no acting necessary.

After a while the medical corporal and I decided we had gathered all we could and started checking the bags, the mail and the money. As we checked the body bags the

corporal called out: ‘Head and pubic hair same colour; 1 head, 1 torso, 2 hands, 2 feet, 2 balls, 1 penis - obviously male’ etc, till we had 12 bodies complete.

I said, ‘OK, close the bags, load them on the truck and let’s get the hell out of here. I’ll ask the civvy sergeant to keep a man here until I can report and get an RAF party to take over’. The corporal then opened his hand and showed me a complete set of upper dentures he had found and asked what to do with them. I said ‘No problem, one head is missing his teeth’. ‘No, no’ said the corporal, ‘I have checked them and they’re all young buggers and all have their own teeth’.

I remembered my lost breakfast; I have dentures and it was necessary for me to grab my teeth and hang onto them. I began checking my men; all were OK, and the civvy sergeant said his men were all fully equipped with teeth. Ha! the WAAF driver I thought! Up to the truck, open the door, ‘Let’s have a look at your little pearlies, love’. But she had more teeth than I ever had.

We returned to RAF Valley and reported to the bumptious Medical Officer, giving him all the body bags and the teeth. He instantly accused us of being careless and of missing a body.

After numerous nasty references by him of incompetence, (which took some time, with us all the while unloading the bodies), a messenger arrived from orderly room to report that 408 RCAF Sqdn at Linton-On-Ouse had rung with the confirmation that the Halifax had carried only twelve men and was returning from London where it had

also picked up the pay money for the Squadron and mail from Canada. In the mail there should be a parcel from a dentist in Canada with a set of upper dentures for their Canadian Adjutant, and would we please search for them in the wreckage?

Problem solved - but no apology from the nasty Medical Officer.

There was a sequel to the spare teeth story some time later when I met the Adjutant concerned, and over a liquid reviver or two he explained that some time previously he had been flying as a passenger in a small plane and, not feeling the best, had slid back the sliding cabin window to chunder all his lunch into the blue - yes, teeth and all!

From *Friends on Active Service*.

**PANCHO MAKES QUARTERMASTER**

*Squadron rations were not plentiful in war-torn Italy in 1944 when 272 Squadron Beaufighters were operating from Foggia base on the Adriatic coast. Spencer Philpott of Toronto, NSW, who crewed with Pancho Manning, tells this story of how they supplemented their mess rations.*

Periodically Pancho would scrounge the loan of a truck from the Motor Transport section and with Ray Moffat and myself we would do a trip into the countryside collecting goodies for the mess. We called at various farms and never failed to have a good day. We knew only two words of Italian - quanta costa? (how much) so the conversation usually went something like this: 'Quanta costa da googy eggs?', pointing to them, or 'Quanta costa de cabbages?' and 'ciao' (cheerio).

The farmers were all friendly people but the only trouble was they were so proud of their home-made wine that after every bartering session they would be grossly insulted if we did not have a mug of their 'plonk'. After each drink I would duck behind the nearest shed and then throw up, foul stuff that it was.

It was unbelievable to see their living conditions as on a number of occasions we were invited inside their homes. They were all basically the same, one large room with walls of pise construction and a flat metal roof, a large barn-type door and no windows. A bed large enough for five or six people stood in one corner, a bench, wash tub, table and fuel stove in another corner. The other two corners were occupied by shelves and some perches for the fowls. All came with a dirt floor and as the door was open all day a couple of pigs strolled in for their swill.
On our first day we bought 250 eggs; other days it would be vegetables or fruit, but always it was a good day out. On one occasion we arrived back at our billets right on tea-time with about a dozen live chooks. We walked into the Mess while everyone was having their evening meal when Pancho said 'Look what we've got today fellas'. As the blokes stopped their meal to look Pancho let the chooks free, and chaos reigned supreme. It was a 'mess' for sure, as chooks, blokes, and plates of food scattered every which way.

By this time Pancho had also installed himself as Head Barman and looked after the incoming rations of liquor for the Sergeants' mess. He also put aside his dislike for CO's and became particularly friendly with an American CO at Foggia for a particular reason. The Yanks had plenty of everything, even fresh ham and ice cream; you name it and the Yanks had it, except good Scotch whisky which they craved for and which we had.

Pancho soon took advantage of his new 'friendship' by giving the Yank CO four bottles of Scotch each week for which the CO showed his appreciation by diverting a one-ton truck from his food convoy loaded with 'goodies' for our mess.

This 'lend-lease' arrangement worked very well both in supplementing our respective messes and in improving cooperation between us and the Yanks.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# MESSES AND MISCHIEF

## A BED IN TOWN

*This story is from Bob Nielsen, now living in San Francisco.*

'Colonel' Knox, said to be one of the best air gunners on 460 Squadron, had consumed too much beer in the mess at Breighton and passed out rather early in the night. His mates put him to bed. Then shortly afterwards they decided to carry his bed out into the fields and leave him there for the night.

'Why don't we take him and his bed into town?' said Joe Grose, my Air Gunner, always one for a practical joke.

The idea was greeted with enthusiasm and soon eager participants transported the bed, complete with Knox, to the nearby village of Bubwith where it was duly parked outside the 'White Swan'.

'When he wakes tomorrow he won't have far to go for a grog,' was how Grose expressed it.

'Colonel' Knox slept soundly and it was a somewhat astonished police constable who found the bed with its occupant early next morning! The law handled the matter admirably, the constable calling for reinforcements. The whole package was carried to the local police station where Knox shared tea and toast with some rather amused police officers.

Then they drove him back to the squadron, with his bed, in the police van. The only sour note came when the sergeant on duty at the gate threatened to charge Knox with being off base without permission, and having stolen one bed and six blankets, the property of the Crown.

It took the best efforts of Knox plus the Bubwith police to calm the Sergeant down!

From *With the Stars Above.*

## ART ON THE CEILING

*463 and 467 RAAF Squadrons, which operated from Waddington in Lincolnshire, seemed to be ahead of the rest of Bomber Command in knowing how to relax when not on ops, if several of the stories in this book are any guide. This one is from Tom Noon of Stafford, Queensland.*

Many a wild party was held in 463's Officers' Mess at Waddington as well as in the local hotels in the area. However, one night about midnight, the CO of 467 (the other squadron), Wing Commander Bill Brill, accompanied by quite a number of us, adjourned to the ante-room or lounge where we stacked tables-on-tables, until the ceiling was within reaching distance for Bill to write 'BILL BRILL' across it with a lighted candle, after which we all went to bed. The next morning when all were sober, no-one was game to walk into the lounge in case all the chairs and tables collapsed, while only some six or seven hours earlier, in a state of inebriation, no-one thought there was anything to climbing up the high-stacked furniture.

I recall another occasion at Coningsby, our Pathfinder Station. On the occasion of the Squadron's birthday we were all lined up in the Officers' Mess to shake hands with Lord Trenchard, the founder of the RAF, who was in attendance for the big event, together with many other high-ranking dignitaries. My crew had just completed our first tour of ops, and had been celebrating during the afternoon. Needless to say, I was far from sober. The highlight of the evening was to be when the Station Commander's wife cut the birthday cake, but before she could do the honours I 'arrived from nowhere' and beat her to it. Naturally I was smartly ushered away from the official party, and the next day we went on a two weeks end-of-tour leave. On our return the matter had been forgotten, and I carried on as though nothing had ever happened. Had we been on an unoperational station I'm sure I would have done a 'stretch' in Sheffield detention camp.

*John Lietke, a navigator from Ocean Shores, NSW, tells of another 467 stunt when the squadron was stationed at Bottesford in early 1943.*

It was late on another mess party when all inhibitions were thrown to the winds. This prank, performed a number of times on unsuspecting new members of the mess, consisted of the selected victim being firstly deprived of his pants and underpants, by the crowd, when one of them, using a toilet brush, would liberally paint his bum with ink; I remember it was Government issue ink and came in a big stone jar. That accomplished, and despite the victim's strenuous protesting, he would then be hoisted up high when many hands would thrust up his inky cheeks to leave a most artistic bumprint on the ceiling.

By the time the squadron was moving from Bottesford we had a good collection of this unique 'ceiling art'. The USAAF was taking over the station and when our CO met theirs he said, 'Sorry about the mess on the ceiling, but we'll get that repainted before we leave'. But the Yankee CO said, 'No, no, don't do that; this is a famous ceiling; we've heard all about it'. We heard later that the Americans had added some bum-sized 'rubber stamps' of their own.

## ADJUTANT SEES RED

*It seemed that whenever a new adjutant appeared on a station it was the usual thing for someone to enliven his otherwise routine life by playing a trick on him. David Drury of Dora Creek, NSW related this story from 7 Squadron PFF at Oakington.*

One of the boys - an inveterate prankster - said one night in the mess, after a few pints of bitter, 'With those lousy forty watt bulbs in the Adj's office, what the poor bugger needs is more light on whatever it is he does. I've got an idea that should brighten up his dreary life for a while. I'll just hop up the Admin building roof and drop a Verey Pistol cartridge down his chimney.'

This he quietly did, first removing the firing cap from the cartridge, then dropping it down the iron chimney pipe - straight into the adjutant's fiercely burning pot belly stove.

Meanwhile the rest of us had positioned ourselves in a good place to view the Adj's door. We had only a few minutes to wait before the Adj burst out, flinging his door wide open followed by dense red smoke billowing out - not surprising, since Verey cartridges are designed to light up a large area of the sky when used for their intended purpose as signal flares.

Everyone enjoyed the spectacle immensely, except the Adjutant, and since, apart from disrupting his work, no harm was done, he took it in good part, closed up shop for the night and joined us in the mess where we proceeded to help wash down any smoke he might just have inhaled!

This lark was done whenever there was a new adjutant, and on some other occasions. Sometimes it might be a green flare, sometimes white or yellow, but always with plenty of smoke. Looked at fifty years and more after the event it seemed a harmless little prank but at the time we thought it hilarious and it did give us just that necessary diversion from the serious business of using similar (but much larger) coloured flares to mark targets over Germany.

## 'GRAND' CHRISTMAS CAROLS

*All RAF messes seemed to be equipped with a piano and in those days many chaps could play so they were well used. Rowdy sing-songs around the piano were an indispensable part of squadron life. Peter Firkins of Claremont, WA tells the sad tale of a baby grand piano that 460 RAAF Squadron at Binbrook had recently acquired.*

After one particularly hectic Christmas night party someone was inspired to suggest that they should all go and sing carols to their CO, Group Captain Hughie Edwards and Mrs Edwards, and that they should take the baby grand with them. It was a perishing cold winter's night with the snow piled up three or four feet deep outside but the suggestion was taken up with great enthusiasm and the Sergeants' Mess went down in force to the Edwards' house. At the time firewood for the pot-belly stove in the mess had run out. Solution! Killing two birds with one stone, someone sawed off the legs of the unfortunate piano, so that it could be more easily slid on a tarpaulin,

and the legs would make very good firewood. Arriving at the nearby Edwards' quarters the piano was duly set down in the snow. Someone sat cross-legged there and began playing the first five bars of 'Good King Wenceslas', whereupon everyone began singing. Group Captain Edwards came out, still dressed in his pyjamas and after a few drinks with the boys joined them in the singing of 'Salome', 'Lagos Lagoon' and other rude air force songs which quickly superseded the carols until Mrs Edwards leaned out of a window and called, 'Hugh, come in, it's too cold out there in your pyjamas'. Like all obedient husbands he said with a little solemnity: 'Well, goodnight chaps, thanks for the grog. A very happy Christmas and New Year to you all and the best of luck for what the future may hold'. With that he turned and went back into the house. End of another good mess party. Back at the mess the legless piano was then propped up on four empty beer cases.

This episode well illustrates why Edwards' influence on morale was quite extraordinary. His courage was something to marvel at, invariably taking new crews on their first operation with him.

On another occasion, after months of almost non-stop daily and nightly operations, the whole squadron was stood down for Christmas and a feeling of relaxation imbued everyone, with parties being held in the messes. The Sergeants' Mess in particular was a sight to behold on Christmas morning. Pushbike races had been held during the Christmas Eve party until there were no bikes left serviceable, whereupon someone had wheeled in a motor-bike, started it up and did a few circuits of the mess, during

which someone who had gone to sleep on the mantelpiece fell off and was promptly run over by the budding track rider.

ENSA's top entertainment group entertained the squadron on one other occasion. It was headed by Lesley Henderson and included such stars as Beatrice Lillie, Vivien Leigh, John Gielgud, Kay Young and Cyril Richard. After the show they were invited to a party in the Officers' Mess, which went on to the early hours of the morning. The visitors enjoyed themselves as much as the squadron enjoyed their show.

From *Strike and Return*.

## INDUCTING ARMY TYPES

*After successful daylight raids it was not unusual for all aircrew to meet in either the Officers' or Sergeants' Mess, reported Bill Dossett of Coraki, NSW.*

On one particular occasion our Squadron (107) had not only been credited with hitting the target, but were reported by the BBC as successfully destroying two enemy fighters. Big thrash at the Officers' Mess.

During the previous month the squadron had received two new pilots, army officers on transfer from their regiment until the end of the war. They were a little put out at the free-and-easy comradeship between aircrew members irrespective of rank, especially amongst the more junior members.

As the above-mentioned party got under way, coats were off and games were on; schooner races, team competitions etc, the noise rising as the evening progressed.

Then came the 'obstacle race'. This meant two opponents starting at one end of the ante-room, negotiating several items of furniture which had been placed in awkward positions, upside down, narrowly close together, as well as loosened carpets to be crawled under and so on. The two unsuspecting army types were picked to be the first competitors. As they progressed around the course, the air was filled with shouts and roars of encouragement. After they had surmounted the last obstacle, there was a sprint of a few yards to the finishing line.

As they came in neck and neck across the line, both were showered by two well-directed soda syphons wielded by our experienced stalwart characters. After that they were informed they were well and truly airmanised and accepted, having passed the initiation test into the squadron

## OPPY AND THE MALVERN STAR

*Those of us involved in the Second World War will remember one of Australia's most famous pre-war cycling champions - Hubert Opperman. John Leeuwin-Clark of Kincumber, NSW served with 'Oppy', as he was popularly known, and relates this classic true story.*

After returning from overseas in 1944 I was OC Test Flight, at 13 ARD Breddan (just out of Charters Towers), where Flight Lieutenant Opperman (later Sir Hubert) was Adjutant. I well remember a formal Dining-In Night in the Officers' Mess, membership of which included some WAAAFs. As the night progressed there was much joviality and a relaxed atmosphere developed. I remember a particular occasion when someone addressed the Mess President saying, 'Could we ask Flight Lieutenant Opperman to explain the difference between a Malvern Star and a Town Bike?'

This was met with gales of laughter from the men and some embarrassed faces from the WAAAFs!

Oppy's reply - if any - is not recorded.

## PIER PARTY AT CLEETHORPES

*The famous Australian 460 Squadron completed its 1,000th bombing operation in August 1943 with a vital raid on Peenemünde, knocking out the V2 launching sites. This was considered an appropriate time to celebrate, which they did. Peter Firkins of Claremont, WA gives us the story.*

A big party was arranged in the dance hall on the pier at Cleethorpes, on the Humber, quite close to the squadron's base at Binbrook, with almost 1,000 people attending.

Squadron Leader Foggo added a touch or realism to the occasion by holding a briefing in the Officer's Mess, exhorting all crews to 'press on regardless of opposition, and to beware of the "Grimsby night fighters" (the local girls)'. He conducted this 'briefing' with due solemnity, even doing a good imitation of CO Hughie Edwards' measured tone of voice.

The aircrews paid for their ground staffs as a gesture of appreciation. As the evening wore on and became more rowdy, one intrepid type, who said he was a lifesaver before the war, decided to dive off the end of the pier. But he overlooked the huge tides there of twenty feet and more that ran out miles over the flat sandy bay. This night the tide was out and there were only about two inches of water around the pier with the result that he landed with a sickening thud on his head in the mud. His pulse rate was reported to have dropped to an alarming thirty-four for some time but he lived, and a relieved Medical Officer said he couldn't believe this happening on any other squadron.

However the organisers overlooked one important item; they didn't get enough glasses. With typical ingenuity the boys adjourned to nearby pubs, had a pint and then returned to the dance with their 'borrowed' drinking utensils. The following day a deputation of pub owners complained bitterly that the squadron chaps had not returned the glasses they had removed the night before. It was some time before they were fully placated or resigned to their losses, most of the glasses having been tossed over the side of the pier at the conclusion of the party.

The squadron was given a few days stand-down to recover from this successful diversion before continuing with the more serious business of working for the Government.

From *Strike and Return*.

## SEARCHLIGHTS AT GIBRALTAR

*Parking space for aircraft was at a premium on Gibraltar because of the small area of the base. In fact 458 Squadron's aircraft were only about one hundred metres from the crews' Nissen hut sleeping quarters. This gave rise to these unusual events told by Harley Marks of Belmont, NSW.*

On the eastern side of The Rock, which rose a steep 1,400 feet, were several searchlight installations overlooking and illuminating the whole base. These lights, with access to the elaborate tunnel system within The Rock, were operated on a continuous moving surveillance against any suspicious movements such as sabotage or even invasion. The brilliant light from the searchlights frequently illuminated the huts like daylight, making it quite a problem for anyone who was a light sleeper or who suffered from insomnia.

**A Wellington silhouetted by searchlights at Gibraltar. Note the nose radar dome.**

One night an air gunner from the attached South African Air Force Squadron, after having a heavy night in the mess, could not get off to sleep because of the searchlights and hit on a solution to the problem. The first we knew of his remedy was when the silence of the night was suddenly shattered with the roaring chatter of machine guns, instantly waking up the whole sleeping base. Within seconds everyone was out of bed in shock and confusion looking for somewhere to shelter, not knowing what was going on. Was it an invasion? Pandemonium prevailed for some time, followed by silence.

