An Air Force Life

by **Joe Lane**

The autobiography of Wing Commander J.R.C. Lane RAF, AFRAeS.

Joe Lane with Bristol Bulldog TM
R.A.F. Sealand 1934

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INTRODUCTION

My father wrote this text between 1987 and 1989 when he was housebound and ill. I typed it for him with what was then the new technology of "word-processing". I used a BBC 'B' home computer running a software package called 'Wordwise-plus'. After his death a few copies of the text were printed for members of the family.

After I retired from the aircraft industry I entered the University of Central Lancashire in 1994. As a mature student I read Geography with History for a combined honours degree. As a consequence of this I returned to Dad's text with new insights and sensitivities about "the historical record". Consultation with Dr. Mike Parry, the university's expert on military matters, revealed that many such autobiographies exist and another Royal Air Force pilot's story, but devoid of Spitfires and a significant total of enemy aircraft destroyed, would not interest the literary market. His view was that it was source material nevertheless, and should be collated and placed on record for "mining" by future students.

With the dramatically increased power of home computers since the original typing, I was able to look again at the contemporary photographs with which he had intended to illustrate the story. All had suffered the years of poor storage typical of both the era and the constant moves of Service life. I was able to repair and enhance some of them and they are now included in the text where they seem appropriate.

Sketches of aircraft used in this book have been photocopied from Dad's flying logs. It only recently become apparent that, because of their similarity, they were probably copied from the once popular 'cigarette cards'[1].

Photographs are from the author's albums and appear to be a mix of personal and official photographs. Properly accrediting them is difficult as many are in postcard form and thus look 'official'. However, personal films processed on board HM ships and on RAF Stations were often exposed onto pre-printed postcard stock so that they could be readily sent by mail. In view of their age no great effort has been made to establish copyright. Some photographs, notably those of the Hawker Henley and Airspeed Horsa aircraft, were copied from various sources on the Internet. I photographed a few of the domestic locations in recent years.

He had a number of photographs of aircraft incidents on board aircraft carriers. He also collected postcards of the places he visited. In early versions of the text many of his pictures were omitted. It was later appreciated that these are also part of the historical record and so a policy of illustrating the text with the most relevant images, supported by appendices containing those appropriate to the time but not directly referred to in the text, was adopted.

The grammar-checking function on the computer word processor constantly objected to my father's phraseology. Nevertheless this has been retained unedited as indicative of both the man and the age. He wrote as he spoke. When he first heard a recording of his voice he was a little mortified as he believed it showed that he had retained a Dorset accent. I have also respected his spelling where it was correct for his time (e.g. 'shewn' for 'shown').

[1] Cigarette cards were themed picture cards inserted in packs of cigarettes and intended to be collected into sets – an early marketing ploy.

Chapter 1

In the Beginning

Frank Lane was born at Thornford, Dorset, in 1878. He was the fifth of ten children born to Joseph and Sarah Jane Lane. The first three children, two girls and a boy, died within the first three years of their lives. The eldest of the surviving children, Stephen, became head gamekeeper to Lord Digby - a big estate owner of Sherborne. Frank, the second boy, was trained to be a gardener on another big estate at Ramsey and being single he lived in the bothy. After some time he moved to a job at Dalesford[2] as an under gardener where he met his wife to be, Edith Williams, a Herefordshire girl.

In addition to Stephen, his elder brother, Frank had three sisters Annie, Amelia, and Beatrice and two younger brothers Reginald, and Gilbert. Both Reg and Gilbert served in the Army during the Great War. Reginald died in hospital of influenza in 1918 - just eleven days after the war ended[3]. Gilbert was killed in action and has no known grave[4]. He was twenty years old.

Frank and Edith married in 1907. Frank obtained a job as head gardener to a Mr. Murdoch who had a large house at Kilcoran in Ireland. The job entailed the laying out and making of the gardens on the lower slopes of the Galty mountains in County Tipperary. Frank and Edith lived in a new cottage on the hillside and close to the gardens. On the 18th June 1908 I was born there.

Figure 1. Edith and Frank Lane c 1950

My memories of Kilcoran are happy and distinct. My mother kept chickens which were truly free range since they had the Galty Mountains to roam as they wished. My mother used to take me to search the hillsides, looking under bushes and tufts of grass, for any eggs laid by the hens. We would often find nests, containing twelve or thirteen eggs, which we would collect and carry home.

My sister was born two years after my birth. On each occasion my father's sister, Annie, came to Ireland and stayed, helping the family until mother was fully operational once more. We children were both christened in Ireland. I became Joseph, after my grandfather, and my sister was named Eva after my father's sister-in-law, Reg's wife.