The 'invasion' was tracked down to one of the SAAF aircraft and one lone 'invader'. The gunner was pulled out of his turret from which he had been firing at the searchlights - some 300/400 yards away - but he did not get any awards for accuracy! Few of us on the base got much sleep that night but we understood that the SAAF air gunner slept soundly in the guard house.

## SURFBOAT IN THE MESS

*There was no surf at Valley, on the Isle of Inglesea in North Wales, but Ron Vidler of Lismore tells us that did not stop a bunch of Aussies deciding to 'show the Poms how to row a surfboat'. Ron explains.*

Outside the mess there was a large lake, on which we had been learning air-sea rescue techniques. A big row-boat there reminded some of our surfing types of a surfboat back home.

We were due to move from Valley to Middle Wallop so that night a good party had been put on in the mess. Later in the evening, being by then somewhat under the weather, some of us had the bright idea of teaching the Poms about surfboats. So out we went and carried the boat into the mess, threw some beer on the floor, hopped in it

and ‘rowed’ the boat, having a great time. This was the main event of the night, after which we retired to bed, leaving the mess looking like Bondi Beach after a New Year’s Eve party.

Next morning we were (naturally) requested to ‘Get that damn boat out of here!’

But try as we may, we could not get it through the door, and no-one could remember how we had got it in. So we had to remove half the doorway to get the boat out, and replace it. This was all a bit difficult with some sore heads.

After that we thought it might be easier if we stuck to teaching the Poms about surf rescue techniques (if we could find a line and reel!).

## ‘TARZ’ OPENS THE MESS

*A serious problem needed to be resolved at the Officers’ Mess at 11 OTU Westcott, Buckinghamshire in January 1944 requiring a special meeting being called, as Ron Mayhill from Auckland, New Zealand relates.*

There was only one item on the agenda at the mess meeting: ‘What should be done with the considerable bar profits?’ It was not that anyone drank too much; oh no; our fitness was attested to by the weekly three and a half mile run around the perimeter track of neighbouring Bomber Command Station Oakley. Somehow, we reasoned, previous courses at Westcott must have contributed generously to the accumulating profits.

‘Let’s have a party,’ roared Flying Officer Francis Henry Clark Lukey. The owner of the big voice was a giant of a man, well over six feet, with the physique of a rugby front rower. The proposal seemed to be unanimously agreed to until one of the administration staff regulars, undoubtedly older and much wiser, suggested that a sum be first allotted to the RAF Benevolent Fund. This was quickly agreed to.

The party went ahead; it was quite a bash and very informal. Not long after it had started it was difficult to hear any conversation over the piano, the singing and the laughter. This was when the CO, Group Captain Shaw, stood up on a table and ordered all tunics to be turned inside out to hide rank, trousers to be rolled up above the knees, ties knotted in bows and for everybody to follow-the-leader, glass in hand. (Oh for a photograph!!) The long weaving line snaked under tables, over chairs and in and out the windows, all singing time-honoured favourites such as O’Rielly’s Daughter, the Ball of Kerrimuir, Lagos Lagoon, Balls to Mr. Bengelstein, Abdul the Bul Bul, Round and Round Went the Bloody Great Wheel, and many more. There followed sporting contests like Muffin Man and Cardinal Puff that demanded ever diminishing skills. The inevitable Verey cartridge found its way into the glowing embers in the stove, to brilliantly light up the mess with the Colours of the Day.

The shenanigans continued for many hours yet nobody seemed much the worse for wear, a tribute to our stamina and practice, though the ranks thinned about midnight as, hoarse with shouting, most had slipped away to distant Nissen Huts and bed.

Strangely, next morning there was some confusion at breakfast. For one thing there was a gaping hole where the mess doors should be, and the carpet looked as though it had been laid over a ploughed field. Further investigation disclosed the long trunk of a huge pine tree that had previously sheltered the car park.

The said Flying Officer Lukey was known as 'Tarz' to his many friends, having previously worked in the forests. It was revealed that such were his skills with the axe that some time in the early hours he had expertly felled the tree, neatly missing the cars in the park and just scraping the CO's wagon. 'Tarz' was at home with trees. He trimmed the branches and somehow dragged the hefty trunk into the mess, the doorway proving no obstacle.

Of course an enquiry was held. 'Tarz' Lukey's defence was that he was employing his skills to help solve the fuel shortage. Everybody had to be impressed - even the reluctant CO, as it took a large team of airmen to remove the great log.

He got away with a stern warning and a fine to cover the damage. Naturally the boys passed the hat around later and that took care of the fine.

*Sadly, 'Tarz' Lukey, aged 24, went missing as second pilot on his first operation, at Aachen on 27 May 1944.*

From *Bombs On Target.*

**THE AUSTIN 7 'PRESENT'**

*RAF Station Oakington was a peace time station with proper brick buildings. The Station Commander, a fierce Group Captain, lived in a suite of rooms at the end of the Officers' Mess. David Drury of 7 Squadron continues.*

The CO's practice was to retire to his suite early and to take no notice of the high jinks that invariably took place in the bar. In fact he was rarely to be seen there. One night, after a successful operation with no losses - rare indeed - and the weather threatening a close down for the morrow, a group of 7 Squadron 'toughies' decided it was time that they involved the CO a little more in their activities. Accordingly they decided to make him a 'present' of an old Austin 7 that stood outside the mess.

The 'toughies' - about ten of them - picked up the little Austin and carried it carefully into the mess, right down the long corridor, around a couple of corners and plonked the old vehicle right outside the CO's door, completely blocking entry and exit.

Next day it took a large party of ground staff several hours to manoeuvre the Austin out of the Mess. Nos 7 and 627 Squadron crews were paraded and the 'riot act' read to them, but no real effort was made to find the culprits.

The boys thought this was a very good show by the Station Commander and raised him considerably in their esteem.

## THE PERFECT VALET

*Syd Johnson tells this story from 35 Squadron at Graveley.*

When Peter Cribb was a Wingco Flight Commander his opposite number was a Canadian of the same rank, one Reggie Lane. They shared quarters in a Nissen Hut with a common wall in the middle which did not reach the ceiling. A light above this partition illuminated both pads. There was a switch in each section to control the light but however, placed inconveniently far from the bed. They also shared a batman named Lunt who behaved at all times like the perfect Jeeves.

Late one night the two came home, having celebrated someone's DSO, and not feeling any pain, wasted no time getting into bed - it was a bitterly cold night - only to find the light was still burning . No-one volunteered for the task to turn out the light. In a fit of inspiration which only comes when inhibitions are released, one of them spotted his Webley and took a pot shot at the globe. Soon they were both blasting away but the inoffensive light found in this case that virtue provided its own protection and remained blazing away when its assailants couldn't, having exhausted their ammo.

Into this hiatus stepped the impeccable and imperturbable Mr. Lunt, elegantly clad in a dressing gown, saying, 'Do you wish me to reload Sir?'

From *It's Never Dark Above the Clouds.*

## WIND TEST WAS A BUMMER

*While at RAF Yatesbury Radio School, Bill Lewis of Croydon, NSW recalls the peculiar initiation ceremony held at the Sergeants' Mess for newly-arrived Sergeants.*

Almost invariably there was a great log fire burning in the Mess. The ceremony was for any new Sergeant to be required to bend over with his bum close to the fire, and instructed to fart into it. One of the other NCO's would hold a burning stick about six inches away and when the 'wind' passed over it, if it was of good quality, a big blue flame could be seen to ignite and a cheer would go up from the Mess and the new Sergeant was considered duly initiated.

However, on one occasion the new Sergeant concerned was a big fellow and was apparently too well supplied with wind, or perhaps had eaten too much cabbage or baked beans, with the result that the usual blue flame became a small explosion, and set fire to his trousers! I was nearby and went to the rescue, throwing a tankard of bitter over his backside to put out the fire. We learned from that episode: ‘The bigger the bloke, the bigger the bang!’

# CHAPTER FIVE

# PUBS AND PRANKS

## ABANDONED EARL TO THE FORE

*Group Captain the Earl of Bandon, Bill Dossett's CO, is the subject of this story, as told by Bill of Coraki NSW.*

The Earl of Bandon, usually called the Abandoned Earl, was a great character, very helpful to those serving under him irrespective of rank. He was always at his best in a bar, being 'one of the boys'.

He was posted from our station in Norfolk to Headquarters Middle East in Cairo as a staff officer. This was not to his liking. However most evenings he could be found with crews on a few days rest from the desert in Sheppards Hotel Long Bar.

One particular evening he and the lads were laughing and talking at one end of the bar and making a bit of noise. At the other end of the bar were three Army officers. They took exception to the noise and the leader, a Lieutenant Colonel, approached the Air Force crowd and told them to make less noise.

From the middle of our party Bandon emerged and addressed the Army man with, 'What's the matter with you, huh?' The reply was, 'Do you know who I am?' 'No, who the hell are you?' 'I am Lieutenant Colonel Sir Titarse Drum'. Bandon glanced down at the four rings on his own arm and said, 'Well I'm Group Captain the Earl of Bandon; got you stuffed on both counts'.

This retort brought roars and hoots from the Air Force and a stiff departure from the brown jobs.

## AIR TEST TO EIRE AND THOSE MESS 'DO'S'

*The Wing Commander on 467 Squadron at Waddington was Billy Brill, an Aussie farmer, and he sometimes carried on like one, said Nev Morrison of Glenhaven, NSW.*

One day he got me to go up in a Lanc with him to air test it, and after putting it through its paces decided to take it down to about fifty feet off the deck and round up a paddock full of sheep - which he did, successfully!

We also had some terrific parties in the Officers' Mess and when there were no ops on, Billy Brill would organise an 'air test' and take a crew to fly to Northern Ireland, to the airfield nearest to the border with (neutral) Southern Ireland. The crew would change into civvies and cross over to the South and buy a load of food and grog with money the Mess had thrown in. In the meantime, Billy Brill would contact Air Vice-Marshal Wrigley, AOC RAAF overseas in London, to inform him there was to be a party at Waddington the next night. He never missed one - neither did Eve, the popular barmaid at the Codgers Hotel off Fleet Street London, well known rendezvous for RAAF on leave.

To liven things up several other little things happened at Waddington from time to time including; two guys having a race down a corridor in the mess - on motor bikes; and the sing-songs we used to have around the piano (Alec Turner, who used to play, would say, 'The piano's dry' and we would pour a pint of beer into it, then lift the piano up and shake it, when Alec would sit down again and say, 'That's better'); or two guys playing 'darts', but using revolvers! This last item is similar to one told by Dave Drury at 7 Squadron, Oakington when he said, 'late in '44 some of the boys, to relax, decided to try out their Smith & Wesson revolvers so they hung drinking mugs on several sets of antlers on the wall in the mess and used them for target practice!'

Obviously such pranks did much for the high *esprit de corps* of these squadrons which has continued with survivors to this day.

## ANOTHER GLEN MILLER STORY

*The Boomerang Club in London was an extremely popular rendezvous for RAAF on leave. They did serve marvellous waffles, but sadly, no beer. Syd Johnson of Trigg, WA tells how he and a half dozen mates, with big thirsts, attempted to solve the problem.*

We set forth from the Boomerang Club in The Strand to see what the city had to offer, but the various watering places did not stay open all night, and round 11 pm we found ourselves in the Savoy Hotel. However the institution found itself unable to fulfil its statutory duty to meet the needs of the weary traveller by supplying him with the necessities of life, because this conflicted with another statutory duty to refrain from supplying the masses with liquor after a certain hour. We would have been happy to accept this point as valid had it not been the case that the lounge was chock-a-block with our comrades in arms, the US Eighth Army Air Force - American aircrew who were all apparently liberally supplied with the glass that cheers. This looked like

discrimination, and our thirst for equality this side of the bar was equal to our thirst for the stuff on the other side of it, so the issue had to be resolved.

We went about this in a quiet orderly manner, not wishing to imperil relations with the Yanks. Just as well, because they came up with a complete defence, explained to me in a quiet, orderly manner by an elegant American officer with a pleasant voice and rimless glasses and a face which seemed hauntingly familiar.

He explained that the Americans were all guests in the hotel and therefore entitled to drink there after hours.

We had to concede the point. One down. But the chance of an equaliser presented itself almost immediately as Big Ben struck the witching hour of midnight and the BBC closed down with the national anthem. *Sotto voce* I suggested we stand to attention, so the seven of us did, staring at the Yanks seated opposite. They started to stand up, and before the anthem was half over, all the Americans in the room were standing to respectful attention. As soon as this was achieved we all sat down again.

A one-all draw.

The elegant gentleman in the rimless glasses was the famous band leader Glenn Miller who sadly lost his life on a flight to France shortly after this incident.

## CREWING UP

It always amazed many people how quickly team spirit developed within a crew. Usually only a short time before, these individuals were unknown to each other, but the RAF's unique method (or lack of it) of forming people into like-minded crews by natural selection, while appearing to be inefficient, actually worked in practice.

At Operational Training Units, squads of pilots, navigators, WAGs, AGs, and other categories were simply thrown together in a large hall and told to form themselves into crews. They were given about a week to do so, though many crews came together on the spot. Some typical 'getting to know you' conversations:

> From a Pilot: 'I'm looking for a WAG; do you drink? You do! Right, you're in'.
>
> From an Air Gunner: 'I hear you want a gunner? Can you fly a Wimpy without making me throw up?'
>
> From a Navigator: 'We're looking for a Wireless Operator and you're about the only bloke here who doesn't look as if he's got the DTs'.
>
> From a WAG: 'Our driver flew into a hill yesterday so we wondered if you might do us for a new one'.

*The following story from Nev Morrison, a WAG from Glenhaven, near Sydney, is fairly typical of what frequently took place.*

I clearly remember how I came to join up with my crew. I was posted to Silverstone together with numerous other bods and we were given a week to form crews. It was getting towards the end of the week and I was still without a crew, but as it was New Year's Eve I was not deterred and journeyed forth to the Village Pub to warm up before attending the dance in the Sergeants' Mess.

It was an extremely cold night with big log fires in the pub, hundreds of RAAF types and one enormous but good looking WAAF who was the centre of attention. I barely noticed her as I entered this den of iniquity, but it is amazing what a few ales can do - the more I drank the better she looked, and by 10 o'clock closing time she was only half the size but twice as beautiful! Naturally the boys were like 'bees round a honeypot', all arguing who was going to take her to the dance, and by some strange quirk of fate she came over to me, lifted me bodily off a stool and said 'I'm going with you'. I vaguely remember trudging through fields, falling over several times only to be lifted bodily to my feet by this massive female. Eventually we reached the Sergeant's Mess and here I made a very conspicuous entrance - I grabbed the lass's arm and dashed into the dance, but alas the floor was heavily coated with french chalk, and I shot halfway across the room on my back with this great WAAF on top of me!

The next thing I knew, a big hand grabbed me and pulled me up from the floor. Then the garbled voice of Graham 'Red' Skelton (who was to be my pilot) said, 'Ah, just what I need, a Wireless Operator who drinks; what's your name, son?' We wrote each other's names down - then it took us three days to decipher our writing and find one another again.

During this time I was haunted by the WAAF, who was a self-confessed nymphomaniac (Boy, I must have been dumb in those days, I didn't know what that meant). One night she waited outside the Sergeant's Mess for me for three hours. A friend would poke his head out of the door and come back and say 'She's still there, Nev', and we would have another pint and double gin. I still wonder if she was really there or if 'Scotty' used this as an excuse for us to grog on, but grog on we did, and when we left the Mess at 10 pm, it was thick snow outside and we had a mile to walk to our barracks through the woods of this dispersed airfield. I don't know how many times we came to grief in the slush and mud, but we had a great time chasing squirrels and it was after midnight when we stumbled into the washroom and poured a huge tub of water over one another to clean up a bit. We then decided we would borrow an Air Force truck that was parked nearby, but fortunately for us this bright idea came to an abrupt end when we were forcibly ejected by several armed guards and told rather rudely, I thought, that we ought to retire.

All this commotion took place outside our billet and when we finally fell through the door noisily protesting, I remember a voice, it was Ted Vidal's, saying 'Thank heavens they are not in my crew'. But did he have a surprise coming! I was eventually posted to 467 Squadron, and little did Ted Vidal of Alstonville, realise that he would have to put up with me in his crew for 38 ops!

From *They Flew From Waddington.*

## ‘FLAK’ AT MARYBOROUGH

*It was July 1943 and the pass-out dinner for 36 Course EATS at No. 3 WAGS at Maryborough was held at the posh Royal Hotel in Kent Street. Ken Stone, who was on that course, sent this report.*

The dinner proceeded in the expected decorous manner until the CO invited a visiting politician to ‘say a few words’. It seemed that the CO was unaware that to a politician there is no such thing as ‘a few words’.

He turned out to be Artie Fadden, Leader of the Country Party, an ex cane-cutter from Ingham in North Queensland, who had reached the peak of his political career in 1941 when he served as Prime Minister for a near-record short term of one month.

Artie talked on, and on, the troops becoming more and more restive until at last one chap as a diversion tossed a bun in the direction of the speaker. This was quickly followed by a barrage of buns, bread, cake and more buns. It was our first experience of ‘flak’, but it had the desired effect of bringing the speech - and the dinner - to a close, with the troops yelling advice to the speaker and the CO trying to restore decorum. The dinner finished in an uproar.

Next day the CO was most irate but could hardly charge the entire Course who were quickly bundled off to No. 2 BAGS (Bombing and Gunnery School).

There was NO pass-out dinner for No. 37 course!

## ITALIAN ‘BATTLE CASUALTY’ EXPOSED

*In mid-1944 in Italy, seven Pathfinder pilots, Australian, Canadian and British, visited the neighbouring 178 Main Force Halifax Bomber squadron for a night out and lots of fun. Tom Scotland of Lynwood, Western Australia, describes the unexpected outcome.*

Our hosts for the occasion were waiting in the Nissen Hut Officers’ Mess. Jocular rivalry was evident because the Bomber squadron’s hospitality included taking these ‘elite’ Pathfinders down a peg or two.

The competitive game of darts were assisted by copious sampling of Italian wines and of course much ‘line shooting’ between the two groups - Main Force and PFF. Yarns of air battles and the progress of the war with the hum of voices, clink of bottles and glasses and conversational rumble with songs around the piano went on into the night. Departure time came with shouts of farewell as the seven Pathfinders squeezed into their 10HP Hillman (which had been borrowed from their CO), a Canadian taking the wheel. The car gathered speed along the dark track then at a newly made high embankment the vehicle rolled, ending in a deep gully below. All inside were bruised, bleeding and shocked, through with no broken bones. The tall Australian lay at the

bottom of the pile of bodies, a deep cut in his forehead sent blood pouring down his face and uniform.

Help came from the friends they had just left. Fortunately staff were already on duty at the medical dressing station, awaiting the return of that night's bomber crews. They set to work cleaning and bandaging the injured, and putting the car back on its wheels, enabling the Pathfinders to return to their base and to their welcome beds.

At breakfast the next morning fellow Pathfinders stared in disbelief as they saw seven bandaged fliers huddled over their meals. The CO arrived, sat down and slowly began eating, wondering what was the explanation. He knew that none of them had been on ops the previous night. He also knew that his car had been used and badly misused as well. Seeing seven of his key pilots arrayed like battle casualties set his strong handsome face in anger and concern. He demanded explanations.

'Scottie, what were you doing last night?'

The tall Australian felt the lameness of any excuse.

'Sir, 178 Squadron held a party for us and on the way home we missed a bend in the road.'

The CO's anger was evident. The seven were called to the medical dressing station where the doctor and his assistants set to work to make the cuts and bruised more presentable, outwardly at least. Then the CO's strategy emerged. All seven pilots were listed with their crews to fly into attack that night - the target being Milan.

For the tall Australian it proved to be a very painful day preparing for the night's operation. His neck became increasingly stiff and sore, until he could not turn his head. How he managed to fly his Halifax off into the star-filled night, and return he did not know but he did know he experienced an agonising flight. Indeed he was in such agony he could not have cared if the whole German Air Force had attacked them.

But the real climax did not come until many decades later when the tall Australian, at home in Western Australia, was entertaining with his wife and animatedly describing to friends the details of that party in Italy that made the flight so painful. The facts as they emerged surprised her and she looked at him very quizzically, saying,

'Do you mean to tell me that you got that scar on your head after a Mess party? I thought you got it from one of your plane crashes.'

He looked down, most uncomfortably, while his wife continued,

'All those years of x-rays about the neck injury you received that night. And to think we've dined out on your crash story for years!'

One of her husband's wartime escapades had been exposed. Then suddenly they both burst out laughing together.

## LONDON'S BEER-PROOF PIANO

*One popular 'dive' or night club in London, was called 'Chez Noir' (or 'Chez Nous'?), according to Reg Towner of Wahgunyah, Victoria. It was reached down a flight of stairs off the Strand. Reg continues.*

The Chez Noir was famous as a rendezvous throughout Air Force circles. Its owner had some earlier connection with the RAF and was a great supporter of aircrews. He had decorated the nightclub with numerous pieces of aviation bric-a-brac, souvenirs and photographs. An artist of some renown had also executed a series of caricatures in charcoal of many of the allied air aces of that time, such as Cobber Kane, 'Tin Legs' Bader, Johnnie Johnson, Hughie Edwards, Guy Gibson, Laddie Lucas and others. This contemporary art decorated the walls.

All pubs, clubs and messes had a piano and rowdy sing songs with the troops crowding around was always on, the boys waving their pints of bitter to the beat of the music. More than occasionally someone would yell, 'give the piano a drink' and in other places this would be the signal for someone to pour a tankard of beer into its innards - a common practice on the squadrons. My mate Freddy Street was an accomplished pianist and one evening he was talked into playing. But at Chez Noir this lovely old grand piano had one unique feature - it was 'beer proof'; the whole top had been covered in sheet lead with guttering around the edges, piped down to a bucket to catch any beer spilt from the tankards and jugs of beer resting all over the top of the piano, to say nothing of thwarting anyone who would want to 'give the piano a drink'.

## RAISING THE NO-WIND SIGN

*Before the war in the UK the RAF had quite a few 'black troops' including probably 500-plus Oz types, said Alex Gould, now of Bundanoon, NSW as he writes.*

The RAF types, with brotherly love, collectively and individually, called all colonials - the 'black troops' to counter our 'poms' and 'limeys', but we still bought each other beers and swapped cigarettes. To us it was a great flying club, particularly since service life was quite civilised in those halcyon days of 1938-39.

I got an invitation to a 'do' at an 11 Group Station north of London and took along the daughter of one of the landed gentry (sorry, no names no pack drill). This was the most colourful 'do' I'd ever been to with the ladies' dresses almost as beautiful as the British regimental mess kits and even those of the RN types. The dancing and carousing went on all night but around sparrowfart after the captains and kings (and the girls) had departed we were still thirsty and managed to keep the bar open. At about this time an old cobber from Adelaide - he was on fixed prop Hurricanes - thought he was pretty hot as a line-shooter AND as a singer. Said he had sung in the choirs. But he failed to convince us, so we decided to invest him with the 'no-wind'

sign . This involved him losing his trews and despite much protesting on his part, they ended up on the mess chandelier. While he was trying to retrieve his duds, standing on a chair, the crowd pressed around him. Some bright spark had found the necessary tin of black boot polish and so with deft hands we duly and quickly invested him with the 'no wind sign'.

I did not see him again until a few months later, after the war had started, and he was still bellyaching about an itch in his private parts. Sympathising with him I suggested it might be the crabs. He bought me a beer. Then in '45 I met him again, still skiting; he claimed it was all OK now as the pressures on his testicular area from his 'chute harness while baling out during the Battle of Britain had fixed everything! Bought me another beer!!

## THE UNMENTIONABLE FLAG PARADE AND INNOVATIVE CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

*Not long after the arrival of Ivan Paull and his crew at 460 Squadron, Binbrook, a large and important parade was laid on. Viv Walsh of Oatley, NSW, who was in that crew, tells the story.*

The occasion was the handing over of the squadron by the CO, Group Captain Hughie Edwards, VC, DSO, DFC, to the new CO, Group Captain Ken Parsons DSO, DFC.

Binbrook aerodrome is on a large plateau about twenty miles south-west of Grimsby and it seemed to attract all the icy-cold winds blowing in from the North Sea. It was Armistice Day, 11 November 1944 and we were perishing. At the parade the RAF were lined up in front, the WAAF behind them and us RAAF at the back. We seemed to be standing there at ease for an eternity, waiting for the CO to arrive.

But fortunately some of our bods had previously planned to liven up the proceedings. In anticipation they had drawn extra supplies of condoms. (I remember the Medical Officer had said 'you boys are optimistic!) As soon as the wind was right, they blew them up and launched numbers of them from the rear of the parade ground, where they flew right over the heads of the WAAFs who all broke out in titters of laughter.

That episode passed without too much drama. Then, after a suitable welcoming speech, it was time for the new CO's pennant to be raised to the top of the flagpole. The Flag NCO duly hauled up the folded pennant. When it was broken out at the top it was revealed to be not the CO's pennant but a pair of WAAF's winter bloomers, size large, colour dark blue, which had been affixed to the flag halyard and were now deployed in all their glory as the CO's 'pennant'. No matter how they tried, the 'pennant' resisted all attempts to be lowered. The parade was then called off. The flagpole had to be lowered next day for the 'pennant' to be removed.

The secret of not being able to haul the offending garment down was simplicity itself: the halyard below the bloomers had been cut through, leaving only a few threads, so that as soon as anyone attempted to haul the ‘pennant’ down, the halyard parted and the bloomers remained at the top.

*This stunt of sending WAAF’s bloomers up a flagpole had of course been tried in other places with varying success.*

One of these was at Whitley Bay in Northumberland where many of us did a two-week commando-style course. Neville Morrison from Glenhaven, NSW tells that on this occasion the result was all leave being cancelled and the squad drilled for the rest of the day.

*Variations on the condoms stunt were played many times including one at Fulbeck, UK as Neville describes it.*

I was impressed with the ingenuity of some of my fellow officers. It was Christmas and we had no suitable decorations available. So we obtained a large number of condoms, and inflated them. Then one chap with artistic talents painted Walt Disney cartoon characters on them and we strung them up across the bar. This set the tone for a fun Christmas, even (or particularly?) for the WAAFs at the dance. They were highly amused when they recognised the source of the Disney decorations.

## THOSE BRIGHTON ROUTE MARCHES

*Brighton, Sussex, on the south coast was one of England's top holiday spots pre-war with several huge hotels, all of which were taken over for troop accommodation when in 1943 Brighton replaced Bournemouth, a similar city further west along the coast, as the RAAF's main holding centre. Reg Towner of Wahgunyah, Victoria describes some of the ways the troops were kept busy while awaiting posting to training stations or squadrons.*

We had various classes, opportunities for skeet shooting, air-sea rescue practice in the local baths (putting on already cold and wet flying suits before jumping into the pool - not much fun in winter), the famous Royal Pavilion and inevitably to fill in time, route marches. Of course we also had unofficial activities, in particular a large illegal two-up school on the third and fourth floors of the Metropole Hotel.

Overall, we found Brighton a very pleasant place for an airman to be introduced to England. The large resident population - both business and non-business - being now denied their normal major peace-time role of catering to thousands of holiday makers, took readily to the RAAF invasion and did all they could to make life pleasant for the boys. Local dances were very popular and, of course, well patronised.

We had some great so-called 'route marches'. They were really just sight-seeing marches around the town. A pommy corporal was usually given the job of keeping a squad of forty or fifty Aussies in order and all together as they marched the streets. But every time a bus went by there would be half a dozen Aussies jumping on to the back of it. On one occasion a popular Aussie chaplain was in the march and when a tram went by with a sign on it proclaiming it was a Dog Races Special, he turned around to the squad and yelled out, 'This is it chaps', and hopped on board quickly followed by about half the squad.

Every time what was left of the squad passed a pub a few more would peel off. So the Pommy corporal was lucky if he had a dozen survivors at the end of the march. There was no shortage of pubs in Brighton. It was said at that time that there were six hundred - mostly quite small of course, nothing like our Aussie pubs.
The Metropole and Grande, the two largest hotels, right on the beach front, were the main RAAF accommodation centres and would hold many happy memories for any RAAF personnel who passed through Brighton.

# CHAPTER SIX

## SHIPS AND SHAMBLES

### INTO DAVY JONES' LOCKER

*Meals on the 8,000 ton Dutch ship MV 'Nordam' left the troops still rather peckish so a number of them found a way to pick the lock to the storeroom, got in and liberated a large number of apples and oranges which made a welcome fruit supper. Keith 'Skitchy' Day of Cannon Hill, a Brisbane suburb, one of the raiding party, tells the story and its unexpected consequences.*

A World War I Flight Lieutenant was in charge of our detachment. He strutted around with his handlebar moustache and really was a fine old fellow. But I had just an inkling that he knew about the raids on the storeroom and that I was the ringleader. The day before crossing the equator he was discussing with me and several others including the ship's crew, the action to be taken to induct everyone into the traditional 'Davy Jones Locker' crossing-the-line ceremony.

The ship's crew busied themselves setting the stage and the Flight Lieutenant said 'DAAAY' pompously and when I responded he said, 'Tomorrow I want you to hide yourself in some part of the ship and when everyone is of the opinion that all aboard have been through the ceremonies I will say 'I don't recall DAAAY going through. This should set off a great witch hunt'.

I complied with his request and found a cavity below waterline, in fact below the main propeller shaft. I lay there on hard boards for so long that I fell into a deep sleep only to be pounced upon by half a dozen of my supposed friends who wreaked vengeance on me every step of the way, up and down Galley ways and eventually on to the deck by which time I sorely regretted volunteering, or rather going along with the Flight Lieutenant's suggestion. I was then blindfolded and given an extra special 'Crossing the Line' ceremony which included being crowned and then having a bottle of tomato sauce tipped over my head. I was then asked if I liked babies but before I could answer someone crushed half a dozen eggs against my face saying 'Kiss the baby's arse'. All this time of course I was blindfolded and everyone seemed anxious to have their pound of flesh from 'Skitchy', which was my nickname. Then they all screamed, 'Throw the bastard overboard'. With that numerous hands grabbed me and I was sent flying through the air, and being blindfolded was convinced I was actually being thrown overboard. I landed with a great splash, only to find myself in a large canvas pool of water that had been erected on deck. And so, as it turned out, Neptunus Rex, the Ruler of the Raging Main, administered retribution for breaking into the food store.

### NEARLY A KING HIT

*Allan Nesbitt of Bathurst, NSW had an unusual experience at 4(c) OTU at Alness, Scotland which he describes here.*

During training we were flying over the Pentland Firth, between Scotland and the Orkney Islands, when we came across the magnificent sight of a huge armada of battleships and large vessels, all apparently having just left their base at Scapa Flow. We were idly enjoying the unusual spectacle, never having seen so many ships together before when a voice on our intercom said, 'Hey skipper, I think they're signalling to us from that battleship with the Aldis Lamp'.

But it was no Aldis Lamp! Before we could reply we were surrounded by puffs of black smoke from close ack ack bursts. I can assure you that no Spitfire pilot could have bettered the evasive action taken by the skipper of our Sunderland. We learned afterwards that King George VI was visiting the fleet on manoeuvres and the Navy was either taking no chances, or just showing off their ack ack prowess. Surely they couldn't mistake a Sunderland for a JU-88 we thought? Of course no one had told us to avoid the area, and as we found out later, the Navy was not too crash-hot on aircraft identification. We never found out whether they were aiming at us, or firing wide warning shots.

Still cranky about this episode, we were sent on a liaison course at an RN base at Londonderry, Northern Ireland and spent a day on a submarine in Lorne Harbour, west Scotland, crash-diving and re-surfacing while several Coastal Command Squadrons did practice bombing runs over us. All great stuff, but I was amazed to discover that the submarine gun crews could not recognise any of the aircraft involved - Sunderlands, Catalinas and Liberators, whereas we had to be proficient in both aircraft and ship recognition.

However the Navy rose to the occasion when we all retired to the CPO's Mess, when they 'spliced the main brace', which consisted of a tumbler three parts full of Jamaican Rum, which they insisted we drink - it being a tradition - or risk offending them. The resulting feeling of 'walking on a cloud' for several hours afterwards certainly overcame our fears of claustrophobia in the sub.

## NIGHT RAIDS ON THE CAPE FLATTERY

*Not all raids were carried out over enemy territory. Tom Moore of Orange, NSW describes some other raids in March 1944, on the USAT 'Cape Flattery', a converted cargo ship that left Pyrmont, Sydney with six hundred aircrew bound for the UK via a twenty-three day voyage to San Francisco.*

We were expecting cabin accommodation but instead found ourselves in the ship's hold, on two feet wide steel bunks five high, with our kit bags completely filling the aisle space. Many chose to sleep on deck.

Fresh water supplies were severely rationed with only salt water from the few showers that we had, so that it was necessary to wait until the ship drove into a

rainstorm, when everyone would strip off out on deck and madly soap up. But if the ship came out of the squall before the soap had been washed off there were a lot of sticky airmen until the next rain came along.

Dining facilities were worse - two meals a day of meagre and sub-standard food with a punch-card system to prevent doubling up. Negotiating the journey between servery and table with the ship pitching in all directions was a test of acrobatic skills and the steel floor became very slippery with spilt food.

A group of six of us Sergeant Pilots decided something would have to be done with the food situation. So we cultivated the friendship of one of the ship's crew who was sympathetic. He told us that the crew's pantry was well stocked with tinned foods and explained how it could be raided. The method we adopted entailed keeping a midnight watch through the black-out curtains at the entrance to the ship's galley. We observed that when the cook finished baking the bread he would unlock the pantry sliding door just inside the black-out curtains, get an armful of bread and carry it from the kitchen to the pantry, then place it on a shelf. He would then walk back to the kitchen, with his back turned towards the intending raiding party. So on each walk back one member of our party would very quietly duck through the black-out curtain into the pantry and grab a tin of food. This was repeated on each delivery the cook made. The tins were larger than usual, 5 pounds I think, with little identification. The haste to get in and get out left no time for picking and choosing. All members of our party were expected to get one tin with the last member getting two loaves of bread. Out in the darkness of the foredeck amongst the winches, chains and cables the tins would be opened and the party would be on! The contents were unknown until spread onto bread; some that come to mind were beans, corn, fruit salad, cranberry sauce, shrimps and various types of berries. The 'menu' was like a lottery, but spread onto thick slices of bread it made a welcome change. Four or five of these raids were carried out. As well as a feeling of hunger, they required patience, stealth and precise timing, but in the spirit of the operations we were heading for we could say 'all our crews returned safely without detection'.

## TROOPSHIPS - FROM LUXURY TRAVEL TO 'HELL SHIPS'

*Stories of the different conditions encountered on the numerous troopships were as varied as the troops who travelled on them. Like most other aspects of war it was a lottery as to what ship you drew. Conditions aboard ranged from the luxurious, quite early in the war, when some troops had 1st class accommodation with other (paying) passengers and were treated like gentlemen, down to the most cramped and uncomfortable conditions in the holds of small 'Liberty Ships'. These latter were little more than rudimentary floating shells designed to be mass produced for the war, virtually disposable, intended to carry war materials, not passengers.*

*But accommodation on some passenger liners was little better. The 23,000 ton SS 'Orion' was a peace-time Mediterranean cruising liner refitted to take about twice her normal number of 'passengers' in the most cramped conditions, as John LeCornu of Lismore NSW describes*:

Conditions on board the *Orion* when RAAF and New Zealand troops went aboard at Southampton on Sunday, 11 November 1945, were cramped in the extreme. I was a member of the RAAF Swimming Team that had competed in events in Britain and the Continent after VE Day. We went straight from the end of that tour to Brighton and then to Southampton where we boarded the *Orion*. But after inspecting the accommodation offered, over 400 officers and men walked off, refusing to sail on her. About 3,700 troops were expected to find sleeping, eating and recreation space and toilet facilities. The cramped conditions we were shown were intolerable; we would be virtually 'elbow to elbow' in hammocks, many slung in confined spaces, others above a twenty-five foot long dining table, with a 'ceiling' of only 6 ft. 6 ins. One hundred and sixty were expected to sleep hip to hip and eat in that room for five weeks. This was Deck H10 which was way down near the keel. But many of us had been away over five years and were prepared to put up with some discomfort to be going home. Others were not and called out to new batches of troops arriving on the wharf: 'This is a hell ship; don't come aboard'. As a result many did not board but sat on their luggage on the wharf awaiting developments.

These events were widely reported in the English press, the London *Daily Mail's* headlines reading: '*ORION'S* DECK H10 WAS TOO MUCH', and: 'TROUBLE EXPECTED ON THE *ORION*'.

However the ship did sail, minus the four hundred who had walked off demanding an enquiry into the 'cattle truck' conditions on board. These men were returned to their holding camps at Brighton, Margate and Gamston. It became known that many of the troops who refused to sail had wives or lovers in Britain and were hoping to spend Christmas there; but that was not to be, as all were soon recalled to sail on the *Athlone Castle* or *Stirling Castle* where they had Christmas on the Indian Ocean.

But the gods must have smiled on those 'mutineers' who relented and did sail on the *Orion*, when next day, as she was about to enter the Bay of Biscay serious problems occurred, with the liner's turbines stopping the ship near Ile d'Ouessant, opposite Brest. The Captain decided that the damage was too serious to proceed and so set course back to Southampton, to the rousing cheers especially of those on board who were in the most cramped quarters.

But one Flight Sergeant was devastated at this turn of events. He had a girl 'in trouble' back in the UK and was reported as being down in the engine room trying to assist with repairs, or to persuade the crew to at least carry on at reduced speed, but to no avail. The London newspaper headlines then read: 'REBELS' LINER RETURNING - Engine trouble'. The ship returned to Southampton and all troops were dispersed back to their holding camps to await another ship.

*Ken Stone of Aspley, Queensland was one of those who started for home on the 'Orion' and finished the journey on the 'Athlone Castle'. This is his story.*

The *Athlone Castle* was my sixth voyage on a troop transport but oh, so different from the previous journeys! The war was now over and we were on our way home. The ship was a blaze of lights at night; no convoy, no zig zag, no gun duty. It was plain sailing, enlivened by the kind of shipboard activity and resourcefulness not encountered or permitted on wartime trips. We had a laundry service, ironing, oil paintings for sale, a mobile tea service conducted by an Erk who purchased tea at twopence a pint on D deck and sold it at threepence a cup on B deck. The greatest activity however was to be found in the casino where two-up, crown and anchor, roulette and crap games were played. 'Ye Olde Firm', conducted by a Flight Lieutenant Pilot in the forward hold, was a remarkably sophisticated two-up school with blankets on the floor, wooden seats, a blackboard recording the spin statistics for the system betters, ice-cold water for the losers and a cold can of beer for the most successful spinner on the night. With his percentage take from the centre over some four weeks the said Flight Lieutenant now had most of the money on board ship. Upon disembarkation at Melbourne he left with an armed guard escort to the bank.

Who so truly said 'gambling was a mug's game'?

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# INNOVATIVE TRANSPORT

## AN MG RECORD?

*In the winter of 1944-45 the snow was thick on the ground at Upwood where Bill Pearce from Camp Hill, Brisbane was flying Lancasters on 156 Squadron, at least when he and his crew were not shovelling snow off the runways, as Bill describes it.*

There was nothing I liked better than having to leave my warm bunk at midnight when on roster for snow shovelling! Ha Ha! My pilot was an Englishman, Andy Pelly. He came from a rather well-to-do English family and owned an MG sports car. He could get our crew of seven in or on the car - with three sitting on the folded-down hood and one on each of the large mudguards. Of course we only travelled short journeys like this, mainly to the local pubs.

One such night, leaving the local rather late, we came out to find the fog had closed in to a real pea-souper. We clambered aboard the MG and took off in the general direction of the airfield at about walking pace, with the car's fog-light penetrating

only about six or eight feet. It was just as well that the pace was slow for we bumped into an airman (ground staff), who was trying to find his way back on his bicycle. No harm was done to either the airman or his bike. However, we managed to get him and the bike also aboard the MG and eventually made it back to Upwood.

I think we set two records that night: the slowest trip and the biggest load in/on a two-seater MG: eight bods and a bicycle.

## CAREFREE CAR CAPERS - 1

When on operations in England some of us bought cars to run around in when on leave. They were quite cheap to buy since for private civilians there was no private petrol ration and tyres were virtually unobtainable. But air crews were given a nominal petrol ration and could obtain priority orders for tyres. For example, an eight or ten horsepower Austin, Ford or Standard, or a nine horsepower Wolseley etc of mid 1930's vintage (this was in the early 1940's) could be bought for between £30 and £60.

**Eric Brown with his 8HP Ford with no foot brake**

Petrol was no problem. Although we had petrol coupons we rarely bought any. When on ops we would drive out to the dispersal, hand around some bars of chocs, etc. (flying rations) to the ground crew who looked after our kite, and when we got back (providing we did, of course) we'd find the petrol tank full up - with one hundred octane petrol! My eight horsepower Ford Anglia ran very well on it. Don't ever remember registering or insuring the car, and one chap I know had a beer label - same shape, size and colour as the 'rego' label - stuck on his windscreen and was never pulled up about it. When 'peace broke out' and the public again had a small petrol ration I sold the Anglia for £90 - twice what I had paid for it a year before. Although it had a good handbrake, the foot brake was useless - but at least the new owner had an unused book of petrol coupons!

Eric Brown

## CAREFREE CAR CAPERS -2

Strangely enough, Bart Mathers, whose life style was such that before the war our paths would have been unlikely to cross, and if they had, they would have crossed at about right angles, is one of those for whom my memory is most vivid. For one thing he sold me a car for £40 - an old Standard saloon; at least it was a saloon until unruly passengers permanently ventilated the windows. It had a roof which slid back and was

old-fashioned enough to have a hand throttle on the steering wheel, as well as an accelerator on the floor. This enabled us to roam the by-ways of Bedfordshire standing on the front seat with the throttle set, but easily adjustable, steering with one hand and waving to the bystanders with the other. We enjoyed it, and so apparently did the local citizenry.

Only once did I take the Standard any distance from base so we didn't think it necessary to get it registered or anything as formal as that. Characters who were not slow to accept a lift down to the local pub in the vehicle were wont, with equal alacrity, to remark on its deficiencies, which in normal circumstances might have been considered ill-mannered, if not boorish to the point of warranting a facial handshake, but these fellows were only trying to moderate the effects of an unusual life style and had to be treated with understanding.

I had a good run with the old Standard but the sleigh ride came to an end after about six months when the polizia caught up with me, only as luck would have it, because I was trying to do a good deed. We were at Oakington, just outside Cambridge, on 7 Squadron. The nearest hamlet was Waterbeach which also sported an airfield, uncomfortably close to Oakington, uncomfortably because aircraft in anti-clockwise circuits over adjacent airfields will be going in opposite directions, but sharing the same air space, on one leg of the circuit - not a good idea.

One night I was driving a car full of sociable types home from the Waterbeach pub, when ahead in the darkness I saw a torch vaguely waving, so I thought someone may have gone into a ditch and needed help. So I pulled up to be confronted by a member of the local gendarmerie. He explained in friendly terms that one of my lights was blacked out a bit too much. This, everybody knew, was a matter of no great moment because blacked out headlights were intended to serve the purpose of letting other road users know they were not alone, rather than lighting the way for the driver. We were getting along smoothly in a spirit of helpful advice on the one hand and polite cooperation on the other, when the freight in the back decided to have its twopenn'orth.

'Ask 'im why do we have to 'ave lights when we've been flying on instruments since we left the pub'.

This induced much hilarity in the rear, and prompted a competition in witty sallies from the freeloaders and an interest in my name and address from the gendarme. My name I got out, but from the rear came various suggestions as to what I should claim as an address, such as 'Kalgoorlie', 'Wagga Wagga', and 'Gundagai'.

It's easy to be gentle with a submissive wrongdoer, but when the reaction is perky defiance, salted with repartee heartily appreciated by those uttering it, it's only human to lower the boom. The copper walked round the back and found one tail light was not working. He asked for my licence. He asked for all sorts of things I hadn't got. I had to say they were back at the Squadron. It took a while for the wheels to revolve, and a bit longer for them to serve the summons, but the story ground on to its inevitable outcome. The thing they really didn't like was the failure to register the vehicle. I am sure the Cambridge justices wrung out their sodden tear-stained handkerchiefs after

reading my plea that life was terribly hard on ops and one tended to overlook such trivia as registering a vehicle, but they disqualified me from driving for six months. This was no problem at all, since the car was practically community property and any of the boys could drive it, whenever I felt disposed to honour the restriction on yours truly.

Syd Johnson, from *It's Never Dark Above the Clouds.*

## CAREFREE CAR CAPERS - 3

I had purchased a second hand seven horsepower Austin at OTU and certainly got my money's worth out of it till the war finished. I didn't want the car when I went on leave before sailing for home so I gave it to Tom Hallett, my bomb-aimer (set-operator on PFF). He and some mates were heading to Sheffield to watch the Aussie airmen (Keith Miller, Lindsay Hassett, Keith Carmody, R.G. Williams, S.G.Sismey, R.S. Whitington, C.F.T. Price, J.A. Workman, R.S. Ellis, C.G. Pepper, K. Campbell and A.G. Cheetham) play the Poms in one of the Victory Test Matches. Fortunately when the car broke down with no service station in sight another friend picked them up. They left the car with a nearby farmer, telling him they would call back and collect it in a few days.

Since by this time the car was practically worn out, the bomb-aimer later decided it wasn't worth going back for it, so he just left it there and forgot all about it. But the farmer became very suspicious and reported the 'stolen car' to the police. Within days the police turned up at my old No. 97 Pathfinder Squadron at Coningsby (5 Group) wishing to interview one Thomas Noon, the owner of Austin car JN 1524 on the following matters:

1. The car wasn't registered.
2. It wasn't insured.
3. It had four Air Ministry tyres on it.
4. It had an Air Force accumulator (battery).
5. Its petrol tank had one hundred octane aviation fuel in it.
6. It had been stolen by the chap who originally sold it to me in London.

Of course Tom Noon was no longer on the station, and my bomb-aimer was quick off the mark, telling the police (correctly) that I was already half way home to Australia. If they had caught up with me, I might still be in the brig. But there was a happy sequel to the story. I later wrote to my RAF Flight Engineer and told him he could have the car if he cared to collect it from the farmer. He was able to do this and after some minor repairs drove it for many years before it finally 'gave up the ghost'.

Tom Noon

## FROM WIMPYS TO MATILDAS

*In the autumn of 1941 there was a real threat of German invasion of England. Frank Griggs of Tugun, Queensland, then with 218 Squadron at RAF Marham, flying Wellingtons, tells this unusual story of his close cooperation with the Army.*

To counter the possibility of German paratroopers landing, the fields around all the main airfields had poles erected on them to make them unsuitable for glider landings. There were also two barbed wire perimeter fences about a mile apart. The area in between them at Marham was occupied by Army units with about forty tanks. I got to know some of the tank commanders as we would drink in each other's mess, and we took them up sometimes on air tests. In return they let me play with their tanks. Anyone who could drive a caterpillar tractor would have no trouble with these tanks.

On one such day when the Army was on our airfield, we had been scheduled for a night operation, but this was cancelled just after dark before we were due to take off. A little later we all got back to the Sergeants' Mess ready to get stuck into the beer, which normally happened after such cancellations, only to find that the Army had drunk it all. This was the only time I have ever heard of any RAF Sergeants' Mess running out of beer, and it caused great consternation. Also, we were unable to borrow any from the Officers' Mess. Things looked crook indeed.

I told my crew to ring up a taxi to take us down to the local pub, about two miles away, but being a fairly bright crew they refused, saying 'Skipper, you can drive a tank and there are plenty just outside'.

Well, all six of us got into or onto the tank, a Matilda, which was a bit of a squeeze, and off we went. At the main guard room, a brick edifice, the guard stood to attention and raised the barrier, and we had no trouble at the outer perimeter guard. We trundled down to the pub at top speed - about fifteen miles an hour. There was plenty of beer, well worth the effort. Pubs normally closed at 10 pm but this one never closed while there were thirsty aircrew within. We left about 1 am and started up the old tank again. We had no trouble with the outer perimeter guard, but at the main guard room the new Duty Warrant Officer stepped out in front of us with his hand up. In order to

miss him I changed direction quickly, but the brick guard room was in the way. This was unfortunate, not for the tank, but for the guard room, which it practically demolished but we continued on, trying to ignore the remains of the guard room behind us and parked the tank where we had found it. However, there were several people about, some in pyjamas and one of these chaps was wearing a hat with 'scrambled egg' on it, and a short Group Captain with a head shaped like an axe head - wide at the top and thin at the bottom, nick-named 'Square'. He was not amused and I was consigned to the guard-room for the night, to look forward to being charged by court martial in the morning.

Next day things did not look too bright, but thank goodness Bomber Command had laid on a maximum effort. That meant that everything that could be made serviceable would fly, and there was my aircraft and crew without a captain. About 9.30 am the Group Captain appeared and told me to report to my squadron. He looked like a lion that had a leg of antelope snatched away from it.

My crew and I did the operation, and that was all I heard about the tank episode. Naturally I did not raise the subject. Later on when I had learned a little more about Air Force Law, I found out that if a prisoner awaiting court martial is released to perform duties, then the misdemeanour is considered to be condoned.

About thirty years later I met the Group Captain who was now an Air Marshal, and he repeated my name twice, the second time much louder - he had not forgotten! But this time he was laughing.

## MILNE BAY POULTRY LIFT

*During the World War II Pacific Campaign, 36 Squadron RAAF Transport flew the very reliable Douglas DC-3, known variously as The Dizzy Three, Dakota, Gooney Bird, Biscuit Bomber and Kai Bomber, (Kai being the natives' word for food). 36 was known as 'The Hydraulic Squadron' with the motto 'We Lift Anything' - and it seems that they did just that. Peter Hummerston from Woodlands, WA explains how they got that motto.*

We carried out a vast variety of both 'official' and 'unofficial' lifts. Early in the New Guinea Campaign, when Allied Forces occupied only Port Moresby, Milne Bay and Goodenough Island, the Squadron detachment at Port Moresby was mainly occupied with what was referred to as 'the milk run'. This involved daily trips from Port Moresby to Milne Bay, to Goodenough Island, to Milne Bay, to Moresby.

One day we received an urgent request from United States personnel for a special delivery to their people at Milne Bay. We supervised the loading and signed for twenty-four identical pinewood cases - contents not specified. Somehow, en route, one of the case lids just happened to come off and guess what we found inside the insulated cases? Every case was full of dressed, frozen chickens.

There we were, living on bully beef and whatever could be scrounged! The case lid was duly replaced but due to rather turbulent conditions, two cases just happened to

slide underneath the Navigator's table in the crew compartment. The manifest quantity was duly altered and initialled.

When we delivered the adjusted consignment, our United States friends were not too happy at receiving only twenty-two cases but we finally convinced them by pointing out that the manifest had been altered and initialled. Naturally we did not say by whom.

The 'Poultry Lift' was the impetus for our detachment to set up its own camp. This was requested by our detachment Commander, Squadron Leader 'Hank' Henry, to our CO back in Townsville, Wing Commander Harry Purvis, and would he also please send up some cooks? He agreed to all this.

We had previously discovered two deserted planters' huts with concrete floors and thatched roofs down to about four feet from the ground, ideal for ventilation and some relief from the heat and humidity. We soon made the huts fit for habitation, 'acquired' some kerosene refrigerators, portable generator sets, water tanks and various pieces of furniture from here and there. Also we increased the vehicle strength considerably. Actually two of them were officially RAAF! Nearly everyone had a vehicle of some kind for their private use. The local Military Police and Service Police were regular visitors looking for 'lost' vehicles but by the time they arrived, numbers had been changed or the vehicles had vanished into the jungle surrounding the huts.

The newly arrived cooks were given the job of cooking the frozen poultry and the following evening a party was held. Besides the RAAF types, a group from ANGAU in Moresby was invited.

Unfortunately the beer ration was, as usual, non existent, so drinks consisted of gin and tinned orange juice. The party continued into the early hours, and only broke up when some crews were due for a dawn take-off.

As a 'house-warming' the party was of course, a great success and justified the Squadron's motto 'We'll Lift Anything'.

## PULLMAN PRANKS

When RAAF aircrew travelled to the UK via the Pacific they normally travelled from San Francisco to New York on a Pullman train, with sleeper cars, a journey usually of six days. In December 1943 one contingent, which included your editor, having boarded the train at Oakland, had some time to wait before departure. They occupied themselves by decorating the sides of a couple of the carriages with a multitude of RAAF and Australian drawings, slogans and motifs - sketches of kangaroos and koalas, boomerangs, kookaburras and tankards of foaming beer, all executed in chalk. Slogans included 'Australia to Berlin' and (directed to the girls), 'If you're a peach you're welcome here'. We thought it was all good fun.

A Negro porter was assigned to each Pullman sleeper car. He would arrange our berths each night and fold them up in the mornings, and I suppose he had other duties.

Our carriage was next to the bulk food supplies car, which we had to walk through to get to the dining car for each meal. The meals were a bit light on, although it must be said the accommodation was otherwise very good. However during the six days we were on the train we were not allowed to get off, which made it a bit boring.

It was December, there was plenty of snow about and the train was very well heated, so we were not inclined to leave it during the many times it stopped 'in the middle of no-where'. So, partly to supplement our meals and partly to break the boredom, we found that we could get into and raid the supplies car, which we then used to do each night after we were sure our porter had turned in for the evening. We would usually come away with tins of peaches, pears, cream, cakes and other goodies that we could easily devour in our compartments. Most nights we had our 'midnight can party', the climax of which was to hurl the empty cans out the window at whatever we could see to hurl them at. We were never found out. Such simple pleasures - but we thought at the time it was a terribly wicked thing!

The route took us through Sacramento to Salt Lake City, Denver, Des Moines, Fort Dodge, Chicago, Detroit - all previously just names to us from the movies, and now just fleeting impressions as we sped by.

Eric Brown

*Tom Noon of Stafford, Queensland remembers when his group did this same trip.*

We stopped at Salt Lake City at about midnight. On the platform was a pallet of crated bottles of milk. Within about fifteen minutes the pallet was virtually stripped. Needless to say no money changed hands. Our train continued on to Buffalo and Niagara Falls, shrouded in winter mist, (couldn't see a thing), Albany in New York State then down to New York for a week's leave in the Big Apple before shipping out to the UK.

## QUEENSLAND TRAIN HI-JACK

*When the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941 great action soon followed at No. 3 SFTS Amberley with the arrival of American Forces plus crates of Airacobras and Kittyhawks to be rush-assembled for urgent use up north. Bill Shrubb of Lismore, then a Flight Mechanic at Amberley, relates this story.*

We were camped near Kingaroy ready to load planes on the train which was on a siding. Some of our boys had been into town and came back with too much XXXX on board.

While we were loading the train the engine driver and fireman were sitting under a tree in the shade, the fireman periodically going back to the engine to stoke the boiler and keep the pressure up.

It had long been a point of rivalry between the Queenslanders and NSW and Victorian chaps about the slow speed of the Queensland trains, on their 3 feet 6 inch gauge lines. Suddenly the train took off, with the whistle 'cock-a-doodle-dooing' madly.

People jumped off and one plane half loaded fell to the ground. The (real) engine driver tried to get on but one of the RAAF in the locomotive cabin pushed him off. The train rushed up and down the siding blowing its whistle while the RAAF 'engine driver' was yelling out, 'See, these bloody Queensland trains can go fast! Cock-a-doodle-doo!'

On their third run they were finally stopped by someone placing a sleeper across the line as they prepared for their fourth run.

Needless to say the heavy arm of the local police soon descended on the culprits, taking them into Kingaroy, where they were charged, and in due course each received six months at Holsworthy (prison camp) near Liverpool.

It was a heap of fun for all while it lasted, and fortunately there was no damage.

## STEAM-POWERED TRANSPORT

*Jim Sharpe of Lismore, NSW was a pilot at 460 Squadron when it was at Breighton, north of the Humber. He relates this story about some unusual transportation used by some of the boys after a very relaxing night out in the nearby town of Goole.*

About half a dozen of our 460 lads were riding their bicycles back to Breighton, when they came across a huge steam-roller parked at the side of the road near some roadworks. A couple of the lads decided to investigate and climbed aboard. They found that the coal fire under the boiler was still burning.

'This would be a good ornament for the mess', said one. So they threw some more coal into the firebox and stoked it up, also loading their bikes on the back of the steamroller.

After some pushing and pulling of levers they began to get the monster moving, but as there was no agreement as to who was to be the driver, whenever someone pulled one lever someone else pushed another one. Then Mick McGrory said, 'Stand back you blokes, I'll drive the bastard', and he successfully got it rolling on to the road.

By this time a small crowd of bystanders had gathered to watch the spectacle and with plenty of encouragement being given, a rather erratic course was steered along the road and with good steam up the monster was soon travelling at a speed not normally expected of a steam-roller. However about a mile short of their destination they were unable to cope with a sharp bend in the road and the goliath rolled off the road to port, over a ditch and through a hedge, finally stopping against a substantial tree. Unfortunately our aircrew driver (or drivers) had not got around to finding where the brake was, if any. Despite a great deal of coaxing and trying all combinations of the various levers etc the boys were unable to extricate the roller.

Reluctantly they abandoned ship, and completed their journey back to the station on their bicycles.

The incident was almost forgotten until about a week later when all crews were summoned to the briefing room where a harassed CO, Wing Commander Kaufman, asked if any of the assembly had ever borrowed or stolen, or knew anything about a steam-roller that had gone missing somewhere on the road between Goole and Breighton. After a deal of soul searching and indecision one of the culprits volunteered the information that yes, he had seen a steam-roller parked behind a hedge about a mile down the road.

The local council was duly notified. After that it was observed that whenever a steam-roller was seen not in use its controls were always carefully padlocked.

## SWAPPING A TANK FOR A LIB

*The players in this drama were the crew of a B-24 Liberator in No. 23 (City of Brisbane) Squadron, then stationed at Leyburn on the Darling Downs of Queensland. It was January 1945, and they were waiting on movement orders to the South-West Pacific area. Navigator Col Badham of Lismore took the opportunity to wangle some unofficial leave to see his wife and new baby son Ian at Casino. He was concerned about being back in time for the movement north. Col continues with the story.*

When I left for Casino my skipper Alan Triggs immediately said, 'No worries mate. I'll fly down to Casino a few days before we're due to go and drop you a note with instructions when you are required back'. Triggs was better than his word. At the appropriate time I, and the rest of Casino, was made very aware of a large four-engine Liberator bomber roaring in low from the north, barely clearing the superstructure of the old bridge over the Richmond River. He easily located my wife's house in Hartley Street and dropped a map with instructions (and a number of rude comments) with pin point accuracy on the front lawn. He then made about four more passes over the residence at 'nought' feet, with propellers in fine pitch and engines screaming. The population was treated to the stark reality of a low level bomber attack - without the bombs.

Triggs also gave the nearby city of Warwick the same roof-top treatment on the way back.
I duly returned to Leyburn to find that we were posted to Darwin, but obviously, as a disciplinary measure, Triggs' crew was not allocated an aircraft but was detailed to proceed to Darwin overland. Evidently masses of irate complaints had come in from both Casino and Warwick.

The monotonous journey by troop train soon bored the extrovert Triggs, so he, with me and two other crew members quietly off-loaded ourselves from the train at Barcaldine where we stayed a few days enjoying the famous outback Queensland hospitality.

**At a reunion in Canberra on 25 August 1995 from left: Alan Triggs MBE, DFC, Col Badham DFC, Norm Williams CGM DFM & bar, who is described by Col as 'probably the most distinguished and famous Air Gunner to have served in the RAAF'.**

We had arranged for the rest of the crew to stay on the train and to cover up for us, as best they could, at our 'missing the train' at Barcaldine. After some fun there we hitched train and truck rides to Mt. Isa where we 'acquired' an army tank, or more correctly a weapons carrier, complete with machine gun and .303 rifles. (Sorry, memory fails me at this point as to how we actually came into possession of this weapons carrier!)

We crossed about 1,700 km of a vast expanse of the empty Australian interior, had no money left, shot scrub turkeys and tried them for food - not very appetising. Arrived Tennant Creek, refreshed ourselves and helped army personnel load a freight train. We finally arrived at Long aerodrome, south of Darwin, to a very hot reception to say the least - being long overdue. However, we were able to negotiate a satisfactory deal with the OC of the Squadron, who could see that after all we HAD showed initiative in making our way overland, albeit somewhat irregularly, and Triggs persuaded him to see the distinct advantage of acquiring for the squadron and his own personal use, one perfectly good army weapons carrier, complete with machine gun and .303 rifles.

Triggs' crew was reinstated and told to get on with the job of winning the war. Having done several years on ops in Europe we were hardly in the novice class in that regard and duly got on with the job in the South-West Pacific conflict.

From *Biscay to Balikpapan.*

## WAYWARD BICYCLES

*'The Fourteen Titties' was a popular local pub in Goole, near 460 Squadron at Breighton, at least that was what the boys called it, though the sign outside read 'The*

*Seven Sisters'. Another popular pub was 'The Dirty Duck' (aka 'The Black Swan'). Jim Sharpe of Lismore, NSW was a regular patron there and passes on this melancholy tale.*

It was perhaps too common a practice by the troops in England to borrow other peoples' bicycles - without asking them, of course. This, it must be admitted, had become a widespread practice outside the above two pubs in particular. The bikes nearly always found their way back to their owners, usually reasonably intact, so 'borrowing' a bike was never taken too seriously by the authorities. Some widely dispersed stations issued bikes to the troops and these were often regarded as interchangeable; so long as you had a complete, reasonably unbent bike to hand in when finished you were right.

But some of the local citizens at Goole prevailed upon the law to take action about their stolen or borrowed bicycles. They were tired of having to walk home and then have to hunt down their bikes. Shortly after Chad Martin's arrival as CO two young police constables called on him to devise some way of overcoming the disappearance of push-bikes from outside the local hostelries at closing time. The constables reported that the bicycles' owners were very peeved at usually finding them outside the main gates of the Station next morning. After a long discussion it was decided that air force bikes would be distinguished in future by being painted all white. Having negotiated this earth-shattering agreement the constables were escorted to the door, beside which their own bicycles had stood. But alas, their journey had been in vain - both their bikes had vanished!

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# THE ROMANCE FACTOR

## AMBULANCE AFFAIRS

*The Fairey Battle aircraft used for air gunnery practice at No. 1 Bombing and Gunnery School at Evans Head on the NSW North Coast were not the most popular nor highest performing aircraft in World War II, and inevitably there were crashes. 'Hep' Klemm of Lismore tells how one crash caused a very private rendezvous to become a centre stage event.*

The Battle took off at about 2030 hours for a night flying exercise but was barely airborne over the perimeter fence when its engine cut out without warning. The pilot had to make a wheels-up emergency landing, pancaking on a sand dune which happened to be close to the Gollan Hall in the Evans Head township. On that night a dance was being held there and was attended mainly by airmen and airwomen from the base. The sound of the crash so close by brought everyone out of the hall, rushing to see the drama and to assist the crew from the plane, which had caught fire.

In the meantime up at the station the duty ambulance crew were sitting on a bench quite near the ambulance, filling in time having a smoke. The crash alarm had hardly sounded before they were in the ambulance, taking off at high speed with their siren screaming, to the crash site - which they could see from the base - followed by the fire truck. On arrival the fire crew started pouring fire foam on to the burning aircraft while the ambulance men backed their vehicle through the crowd of onlookers to where the injured crew were. They quickly opened the rear doors of the ambulance to get the stretchers out when, to the absolute surprise of the ambulance crew and the crowd, out popped two sheepish people: a slightly dishevelled but very well known Airmens' Mess WAAAF - she was a smasher - and an equally well known airman from the maintenance wing.

It was later revealed that they had been using the ambulance as their 'perfect love nest' for quite a while until this night when the 'system' failed and they were too busy to get out before the ambulance took off. Naturally they copped it from all directions and both were soon afterwards posted to different stations.

Is it a coincidence that No. 1 BAGS, was also known to some as No. 1 Boys and Girls School?

## IS THERE NOWHERE PRIVATE?

*In Italy one tended to relax after leaving the patrol area, reports Spencer 'Flip' Philpott of Belmont, NSW.*

On one occasion Pancho and I were quietly returning to base in our Beaufighter, flying quite low and admiring the Mediterranean coastal scenery just south of Venice, when Pancho suddenly pushed the nose down and with a very excited tremor in his voice said, 'Hey Flip, get a load of this!'

Just up ahead, in a boat about the size of a large rowing boat, was a German soldier flat out in the bottom of the boat 'having it off' with his girlfriend. Pancho said, 'I'll give this bloke a shock' and immediately started a dive on the couple engaged in that age-old practice.

He pulled out of the dive, just above the boat, not firing a shot, in time to see the soldier dive headlong over the side, wearing only the top half of his uniform, leaving his girlfriend wearing only a most amazed expression and little else, as we waved them goodbye.

I understand the Adriatic is icy cold in December!

From *Once Was Enough*.

**DOING HER BIT FOR THE WAR EFFORT**

*Tom Noon from Stafford, Queensland sent in this story, which will probably ring some bells with others who went through 27 OTU Lichfield, where most RAAF did their operational training and crewing-up and enjoyed the social pleasures of this friendly old town.*

One of my crew was courting a young lass when we were at Lichfield - she was doing her bit for the war effort during the day, working on a lathe at the local Brush Engineering factory. His name was Len, but for some reason we nicknamed him 'Haystack'. He first met Susie at the popular Guildhall dance and then regularly met her at the local pub after which they would have a cuddle on the way home in one of the haystacks, where no doubt she continued her good work for the war effort.

One day she told Len she was seeing her doctor the next day. Len immediately got alarmed and suspected the worst, but Susie said she only had a piece of steel in her eye from the lathe.

However, much to her embarrassment, when the Doctor examined her later he said, 'Lass I'm sorry to inform you, that's not a piece of steel, it's a hayseed'. I don't think after that they ever went back to the haystack to do their romancing.

But by that time 'Haystack's' nickname and reputation as a rural lover was well established with our crew, and the name stuck to him from then on.

## THE RELUCTANT DRAFTEES

*After the war ended in Europe, huge numbers of personnel awaited repatriation to their homelands, the majority by far being Americans, who were given first priority, with the result that Australians, with a lower priority, had to wait. But this was no worry to some who had married in England or who had steady lovers. Doug Gordon of Northampton, WA describes a surprising turn of events at his pre-embarkation station near the village of Beccles near Norwich in Norfolk.*

This airfield had been an Air Sea Rescue base and was one of the dispersed airfields, which meant it was scattered all over the countryside, requiring the issue of pushbikes for everyone to get around on, and these had to be signed for and returned in due course, undamaged.

Being close to Lowestoft on the coast, Navy personnel came to drink at the Beccles pub. They often left their departure a bit late and were prone to swiping a bike or two to get them back to port, leaving the RAAF signee to walk home. Mostly the bikes were returned to the pub later, usually with buckled wheels or frames, but still rideable and returnable to the bike store with an explanation as to how they got that way.

One day an urgent order went out to all ranks. Everyone was to fall in on the Parade Ground at 3 pm sharp. Pushbikes came from everywhere, some wobbling precariously on buckled wheels, etc, but the parade ground eventually filled up and assumed some kind of order. Then the fateful announcement was made. A ship was due to leave Southampton shortly and had vacancies for only a limited number of men. The

apologetic administrative officer explained that it had been decided that the fairest way to select the lucky few was to give berths to the first fifty married men to come forward. The order was then given: 'Fifty married men, fall out!' But no one stepped forward. It looked as though they hadn't heard him properly so he re-explained how it was to work and repeated the stampede order. Result, ditto. By now the apologetic executive officer's demeanour had stiffened considerably. The next time he read out from his list the names of fifty married men and ordered them to be ready to return to their loved ones immediately.

It was a revelation to us that some of those so insensitively ordered home were married but were so unappreciative of this unexpected turn of events. By their free and easy lifestyle while on leave, we had assumed they were, like ourselves, unencumbered. But they had to go.

We did hear later that when these unfortunate expatriates went aboard the *Orion* at Southampton they promptly declared conditions unsatisfactory and walked off, but were ordered back aboard and sent home anyway. There was a sequel to this story and a short respite. (see Troopships story) Needless to say, we all got the axe eventually, some of us being lucky enough to sail on the *Aquitania,* calling at Freetown where disembarkation was disallowed, and Cape Town where leave was cancelled but as discussed in the first chapter was taken anyway.

# CHAPTER NINE

## LOOSENING UP ON LEAVE

### ALL IS REVEALED AT BLACKPOOL

*At 456 Squadron at Valley, North Wales, Nobby Blundell tells a revealing story about demon drink and its consequences.*

We arrived at Blackpool on leave and went to Fun Land - a large entertainment complex with theatres, dance hall and bars, rides and more, the best in Britain in those days. My mate Skelty - so called because he looked like a walking skeleton - proved to be a two-pot screamer. At the dance I noticed him dancing repeatedly with one girl, and then he disappeared. I assumed he had left with her. But about two hours later one of the bouncers asked if I had a mate there. With our dark blue RAAF uniforms we were easy to pick out. He said to me,

'Come and give us a hand.'

Sure enough it was Skelty; he had been sick and had collapsed in it. He was helpless, so the bouncer fetched a hose and helped me hose him down and get him mobile. Eventually we reached our room at the boarding house and turned in.

When I awoke the next morning and looked at Skelty and his uniform I don't know which one looked worse. Certainly neither was fit for public inspection. The landlady tried to dry his uniform in the oven, but it still looked dreadful - and all wrinkled. She

then had the bright idea of suggesting we go to a pleating firm where her sister worked, and where the could steam press the uniform, which we did. When we arrived there the girls had been advised by phone and were prepared. They gave Skelty a screen to stand behind while he removed his pants and tunic to be pressed. This was proceeding well, although I heard a lot of giggling and then one girl, a supervisor, requested that he really should let them do his shirt, tie and underclothes and insisted that he toss them over the screen, which he reluctantly did.

When they had all his clothes another one said in a bossy voice, 'Sorry luv, we need the screen', and whisked it way. There he stood, starkers, in the large workroom with about fifteen girls, all lined up, pointing and screaming with laughter. The bunch was merciless but it did a lot to cure Skelty's shyness; he even forgot his hangover.

We left with the neatest uniforms in Blackpool and had made a number of new friends.

From *Friends on Active Service.*

## ANZAC DAY IN NEW YORK

*Many contingents of RAAF EATS (Empire Air Training Scheme) trainees en route for the UK had some leave in New York, waiting for a troopship. Harley Marks from Belmont, NSW tells about his contingent's leave there in April 1944.*

As Anzac Day fell during our leave a march was organised by the resident Australian Ambassador with the help of the Mayor of New York, who also arranged for a US Army Band to accompany the Aussies. The idea of an Anzac Day march, in New York of all places, quickly caught on with the troops who were pleased to show New Yorkers that 'the Aussies were here'.

The contingent of about three hundred, decked out in their 'best blues' and smartly led by a Pilot Officer, marched three abreast down Fifth Avenue proudly upholding the spirit of Anzac. They were given great cooperation and assistance by the famous New York cops. It is believed to be the first ever, if not only, Anzac Day march in New York.

The march was followed by a civic reception in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel where we were guests of the Mayor of New York.

Most of the troops were billeted in private homes and treated like honoured guests, being taken on drives, to restaurants and to dances. Three of us stayed with the wonderful Dent family in New Jersey for nearly a week. They would not let us spend a cent! What a great experience of friendship and trust these people showed us. Most of them had never met an Australian and knew very little, if anything, about Australia. One of the highlights was our accent and the Aussie slang. They loved to hear us talking, particularly to each other. It was a wonderful few days. We left with our heads held high knowing that we had given and shown these wonderful people our greatest respect and gratitude.

**RAAF contingent proudly marches down Fifth Avenue New York on Anzac Day 1944. This is believed to be the only Anzac Day March ever in New York.**

**Reception in the Waldorf Astoria Hotel hosted by the Mayor of New York, Anzac Day 1944. L-R Tom Moore, Harley Marks, Ron Neely, Don Aynsley, Alwyn Baker, Ross (pissy) Wilson, Ian Hocking, Cec Bull, Peter Cooney.**

Despite our wonderful reception there it should be stated that the New York public is widely reputed to be the most blasé on earth. Nothing seems to concern or disturb them. A story about the Big Apple that is told so often it is probably true is that an actor, for a bet, dressed in a full Nazi uniform, strolled the full length of Broadway without ever a challenge, not even when he stopped and asked directions in a fake German accent. People who know the city, on hearing this story, just nod their heads and say, 'Sure, no risk at all'.

## BOOMERANG CLUB MEMORIES

*A favourite place for Aussies to go when on leave in London was the Boomerang Club in the basement of Australia House in The Strand. Its telephone number was Temple Bar 4053/4 according to your editor's old diary. He recollects this story.*

The Club appeared to be an extension of the Australian Consulate's activities. You could always be sure of a warm welcome from the expatriate Australian civilian community and their London friends - especially their young daughters, who helped out in staffing the club. In the convivial atmosphere you could nearly always be sure of meeting old RAAF mates you had not seen for years, have a great yarn and find out which of your old mates had 'bought it' or 'got the chop', and where some others were now.

The Club served meals and was famous for its waffles. It also had a billeting service whereby leave could be arranged in many beautiful country homes through the Lady Francis Ryder Scheme. Through this scheme, my mate Syd Bacon and I were fortunate to spend Christmas 1943 at Studley Farm, Mucklestone, Market Drayton in Shropshire, where Mr. Frank Furnival and his wife treated us as honoured guests. Unfortunately we neglected socialising with our generous hosts as much as we should have; they were quite old (over forty we reckoned!), and we were more interested in sitting around the kitchen fuel stove and chatting with their two pretty young housemaids. However we did acquit ourselves reasonably well when Frank took us trap shooting on the moors with his tweed-coated and welly-wearing friends. Syd and I bagged our fair share of clay pigeons with the twelve gauge shotgun. Fortunately we had had some practice at this on a range at Brighton, while waiting for posting to units.

All visitors to the Boomerang Club were asked to sign the Visitors Book and give their home town. The Australian papers often published lists of these visitors. No doubt the lists were eagerly scanned by the folks back home and were a welcome change from the Government's regularly published lists of casualties.

## LEAVE ON THE NORFOLK BROADS

*Noel Coward had one of his characters assert that Norfolk was very flat, implying by association the quality of dreariness in a gent who came from that county. He wasn't wrong, said Syd Johnson of Trigg, Western Australia, going on to describe his leave with his pilot Dickie Walbourn and Dickie's wife Betty, yachting on the Norfolk Broads.*

The river Yare, supplemented by numerous tributaries, enlaces a lot of the countryside round Norwich, and has its mouth at Great Yarmouth. When you're talking about a river, it's standard phraseology to say it flows into the sea, or empties into the sea, but you couldn't say that about the Yare. It doesn't empty anywhere, but remains brim full, apparently without moving. If it did, it would flow into the North Sea. The river Wissey 'drains', to coin a phrase, the other half of Norfolk and comes out in the Wash, as a lot of other things do, near King's Lynn. How these rivers know which way to flow is a mystery. They create a vast checkerboard of waterways, all over the middle of Norfolk, separated by islands of grass and other stuff, all at the same level as the water. Opposite Norfolk, across the North Sea, lie the Low Countries, which if left to their own devices would be under water. The bit in the middle couldn't stand the deception, and decided to give up and become part of the English Channel.

Sailing in a small boat on the Norfolk Broads is great fun and would be an admirable nursery for a novice yachtsman to feel what it's like to get his hands on the tiller and appreciate the reaction of sail to wind. The reaches curl in and out all over the place, most about fifty yards wide, so you're going about the whole time. Safe as houses, and you work up a considerable appetite because you're continually on the move.

Of course if you run out of wind, then in order to locomote you have to quant, which means you stick a long pole down through a lot of water and through a lot of mud after that, until you feel it get sufficient purchase to cause the boat to move when downward pressure is applied. There is a fine balance between the proper amount of enthusiasm which should accompany this act, and the sensitivity to judge when to desist, when to stop pushing the thing in, and start pulling it out. You like to get the optimum forward motion from a push, but there is a point of no return when the pole becomes reluctant to disengage from the mud and the platform you are using as a fulcrum gradually quits the scene with your feet on it. You then have two quick choices, to leave the ship or leave the pole, but it is all the tea in China to a bad egg that you have at this point abandoned the second choice because you are hanging on to the pole with your hands and you haven't got prehensile feet. So there you are, on the pole and up the creek, while the rest of the cast, safely seated, drifts slowly away, pointing at you and having a good laugh. To add to their enjoyment, the pole will lower you into the water, and to prolong your distress, will effect this delivery in slow motion.

Still, all this makes a welcome change from touring Europe at a great height in the dark.

From *It's Never Dark Above the Clouds*.

## LIGHTER MOMENTS REMEMBERED

*Well known author Don Charlwood has contributed the following reminiscences especially for this collection.*

Except for such high-jinks as bailing-out off the mantelpiece, setting fire to the newspapers of avid readers and, of course, leaving footprints across the ceiling, I don't remember much by way of hilarity in the Sergeants' Mess on 103 Squadron, Elsham Wolds, during the winter of 1942-43. There seemed to be more wild activity in the Officers' Mess, but word of this only reached us second hand. Much of it centred around our immensely popular squadron medical officer, Robert Henderson.

At an Elsham Wolds mess dance The Doc had to attend the Queen Bee professionally for an injured back. At the time it happened, she was wearing the adjutant's trousers and he was wearing her skirt. This swap had been made not long before a final conga chain. The adjutant, a portly man, had leapt into the middle of it, landing on the Queen Bee's back. The Doc told me years later that the Adj didn't much care for the Queen Bee. But then, what airman ever did care for any Queen Bee?

The Doc was in the habit of unauthorised flying on operations, always with a different crew; this, ostensibly, was to study 'aircrew stress'. He got away with it sixteen times, most of his mishaps being non-operational. One night he and 'his' crew landed away at another 1 Group Station. Finding a dance in progress, they wanted to join in unobtrusively so entered by a side window. They found themselves in the ladies' toilet!

This was rather better than a later visit by a number of WAAF officers to an Elsham Wolds dance. The visitors having missed their return bus, the Doc commandeered an ambulance and drove them and their languishing partners homeward. Somewhere the ambulance broke down, steam rising from the radiator. Giving it time to cool down - adequate time, it is hoped! - the Doc ordered the men to urinate into the water-filler. The girls were safely delivered back to camp; the ambulance made it back but the engine proved to be ruined. The transport section worked overtime to save The Doc's reputation.

I think there was more hilarity when ops were over and tour-expired men were posted as instructors back to Operational Training Units. Perhaps they were all faintly surprised to find themselves alive and were unable to take things too seriously. Most Australians were posted to 27 OTU Lichfield. I well remember my first dining-in night as an officer and a gentleman there. In best blues we stood behind our chairs, heads bowed, waiting for the padre to say grace. At that moment a decorated Flight Lieutenant staggered in at the door, face flushed, eyes swivelling uncontrollably. The padre paused; the time-expired men raised dismayed eyes; the intruder cried in a loud voice, 'They're all looking at me!' It was some little time before the padre was able to negotiate a reverent grace.

As every airman knew, WAAF's underpants were referred to as 'passion-killers', also as 'blackouts'. I remember hearing a nervous, obviously new young WAAF making an announcement for which she had undoubtedly been well-coached: 'It is now 2130 hours. All blackouts must be drawn and securely fastened'.

After flying accidents, survivors' stories were sometimes extraordinary and we often found ourselves laughing over pretty macabre happenings. One instructor at Lichfield told of a Wellington 1C crash. While the pilot battled to land, the instructor took up the navigator's position under the astro-dome, ready to lift the dome off to allow escape. He remembered no more until he found himself walking through surrounding wreckage, the dome still held overhead. Only when he got clear did his legs give way, both were broken! By some miracle the entire crew survived.

In 1943 the CO of 27 OTU was the well-known Australian Group Captain 'Paddy' Heffernan. On gas-drill days Paddy would make random visits to various sections on his bicycle to make sure we were carrying gas masks. One day he was seen to be approaching Flight Commander Arthur Doubleday's office. With Arthur was his laconic deputy, Pete Hallett. Pete had recently used his gas mask haversack for carrying his clothes on a forty-eight-hour leave. In the hurry to leave his room that morning he had merely shoved the innards of it down his battledress blouse. Seeing 'Paddy' approaching, he realised he wasn't going to get away with it, so he leapt into a cupboard. If Pete was quick, Paddy was quicker. He said nothing - merely stayed for morning tea and a long yarn with Arthur.

Pete was an irrepressible fellow. I remember seeing him ride into Arthur Doubleday's office on a motorbike for duty. Between laughter and exasperation, Arthur cried, 'For God's sake, Pete, take a day off !'

**Danny O'Shea, left, and Don Charlwood fifty years after their days at 'Kelly's Brickyard', as the Nav section at 27 OTU Lichfield was dubbed.**

The screen navigators' section at 27 OTU was occupied by the most flak-happy bunch of men I ever knew. As I related in *No Moon Tonight* the OIC of the section was Keith Campbell, a member of the 1943 Services Eleven. Cricket practice often took

place in our long, desk-lined room, the authoritative commentator being Danny O'Shea, a Queensland pharmacist. When a phone call interrupted play, 'The Great O'Shea' would lift the receiver and answer, 'Kelly's Brickyard' all over the OTU. The painting and sign-writing section finally executed a handsome KELLY'S BRICKYARD shingle for our door. This remained in place until Danny was posted home; the shingle then disappeared with him. I next saw it in 1993 when I called on him in Queensland. Two aged men held it between them for a photograph, both of them a bit moist-eyed.

But to paraphrase 'Curly' Richardson, another Brickyard character, 'As my old headmaster Dr. Barnardo used to say: Boys! enough is enough'.

*Another Lighter Moment, this one contributed by Don McCord.*

The Australian Polo Team just before the war consisted of four brothers. In 1943 one of them, Flight Lieutenant Phil Ashton, was instructing on Beaufighters at an OTU in NSW. One day two instrument fitters were doing a daily inspection in a Beau cockpit and the following conversation was overheard by a passing pilot: 'This Flight Lieutenant Ashton's a funny sort of joker, ain't 'e?'

'Yair...Y'know 'oo 'e is, don't you?'

'No..'.oo is 'e anyway?'

'Oh, 'e's one o' them polo-playing Ashtons.'

'Well, all I can say is, 'e must have had a bloody clever 'orse!'

**NOT REALLY GHAND-EYE**

*After a hectic night in Manchester, early in the morning Syd Johnson and a couple of his mates succumbed to the bright idea of directing the traffic in Piccadilly Circus. Syd tells the story.*

The motorists cooperated and the whole thing went like a German band until the large crowd that had gathered on the footpaths enjoying the performance became a barrier to pedestrian traffic and the police felt compelled to intervene. This they did, leaping across the Circus from cover to cover like Indians attacking a fort, while the crowd cheered and the whole thing took on a holiday atmosphere. On the steps of the paddy wagon, about to be slung into durance vile, but quick to recognise and capitalise on the prevailing mood, Bill turned to the crowd and opened up with 'Land of Hope and Glory'. At that time it was easy to hook a crowd into community singing and as 'Mother of the Free!' resounded across the Circus from a thousand throats the police recognised this was the point of no return and took no further action, other than replacing our 'traffic cop' with their official one.
We got back to the pub about 8 am to find that George had gone to bed in the wrong room, namely mine, so I went to his room and flaked out there. This triggered off a misadventure which could only happen to a fellow like George. Shortly after I was

safely ensconced, he felt need to go to the toilet, which he did, for this relief much thanks, and returned to his room. This time he picked the right room, where he found me sound asleep, in pyjamas, clothes put away, all ship shape and Bristol fashion, and George was completely stumped as to how I had managed in his brief absence. Scratching his head, he decided not to disturb me but to find a billet elsewhere. This was a mistake since his modus operandi was to go along the passage, opening any likely-looking door. The occupants were in various stages of preparing for another day, and George's intrusions were made the more spectacular by his absence of regulation night wear, his only concession to the mores being a loosely arrayed sheet. Soon there was a good old furore in progress all along the passage.

George gave up trying to explain, and, slumping in a corner of the passageway, went to sleep wearing nothing more than his loosely wrapped sheet and a puzzled expression, oblivious to the battle raging around him, which woke everybody else. The first thing I heard was the plaintive cockney voice of a cleaning lady saying, 'I've been married for thirty years, and I've never seen anything like it. He were dressed joost like Ghand-eye!'

Our popularity generally seemed to be at a low ebb in this neck of the woods, and our legal right to occupation, if not already lost, would expire at 10 am, so our decision to depart was a relief to everybody including ourselves.

From *It's Never Dark Above the Clouds.*

**PERILS OF STRANGE CITIES**

*Many a young airman, worldly-wise and battle-hardened in an operational zone, often proved to be very naive when on his own in a strange city. John Grigsby, now a resident of Canberra, admitted this after an experience in Brisbane late in 1944.*

While waiting with their contingent at the Sandgate Embarkation Depot to board the USS *Sea Ray* for Morotai, some of the airmen wanted a farewell party but because all messes were closed prior to embarkation the next morning, it was decided to draw straws to select someone to buy sly grog in Brisbane.

Grigsby, a moderate drinker, was not interested in boozing, but peer pressure forced him into the draw. Just his luck! He drew the short straw. With an empty kit bag he resignedly headed for Brisbane on the local train.

He was totally unfamiliar with Brisbane and where to obtain sly grog but had heard vague references to an Albert Street and that it was frequented by servicemen. After asking twice for directions he eventually reached it. Lines of Australian and US servicemen stood in the street outside some old houses and assuming this was the right place to buy sly grog he joined the queue.
Progress toward the door was only snail paced so after about ten minutes Grigsby remarked, 'Pretty slow, isn't it? Hope there is some left by the time I get there.' Loud guffaws from the others, but Grigsby didn't see what was so funny.

A US soldier asked Grigsby why he was carrying an empty kitbag. He replied that he was going to take a bagful back to his mates at Sandgate. More loud guffaws, some ribald remarks and a crack from a sailor, 'Just like a bloody blue orchid!' Grigsby still couldn't see what was so funny.

A little later he commented, 'It's certainly taking a long time. It's going to be pretty warm by the time I get some. The blokes can't stand it when it's warm'.

This time the men around him roared with laughter.

Grigsby, very fair-complexioned and looking much younger than his twenty-one years could not understand why his remarks caused so much laughter and began to feel a little foolish.

Suddenly a big, burly digger, several places behind, tapped Grigsby on the shoulder and said, 'Hey son, where do you think you are?'

'I'm here to get some beer to take back to the camp', Grigsby replied, sensing now that something was really wrong. The big, good natured digger took Grigsby by the arm, led him out of the queue and said, 'Listen son, what you get in there doesn't go back to your camp. What you want is about three blocks down then along a lane to the right. You'll see others there. Now scoot'.

Suddenly awake to where he was and grateful the dim light hid his blushes, Grigsby thanked the friendly digger and quickly went on his way. The sly-grogger's beer was almost exhausted but he managed to get four warm bottles and returned to Sandgate.

'What took you so long?', his mates asked. 'And this is the best you could do?' He did not explain. He'd had enough of looking foolish for one night.

## SAILBOATS AT ALGIERS (OR DOING IT TOUGH IN THE MED)

*A quite varied, and frequently exciting, period of RAAF service both on and off duty was that shared by Spencer 'Flip' Philpott of Toronto, NSW, a navigator, and his pilot 'Pancho' Manning. Here 'Flip' tells about just some of their off-duty exploits.*

In 1944 we were serving with 153 Beaufighter Squadron at Reghaia, about twenty kilometres east of Algiers in North Africa, doing nightly shipping patrols over the Mediterranean. Our camp was quite make-shift and apart from the very basic runway, had just a few two-man tents, an orderly room built from packing cases and a similar small crew room. The camp did have the advantage of being adjacent to the beach - in fact I could throw a stone from our tent into the water without any trouble, so we made good use of the beach either swimming or just sun-baking almost daily, which we could do since we were a night fighter squadron rostered 'on' each alternate night, giving us the days free to sleep or go down to the beach.

Leave passes out here in the desert were not as frequent now as they had been in England, nor as useful. One could not catch a train to 'wherever' and Pancho no

longer had his car, but we managed to enjoy ourselves. Within a week of our arrival, and with the beautiful Mediterranean on our doorstep, Pancho thought we should have boats, so we promptly started building two sail boats, his and mine. Our source of materials was the camp's scrap heap. About five weeks later Pancho's boat was launched followed shortly by mine, complete with sails from a 'disused' tent. We had many a good day with our boats as we pushed our way through the low surf; or just relaxed on the small cliffs overlooking the beach. Late one afternoon as Pancho strolled back to our tent from the mess, he spotted a small group of Arabs attempting to steal the perspex windscreen from his boat. He raced to our tent, collected his Llama automatic pistol and then opened fire on the Arabs who immediately scattered except for one who just limped away. It was said that should you kill an Arab the penalty was a fine of 1,000 Francs (say $20) but if you killed a camel the fine was 5,000 Francs.

**Pancho Manning (left) and Spencer 'Flip' Philpott with their Beaufighter**

About that time we had organised a truck to make a regular trip into Algiers each Sunday to bring upwards of a dozen French girls out for a day on the beach with a 'do' in the mess that evening. We would have as many as four or five of them at a time out in our boats on occasion, sailing the Mediterranean. They were wonderful days: swimming, surfing and Sundays with the girls from Algiers who, even in those days, wore bikinis similar to the most abbreviated that are worn today. 'WOW!'
The RAF did have some alternatives for leave, one being the beautiful Tamaris Hotel, a fine French hotel on the coast not far from our camp, that became an RAF rest camp. The other alternative was a British destroyer, home-based in Algiers.

Our squadron had an arrangement whereby each time the destroyer was in port it was 'open ship' to the squadron personnel and they in turn would come out to the

squadron and fly with us. We flew many a British naval bloke around the sky and when they left port they would take along one of our crews, rostered for leave, on a Mediterranean ‘cruise’. Although we had many good times on board for a night, by the time our names reached the top for rostered leave - and a short cruise - the squadron had been moved on.

**Manning and Philpott with one of the two sailboats they built at Reghaia.**

When we later had leave and set off to explore Cairo and its surroundings, it did not take us long to realise that all the better class hotels, restaurants and cabarets etc, were out of bounds to all NCO’s (ie. ‘us’). This situation was soon changed as we went shopping that afternoon and purchased officer rank stripes; thus we became officers unofficially for our Cairo visit. That evening Pancho, another mate Foxy and I went to a very plush nightclub for officers only (we were ‘officers’ now) called Dolls Cabaret. The Ambassadors, the Beba and the Auberge Des Pyramides were some of the other nightclubs that experienced our patronage. At the Auberge Des Pyramides we became good friends with Chris, a local of mixed blood, who invited us to the Kit Kat nightclub the following night - and he turned out to be its owner! We had now attained great heights in night-clubbing as the Kit Kat was for civilians only, out of bounds to all service personnel. This meant we had to become civilians. Dressed in our new safari suits and stripped of all rank we were met by Chris who checked our appearance before letting us in, then showed us to a table. What kind of situation were we in now? To look around the club and not see one uniform seemed so strange. It must have been years since any of us had been in a similar situation. Nevertheless we settled in to enjoy ourselves as ‘civilians’.

As usual our night out was not without some drama. Leaving the Kit Kat club, Foxy and I went ahead to find a cab then noticed that Pancho had disappeared. As he was leaving the club an Arab Sheik along with his two burly bodyguards spat at him so Pancho promptly called them ‘dirty, filthy, wog bastards’ - and more - in his best Australian vernacular. Prompted by these remarks the three Arabs surrounded Pancho, each pulling a sword from their swordsticks but not to be outdone Pancho drew his Llama automatic pistol from under his safari jacket. The Arabs backed off and disappeared into the night.

From *Once Was Enough.*

## TOUGH WAR IN NASSAU - BUT SOMEONE HAD TO DO IT

*The pranks or skylarks in this story were really the unusual movements ordered by Air Force authorities. While the facts make incredible reading, those who 'copped it tough' with unlucky postings might well gnash their teeth in envy at this 'Cook's Tour' of the Americas, as told by Sandy Johnson of Warrawee, NSW.*

From 36 Course WAGS at Maryborough I was eventually shipped to the UK where on my first night at Brighton Personnel Depot, housed in the famous Metropole Hotel of pre- and post-war holiday fame, I experienced my first and last air raid. I did not know it then, but this was to be the nearest I would get to any enemy action. After Brighton we were posted to various training courses for a month or so, before being shipped, per the *Aquitania,* to Moncton in New Brunswick, Canada. At this Personnel Depot we discovered that we were to be posted to Nassau, in the Bahamas (tough!) but they could not take us in for five weeks. I was one of three Aussies with thirty Brits. So for the next three weeks we were either stood down or on leave. We filled in the time rowing, cycling, roller skating, enjoying the sun, snow and experiencing the delectable French cooking. It was all there, with always someone ready to stand in for me when there were any duty calls. In due course we travelled by train right down the American east coast to New York for a spell there and then to Miami (really tough!). This was another interlude just like Moncton, if briefer. Finally we travelled the last two hundred miles east to the tiny but important island of Nassau, in the Bahamas, where the Duke and Duchess of Windsor were very comfortably ensconced, out of harm's way, at least that was what the British Authorities hoped. The Duke, as might be remembered, was a very popular personality (I suspect on both sides of the war).

Nassau was a kind of genteel place, but an education in class distinction. Servicemen came a long way below the local lads and ladies on the social scale and blacks were quite separate again - say no more.

Here we finally got on to OTU, flying Mitchells, and later operated on Liberators on long range-submarine patrols. This 'duty' did not greatly interfere with the good life we had become used to. Here at Nassau there was swimming, dancing, rambles through the woods, boxing, and I joined social groups to take in 'the pictures'.

But a small problem: Mother's parcels. She constantly sent me food parcels, including a Christmas cake about every three weeks. But here at Nassau food shortages were unknown. At one stage two full mail bags of comforts caught up with me.

Would you believe it, we were then posted back to Moncton - another week-long train trip - up the east coast again, which was becoming familiar to us by now. Another week's leave - spent this one in Montreal - then, at last, at last, back to the UK on the *Queen Mary.*

But a week after we arrived it was VE Day! Then, of course, more leave, or work at one's chosen future career, until our turn came for a ship home - for me, the *Aquitania,* and that is another fun story!

# CHAPTER TEN

# DIVERSE DEPARTURES FROM DUTY

## BAILING OUT AT NOUGHT FEET

*Lennie was a WAG who had been around a while, a real doer, one of those characters who walked side by side with trouble. This story from Lloyd Mortlock of Ocean Shores, NSW.*

One afternoon when flying was suddenly scrubbed on a Lincolnshire station, Lennie took full advantage of the unexpected leave and promptly went down to the Fox and Hounds pub in the village, joining some other off-duty crews there.

Some time later in the day, after many drinks, he was collected, along with others, from the pub. Back to base, 'ops' were on again - a rush job - into the aircraft and as they taxied out in the dark it was all too much for Lennie who went gently to sleep as soon as he was installed in his position, not bothering to plug in his intercom.

The kite however went U/S at the end of the runway, so they taxied back. The crew were then ordered to switch to another aircraft. They started doing this, leaving our hero where he was pleasantly sleeping, and trying not to expose him to the CO who had come down to oversee the switch over.

At this point Lennie awoke and looked around. It was pitch dark; he could not see a soul - no pilot, no nav - no anybody. No sound of motors. He quickly plugged in his intercom and called up the crew. No answer.

A sudden feeling of panic grabbed Lennie, thinking, 'THEY'VE ALL BAILED OUT AND LEFT ME!' Grabbing his 'chute he clipped it on and dived out the front hatch into the black night - pulling the ripcord as he jumped - and landed flat on the tarmac at the feet of the CO.

Dazed and dumbfounded, enmeshed in parachute lines and still on his knees, he was totally unable to answer the CO's very icy, 'Just what do you think you are doing down there, Lennie?'

## BUGLE CALL AT DAYBREAK

*Sirens, not bugles, were used to call parades and other activities in the World War II RAAF, so there was understandable shock, consternation and considerable ill-humour among all ranks at No. 1 Wireless Air Gunners School, Ballarat, Victoria, early one cold autumn morning in 1942 when Bugle Call Rag shattered silence and sleep over the station's PA system, as recalled by John Grigsby of Canberra. This arose from the formation of a small dance band among trainees by a musically minded Sergeant PTI as John describes*.

The enthusiastic members used their own instruments but the drums, played by Grigsby, and the piano were part of the recreation hall equipment. They played for unit dances, Officers' Mess socials and for their own enjoyment after the day's training grind.

A suitably impressed Administrative Officer thought it would be fitting if the band played martial music at morning and CO's monthly parades. The players assured the AO that they could give a reasonable rendition of marches if they had the music. He arranged this along with time off for rehearsals.

One Sunday night he instructed the PTI to assemble the band on the parade ground the following morning at 6.15 and he would work out the best location. Band members, weary after a long week-end leave, begrudged giving up fifteen minutes of bed time but assembled as ordered.

Awaiting the AO they stood around the dais near the administrative building sheltering from the chill wind. The trumpeter remarked impatiently, 'We don't want Colonel Bogey or British Grenadiers, what we want is some lively jazz like Bugle Call Rag'.

So saying he stepped on to the dais and softly began Bugle Call Rag believing that his sotto voce blowing from such a remote location would not disturb anyone.

Suddenly, throughout the unit's amplifying system Bugle Call Rag shattered the silence and sleep of all ranks. Volleys of abuse issued from the men in the huts at being deprived of the last ten minutes of sleep before the siren blew.

The Service Police, Duty Officer and Duty NCO rushed around trying to find the source of this desecration. Members of the band, also bewildered at first when the sound also blasted from the parade ground amplifiers, realised the microphone on the dais was open and dragged the hapless trumpeter away.

The AO suddenly appeared, demanding an explanation. The trumpet player said he was merely warming up and testing the trumpet valves and had no idea the microphone, which was linked to the entire system, was open. The AO decided there and then to scrub the marching music and told the band to parade as normal. He managed to explain away the incident to higher authorities but no one ever found out why the microphone was switched on so early.

## DON'T DRINK THE WATER

*Many who trained at Evans Head Bombing and Gunnery school will remember that water came from a bore and when first drawn from a tap it smelt like rotten egg gas. It also had the effect of causing dysentery for about 24 to 36 hours after your first drink but stomachs usually settled down if you continued to drink it. Keith Day of Cannon Hill, Brisbane, tells his story.*

Although the smell disappeared if it was allowed to stand twenty or thirty minutes, like many others, I planned to drink only soft drinks for the two months that I would be there. But because the canteen was open for only two hours a day, when we were delayed due to flying classes we often had a raging thirst. One day with no soft drinks available I took the plunge with the local nectar.

Next day I was in the air in a Fairey Battle with one hundred rounds to fire from the old Vickers gas-operated machine gun for air-to-air target practice at a drogue. While another WAG, Earl Evans, was shooting off his one hundred rounds I had a bad gastric attack and had no alternative but to rid myself of my parachute harness and woolly bull flying suit, and since there was no toilet on the plane, grab a large white handkerchief from my pocket and let nature takes its course. Earl finished his rounds before I finished so I handed him my one hundred rounds which he used up while I was re-dressing, eventually getting my parachute harness back on. Then came the tricky bit. I carefully folded the hanky from each corner and indicated to Earl was going to abandon it over the side. he got out of harm's way and I despatched the loaded hanky out the back hatch.

On landing, the pilot, Flight Sergeant Cutler (brother of Sir Roden Cutler VC), got out of the aircraft, took one look at it and screamed,

'What have you bloody done to my aircraft?'

Not having fired a shot I felt safe but looked at the aircraft. Its tailfin, rudder and tailplane all seemed to be intact so I said,

'I can't see any part of it missing', to which he screamed,

'The roundel and my aircraft identification - they're covered in crap!'

I then had to admit what I had done and I was called upon to get a bucket and scrubbing brush and wash the lot off to the accompaniment of much ribald ribbing from the groundstaff onlookers.

As someone later remarked, 'At least when you scrub an aircraft this way, it's still there when you've finished!'

## FAIR GAME AT FAIROAKS

*At 18 EFTS Fairoaks (Woking) while doing familiarisation trips of the English countryside in Tiger Moths, Noel Dwyer (Navigator) of East Ryde met and saw more than he expected, as he explains.*

My stint at Fairoaks was a halcyon three weeks. I had a bicycle there - though I can't remember how I acquired this one - but I remember it vividly because it nearly knocked down King Peter of Yugoslavia, a young, good looking monarch who visited Fairoaks a couple of times each week to maintain his hours on Tiger Moths. He was usually driven over in an enormous Cadillac type vehicle, guarded by two swarthy bodyguards. I was unaware of His Majesty's existence until bumping into him, literally and actually, when cycling back from the drome to my quarters. Rounding a downhill corner in the camp I suddenly came upon his car blocking the narrow street, with the Station CO bowing and scraping to the tall young figure of a dark-haired man. I immediately applied my clapped-out brakes which had very little effect resulting in me colliding with the august figure who glared at me without any sign of amusement. I quickly got out of the way and only later learned about the Royal Presence.

King Peter's car had a monstrous compass arrangement fitted at the top of the of the rear of the front seat. This car with its huge compass became an object of fascination with Australian RAAF who would always crowd around it peering in at the compass with the two Yugoslav bodyguards trying to beat them back - usually to little avail.

I also remember Fairoaks very well for the marvellous cross-country trips we made all over England. One fascinating trip was to Windsor Castle which was strictly out of bounds but with Australians at the controls you might guess what happened. We Aussies seemed to have had the uncanny ability to ferret out the unexpected. It only took one crew to find a secluded nudist camp in the vicinity before the word was quickly passed around and the area was thereafter circled and 'dive bombed' in succession by every crew at Fairoaks

## HOT HYGIENE UP NORTH

*No. 4 RIMU (Radio Installation and Maintenance Unit) at Morotai, Indonesia, in 1945 was a very rudimentary camp, lacking most of the comforts and conveniences - especially the conveniences - of a proper station. John Toland from Lismore remembers.*

Our toilet was a 'three-holer' affair over a trench in the ground. The hygiene corporal had a crude method of sanitising it. Each day he would pour some petrol into it and set it alight. Very effective! When he called one morning one hole was occupied by a Sergeant so he said to him, 'Don't worry sarge, take your time, I'll just do the trench under the other two holes and set it alight after you leave'.

With that he poured some petrol down and waited for the Sergeant to go before dropping in a match. What he didn't know was that the contents were still smouldering from the day before. The whole toilet went up in flames with a whoosh,

the Sergeant receiving not only a shock but severely burned posterior. He couldn't sit down for weeks!

*But this Sergeant wasn't the only one who had trouble lowering his undercart after a burnout. Compare his experience with this story told by Jack Van Emden from Beecroft.*

We were on Goodenough Island, north of New Guinea, where the outdoor toilet was a 'six-holer' over a trench about eight feet deep. As in other similar bush toilets it was burned out each day. I was sitting there one day when a bloke came up with a drum of fuel and began to pour it in. I told him not to light it while I was there. 'I'm not that stupid', he said but unknown to both of us it was already alight as it must have been done earlier. There was a muffled explosion and flame shot up all around my rear end causing extreme pain, and in shock I ran, with my overalls around my ankles, through the eight foot high kunai grass. Later, when my mates had stopped laughing, they told me they could follow my progress by watching the tops of the kunai grass waving as I trampled it down. Most of the toilet was burned down and from the airstrip the Duty Pilot in the Control Tower called us and asked if one of our aircraft was on fire. It was a month before I was able to sit down after that and I had to attend sick quarters every morning, drop my trousers and have the affected parts painted with salve by a nurse, which was very embarrassing to a twenty-year-old airman.

*We could not resist adding a wonderful variation on these stories from another branch of the Services, namely the Army, told by that prolific writer and broadcaster Keith Smith in his book: 'World War II Wasn't ALL Hell'.*

I was serving with an infantry unit in New Guinea in 1943 and some army engineers built a wonderful self-flushing twenty-four-seater latrine by diverting water from a fast flowing river, so that it 'flushed' continually. It was a brilliant example of jungle plumbing.

One morning a couple of jokers thought up a devilish idea: they part-filled a tin dish with highly-volatile range fuel, set it alight and lowered it into the top end of the race at a time (after breakfast) when the seats were all occupied. They then took cover behind some nearby bushes to watch the action. They reported later that the consecutive screams of agony, combined with high jumps from the occupants as the dish whizzed by, singeing their undersides and private parts, reminded the jokers of a lively game of musical chairs!

## IT WAS DIFFERENT IN RUSSIA

*455 Squadron Hampdens were based in Russia in 1942 at Vaenga, near Murmansk, nearly 70 degrees north. This story is from Frank Dick of Mullumbimby who was there.*

On Vaenga 'drome our huge barrack buildings had only two wash basins, so I was delegated to arrange communal bath sessions in a nearby village. The massive shared bathhouse had rows of open showers, baths and saunas. Everybody was madly scrubbing away, enjoying the rare endless hot water and singing madly when in walked several huge Russian women with piles of towels on each arm, which they proceeded to hand around to each of us.

They were dressed in typical Russian long shapeless rough dresses tied in the middle like a sack and were wearing conventional bonnets. Our bronzed Anzacs yelped protests and contorted in all sorts of cover-up antics, which must have amused the stolid Russian women, as they were well used to seeing all this every day! They just delivered their towels and marched off with never a word. No one enquired whether they might be available for a massage or a rub down!

*Jack 'Bluey' Collins, a WAG from Chittaway Bay, Sydney, also at Vaenga, found flying arrangements too were quite different from those where his squadron had been at Leuchars in Scotland. He describes some of them.*

Although Vaenga is nearly 70 degrees north, it was still only twenty-five miles from the Finnish front line, so German air raids were a common occurrence. The Russian YAK fighters were housed in dugouts, with a wooden ramp at the front to allow immediate egress for take off. When a red Verey Light was fired, pilots would leap into their aircraft, start up and begin their take off, no matter in what direction the aircraft was heading. As soon as the tail lifted the pilot would test his guns - causing considerable consternation to ground parties.

On one occasion after a German air raid a 500 lb unexploded bomb was left with its nose stuck in the middle of the runway. The Russian bomb disposal crew's method was not to explode it on site, but to tie a long stout rope to the bomb's tail and the other end to a truck. While everyone took cover except the truck driver, who must have drawn the short straw, this lone intrepid Russian climbed into the truck and slowly tugged the bomb out of its berth, dragging it slowly, bumping and rolling to the far side of the airfield, where the demolition team then blew it up. As for the truck driver it was all part of a day's work to him. We could all then resume normal duties.

Before we flew to Russia, everybody - aircrew and ground crew - were issued with a Smith & Wesson .38 revolver, plus a few rounds of ammunition; side arms were to be worn at all times.

The reason for this, according to the Russians, was that if a serviceman didn't wear any type of armament he was not a fighting man and of no consequence and therefore not deserving of respect.

Because of the destruction of Murmansk there was little night life, let alone any buildings left, except one small place, the Arctica Cafe. Some Australians managed to stay there overnight at one time. After a few glasses of very potent Vodka, we all decided that bed back at the camp was next best bet. 'Darky' Taylor, ace mechanic, was last in. Someone yelled, 'Put out the bloody light' - Darky obliged immediately with a well placed shot from his .38. Even 'Wyatt Earp' would have been proud. To the Russians - just another ordinary day's incident.

## JERRIES SHOW THEIR SENSE OF HUMOUR

*The widely held view that Germans are a dour and humourless lot had some validity when they were the enemy, but even then there were occasions when their mask slipped and they gave us a good laugh - deliberately. Ian Kirkby of Lismore was operating at Airfield Shandurin in Egypt, not far from Cairo and the Pyramids. He tells us this story.*

It was 1942 and the German Luftwaffe supporting General Rommel was becoming a real problem in this area. The British local command therefore decided to build a decoy aerodrome about twenty miles away, to mislead the Germans into bombing it instead of the real airfield. In Europe the Germans had been very successful with this strategy, building dummy airfields outside many cities, and even dummy towns. These misled so many of our bombers that large numbers of bombs were wasted on the decoys. It was hoped that we could get similar results near Cairo.

In great secrecy this work went ahead and over three to four months, a 'runway' was put down, hangars and other buildings erected, impressive-looking but dummy ack-ack guns made of wood and painted black were placed strategically and a number of various 'aircraft', made of wood and canvas but properly painted, were dotted around. From the air they looked very authentic and the aerodrome was just like the real thing.

But apparently undetected by the British, were occasional very high-level German photo-reconnaissance aircraft, obviously observing and correctly interpreting the fake airfield as such.

About a week after work at the decoy drome was finished the Germans sent over a lone bomber and dropped two 'bombs' - wooden ones!

## MILTON REMEMBERED

*Yatesbury in Wiltshire was home to No. 2 Radio School where any opportunity was seized upon to have a bit of fun and break the boredom of routine drill and training. Some of those 'larks' seem very tame when looked at today but in those war-time days when we were only about twenty years old we thought they were a riot. Fred Adams recalls one such incident on a particular CO's parade.*

After being stood to attention on the parade ground by the SWO for what seemed like hours, though it was probably only ten or fifteen minutes, the men on parade grew

restless. Then a voice from somewhere in the back ranks was heard to call out, 'They also serve who only stand and wait'. 'Who's talking? What was that remark?' said the Pommy SWO. The message was then repeated by the same anonymous voice. 'Who said that?' demanded the SWO, much louder this time. 'Milton, sir', from the anonymous voice. 'Righto Milton, fall out and report to me', said the SWO, at which the whole parade collapsed with laughter, with the SWO, mystified, looking around for some explanation.

## MINES FOR SPEED

*Eric Germain, of O'Sullivan Beach, South Australia, tells this explosive story when he was a Motor Transport driver at RAF Kelstern.*

Along with another Motor Transport driver, a cockney named 'Spud' Hurley, I was climbing one of the steep hills out of Lincoln on our way back to Coningsby. We had eight parachute mines on each truck and trailer. Travelling behind Spud's truck I noticed the four mines on his trailer starting to move - he obviously hadn't chocked them properly. Around the next curve the mines smashed through the side of the trailer onto the side of the road. We both pulled up, found a telephone and rang Coningsby for a crane.

In the meantime we were doing what we could to get them into a suitable position while waiting for the crane.

I remembered having passed a lone cyclist walking up the hill, pushing his bicycle; it was too steep for him to ride up. When he reached us he dropped his bike on the grass and said, 'Can I help you lads?'

Since the mines weighed around 1800 pounds each we took up his offer and between us we jiggled the mines around into a better position for the crane. After a while the cyclist said, 'Do you mind me asking what these are?'

'They're parachute mines'.

'Do you mean MINES, aerial mines, them what explodes?'

'Yes'

*'BLOODY HELL !'*

With that he jumped on his bike and pedalled furiously up the hill that he was previously only walking up, and though our cries of, 'They're safe, they're safe!' were ringing in his ears he took no notice and soon disappeared over the crest of the hill.

In many times travelling that road since, I have never seen anyone go up that hill so fast. The crane eventually arrived and we loaded the mines back on his truck but Spud did get seven days CB for negligence in securing his load.

## TERMITE TERRITORY

*In some operational theatres - notably the UK - the operational casualty rate was much higher than in other theatres of war, said 'Hep' Klemm of Lismore, but operating in such a relatively 'civilised' environment had the compensation that there was always the relief from flying stress through those unofficial skylarks on leave, which this book is largely about. Spare a thought then for some of us who operated in the tropics, said 'Hep'.*

As my tours of ops were undertaken in uncivilised conditions - in isolated bush areas where I saw ONE white woman ONCE in the first tour and NONE at all during the second tour - there were few opportunities for pranks, etc, as our non-flying hours were spent in playing cards, writing letters, diary, sleeping and some camp duties. Our 'pranks', if you could call them that, were in combating the hostile environment.

On my second tour of ops I was flying with No. 1 Squadron Beaufort bombers from Gould Strip about seventy miles south of Darwin. This was a new strip and as we were the first outfit to operate from there we had to chop trees from the surrounding bush and build our own ops hut, messes, stores hut, etc. We were issued with a tent between four of us and nothing else! We chopped and trimmed saplings to size and made our own double-bunks - sleep on the bottom and store gear on top because nothing could be left on the ground - this was termite country!!

We scrounged some camouflage netting to string between our bunk-poles for bedding and three of us set our tent poles in jam-tins on the dirt floor. Not so my co-WAG, Bertie Brough, who looked on any unnecessary work or precaution with disdain. Our only lighting was one kerosene lantern per tent and this was hard to find and light in a hurry in darkness.

One night after about three months we heard an almighty crash and copious swearing. When we obtained a light from a nearby tent it revealed Broughie trying to untangle himself from a pile of collapsed bunk and tent, all his flying gear, kit bag, broken lantern and, the ultimate disaster, the smashed remains of his weekly ration of one bottle of warm beer. Inspection of his bunk poles revealed that termites had attacked from beneath the dirt floor and eaten out the insides of his poles to collapsing stage. We, plus neighbouring tents, all had a good laugh and even Broughie eventually saw the funny side. The next day we helped him get saplings and rebuild his bunk and this time made sure the poles were set inside jam-tins, impervious to termites!

## SHOT DOWN IN SYDNEY

*Your editor tells this post-WWII anecdote against himself.*

In the 1970's in Sydney I was interviewing a young lady for a market research position. Her name was Michelle Rose and she spoke very well, if with a slight accent which I could not quite identify. Her credentials for the position were excellent. Her father, she said, was an engineer with the Water Board 'designing dams and work like that'.

Seeing a small metal model of a Lancaster on my desk she asked whether I had been in the Air Force in World War II. 'Yes, I was a WAG on Lancasters', I said. 'My Dad was in World War II also', she said. 'What did he do?' 'He was a fighter pilot'. 'Oh, they were great. Was he on Spitfires or Hurricanes?' 'No, he flew Messerschmitts in the Luftwaffe', she said with a mischievous grin.

She still got the job and did very well.

## PRUNERY AWARD TO AIR GUNNER

*The MHDOIF (Most Highly Derogatory Order of the Irremovable Finger) and two knuckles, was awarded to the off-duty gunner on a 201 Coastal Squadron Liberator for 'obeying his skipper's command instantly, without thinking'. This story is from Allan Nesbitt of Bathurst, NSW.*

The aircraft, out of Lough Erne, Northern Ireland, had just sighted a U-Boat so the skipper sounded the klaxon, everyone sprang to action stations, the bomb bay doors came thudding down and out went the depth charges under the wings. The off-duty gunner, having been making a 'cuppa', was then in the process of opening the galley hatch to install his VGO (machine gun), when the skipper's strident command came over the intercom: 'Galley, put out that stove'.

Taking the order literally the gunner immediately picked up the double Primus stove and hurled it out of the galley hatch.

Unfortunately the bomb aimer did not record any hits on the sub, which had dived, either by depth charges or the gas stove, and for the rest of the crew's fifteen-hour patrol they were without tea or hot food. The gunner was never allowed to forget the episode!

## THE GROUPER, MOVIE-MAKER

*Nev Morrison of Glenhaven, NSW tells this story from 467 Squadron at Waddington, near Lincoln.*

Our CO was Group Captain Bonham-Carter, a typical English gentleman, who was a great 'press-on', keen flying type. He had a mania for going on ops (although COs were officially restrained from operating regularly) and was always looking for 'spare bods' to make up a crew. But word soon got around when he was coming to the crew rooms and we would hide our 'spare bod', if we had one, in a cupboard.

He was on an operation one time and on the bombing run his bomb aimer was giving the normal instructions for lining up on the target: ‘Left, left, steady. Right, steady’, etc but there was no response in the plane’s direction and no reply from the skipper to his intercom instructions. At this stage the bomb aimer is in charge of the aircraft; the skipper must follow his instructions meticulously, so the bomb aimer looked up, and there was the pilot - our illustrious Group Captain - with the auto-pilot engaged, and himself leaning out the window shooting the target with his movie camera!

Bonham-Carter also wore a hearing aid and so was affectionately known as ‘TR9’ (the name of the pilot’s radio in the cockpit).

### WHO DONE IT?

*Lila Clark from Melbourne, a trained nurse in the WAAAF, admits after fifty years ‘Who Done It’ in this hilarious story.*

I was on my last night of duty at No. 5 RAAF Hospital Tocumwal before being posted to Heidelberg RAAF Hospital to nurse returned POWs. A young airman I had been treating for a big boil on his posterior had been giving me a lot of cheek, so this being my last night there I decided to ‘leave my mark on him’ in a special way. Unbeknown to him of course I painted a face around the boil on his bottom with Gentian Violet (part of the regular treatment) but using more than usual, and in a rather artistic way, with the big red boil, featured as the nose, highlighted with mercurichrome! (Would love to have had a camera there!).

Having completed my artistic handiwork of which of course the patient had no knowledge, I went off duty soon after and left the hospital the next day and never heard anything about the event until a few weeks later, when walking down Swanston Street Melbourne I heard a shout from the other side of the street and I saw someone waving to me and yelling ‘WHO DONE IT - WHO DONE IT?’ Yes it was my patient. We met in the middle of the tram tracks and he told me the full story of what happened. Owing to a staff shortage, Matron had decided to do the next treatment. When she discovered the artwork I don’t know who got the greatest shock - the Matron or the Airman - as Matron had screeched out at the top of her voice, ‘WHO DONE THIS? WHO DONE IT? Nurse, get the Medical Officer, quick’.

Fortunately the Medical Officer had a sense of humour, calmed the Matron down and took no further action. My patient seemed to have enjoyed his momentary fame as an art exhibit and in fact had quite a job keeping a display of it within bounds of modesty.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

## LINE SHOOTS

*Unlike the other stories in this book, which are true, the same cannot be said for most of these 'line shoots', which range from the plausibly possible (and maybe true) to the wildy imaginative, if perhaps apposite. They were usually based on some related experience and were essentially for fun.*

*'Shooting a Line' was a regular practice after a few drinks when crews got together, typically when discussing their last trip, when exaggeration and imagination were not unknown. The stories were usually required to be properly written up and signed and usually countersigned also, so that they gave some quasi-official recognition to the events claimed. Even so you could never be quite sure which were true, or almost true. Some of the most outlandish 'lines' turned out to be essentially true.*

*Most operational squadrons kept a 'line book', carefully guarded and usually to be found at the bar in the mess where crews could record any 'outstanding performances' or 'unusual events' they claimed to have encountered while flying, the emphasis being on 'claimed'. On some squadrons a fee of one shilling was charged for each item. The Famous RAF magazine 'Tee Emm' (for training manual) also published many, usually involving that fictitious buffoon Pilot Officer Prune MHDOIF. This magazine was quite effective in getting training and safety points across mixed with humour, particularly through cartoons. Some 'Line Shoots' were believed to be true, including at least the first two below.*

Dan Conway began his tour with 467 Squadron at Waddington. His first op was to 'The Big City', Berlin. Some weeks later on being briefed for his 5th Berlin op he exclaimed in mock horror and apprehension, 'Stone the flamin' crows, I've been to Berlin more times than I have been to London'. This was true, but it still cost Dan a large round of drinks!

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Suda Bay, Crete was notorious for shooting down mine-laying aircraft in 1943 so when Ian Kirkby's skipper on 178 Squadron was asked at de-briefing, after a night mine-laying operation, how he managed to avoid being hit he replied, 'After seeing the first Lib go down we just went down to wave level and when they opened the boom gates for a ship we just went through'.

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Wing Commander C.L. Gomm, CO of 467 Squadron at Bottesford, is recorded as saying, 'Accurate bombing of Essen (perhaps the best defended target in Germany) is a piece of cake because it is usually visible from a long way back by the fires, so that all one had to do was simply to lower the wheels and taxi up to the aiming point on top of the flak to give the bomb aimer a steady platform to drop his bombs straight down'.

(Wing Commander Gomm DSO DFC, an outstanding and very popular figure was killed in action over Milan on 14.8 43.)

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*Tom Noon DFC is on record for having said while at 97 Pathfinder Squadron,* 'I never can keep my windscreen clean for long; I think it's all the smoke off those Nuremburg fires'.

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*Des Sullivan is credited in a Line Book at 463 Squadron at Waddington with,* 'I have been to Cologne so often that I simply follow a bus from the Hohenzolleren Bus Terminus into the city'.

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*Ian Kirkby swears that the following story was widely talked about on 10 Squadron Coastal Command in 1942.*

There we were, upside down with nothing on the clock (ASI) and still climbing. Our Wireless Op swears his cup of coffee floated around the cabin and then came back to rest and never spilled a drop!'

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*This story is all the more remarkable since it happened in a four-engine Sunderland flying boat, not normally given to fancy aerobatics. The explanation, given later, was that they had flown into a classic 'anvil-top' cloud formation in which it is known that internal wind speeds could be extremely high and from any direction, including up and down. Syd Johnson sent these.*

'We were flying so low we needed a periscope to see over the waves.'

The Brits called the 39-45 Star the 'NAAFI Gong'. One RAF type said: 'My NAAFI Gong is really a DSO but one end got faded - from the searchlights!'

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*Peter Firkins reported.*

'The flak was so heavy over the target it burned the paint off our fuselage.'

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*Bob Nielsen (Nav) to his Bomb-Aimer shortly after take-off:* 'You can just drop your bombs on ETA - we will be over the centre of Berlin at that time.'

## HOW BLONDIE GOT HIS FIRST GERMAN

*Sir James Rowland contributed this beauty.*

On leave in London after finishing Halifax conversion I ran into an old mate from home, who went by the nickname of Blondie, entertaining a bunch of sprogs like

myself in a pub. He was instructing on an OTU, having recently finished a tour on Wellingtons, and we, of course, were all ears as he told us.

> The target that night was Dusseldorf, in Happy Valley. We were on the bombing run and all hell was going on down below, the great bursting light-bubbles as cookies from the Lancasters exploded mingling with the strings of fire from incendiaries and smoke and flame from the fires already burning. All of a sudden, right in front of my windscreen, up came a huge lump of concrete and on the concrete was a lathe, and working at the lathe was a German. What was I to do? Instinctively I closed the throttles, and of course the undercarriage horn blew. The German heard it, looked up, thought it was knock-off time, and stepped off the edge of the concrete.

'And that' said Blondie, 'was how I got my first German'.

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*The following 'lines' are credited to that famous, or infamous RAF airman, Pilot Officer Prune MHDOIF. They first appeared in the RAF magazine Tee Emm.*

I can fly through any balloon barrage: I bank over vertically and fly through on the wing tip.

*I was flying low along a main road in a Maggie (small aircraft) against a strong head wind when a bloke in an Austin 7 hooted and overtook me.*

I identified the target easily as Saarbrucken by the letters S.U.D.C. on the side of a fire engine: Saabrucken Urben District Council of course.

*I leave my top button undone because I haven't got one - it was shot off in a dog fight.*

My landings are always so smooth that I have to call up Control by TR9 to find out if I'm on the deck.

*I was flying so low over the Channel that sea spray got in my pitot tube and the A.S.I. was registering in knots*

Why my flying's so good the DF stations get fixes on me to find our where they are.

*The flak was so thick I had to go through on instruments.*

Why I must buy everyone else a drink every time I shoot down a wretched Hun is something I can never understand.

*Rod and line fishing! Why I just borrow a Swordfish and use the deck hook.*

I prefer the Rotol propeller to the DH - the blades are three inches shorter so I can fly lower.

*I had so much metal in me after being shot up, my compass followed me around.*

It’s not really blind flying - the instruments aren’t in Braille.

*I bounced so high when I first touched down that I had to slip off height to get in.*

And finally,

*I’ve spent more time rolling off the top of loops than you have flying straight and level, so pipe down.*

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