Our nearest neighbours were an Irish family called Davern. The husband was Neddy - that is as my memory serves. The family, there were three children, lived in a thatched cottage on the road to Cahir near the entrance gate to the estate. The living room in the cottage had an earth floor and an enormous open fireplace. There always seemed to be a huge fire stacked with burning lumps of peat. The smell was lovely, the air smoky, but always warm.

[2] There is no Dalesford on current maps and this evidently refers to Daylesford.
[3] War Graves Commission records list him as buried at Thornford. No grave was found there during a visit in 2003.
[4] Commemorated on Panel 99-101 Loos Memorial, Pas de Calais (War Graves Commission)

Neddy Davern was a road man who appeared to spend his life sitting on a huge heap of stones by the roadside breaking the large stones with a long handled hammer into small pieces suitable for road making. There was no tarmacadam in those days!

The main house was supplied with water pumped from further down the hill by a water ram set in a fast flowing stream. My father used to go down to check the ram and on occasions he would take me with him. This was a great thrill for me especially when approaching the stream and I could hear the click clack of the ram as it operated. Maybe it was due to these visits so very early in my life that made me interested in things mechanical and led me to eventually become an engineer.

I apparently had seen trains somewhere, presumably in Cahir for I used to hold a stick in my mouth and puff around the garden moving my arms in a circular motion like the connecting rods on the wheels of a railway engine. On one occasion I tripped and fell and rammed the stick down my throat. The noise I made brought my father and mother running to me. My father had been talking to a veterinary surgeon in the stables near our house. He fetched him to take a look at me. He examined the damage to the back of my throat and said to father and mother "Don't worry; nothing heals more quickly than the throat!" My first-ever medical attention was quite successful!

Kilcoran was about seven miles from the nearest town of Cahir. There was a village shop and a few houses at Kilcoran but my mother did the bulk of her shopping in Cahir. She used to take we children with her by pony and trap which made it an exciting day for us.

My father was a Protestant whereas all his men in the garden and others employed on the estate were Catholics. The "troubles", as the Irish called them, began to blow up locally and my parents were upset when a woman who lived nearby was shot dead when she opened her door to someone who expected her husband to appear. Also news from England indicated the increasing tension with Germany.

In 1914 my father and mother decided to return to England. They went, in the first instance, to Thornford where father's sister Annie and family lived. Father rented a cottage nearby in the village. After some time he obtained a head gardener's post at Kineton, Gloucestershire, to the Masters family and we lived in a lodge at the entrance to the estate. This was a delightful little house with a walled garden of about half an acre containing fruit trees; apples and pears and gooseberries and currants. There was a particular apple I liked but I cannot remember whether it was because of its taste or its appearance. My father told me it was called Tom Putt[5].

Figure 2. A 1957 visit to a now-derelict Kineton lodge.

I never came across a Tom Putt again for many years. When I grew up and had my own home and garden I could never even find it in the nurserymen's catalogues until one day my wife

[5] Variously attributed to the Rev Thomas Putt of Trent and Sir Thomas Putt of Honiton the Tom Putt is of uncertain parentage and is a 'triple' being an eating and cooking apple and used for cider making. It was favoured in West Country cottage gardens. (National Collection)

and I were visiting a friend near South Petherton. She showed us around her house and as we left a door from the lounge to see the garden she said "mind the Tom Putt" which was growing near the door. This was seventy years after my father had first told me the name. I had begun to think he had been pulling my leg over that apple!

The lodge was at the top of a hill at the end of a driveway leading down to Kineton House. The view was lovely down to the Severn and Oldbury. Mother often took us to the Severn where we picnicked and paddled. My father would take me into the fields near the lodge looking for birds nests in the hedges and trees and I soon had a collection of eggs.

Kineton house had electric lighting produced in its own power house. The electricity was generated by an engine driving a dynamo by means of a long wide belt. When the man responsible for the power house was away my father would start and stop the engine each day. He was not very mechanically minded but he had been shown all the procedures necessary by the man in charge. He would occasionally take me to see him start up the engine which fascinated me. The engine ran on paraffin which was ignited as it entered a vaporiser. The vaporiser had first to be heated up with a blow torch. When it was hot enough the engine was started by pulling the belt. While the engine was running the vaporiser remained red hot and the governor on the engine controlled its speed. There were racks of batteries around the walls and a central switchboard with a circuit maker/breaker, ammeter, voltmeter and hand operated switches. The circuit maker consisted of a lever with two prongs which dropped into two cups containing mercury when charging the batteries took place.

My brother Donald was born at the lodge so there were now three of us. Mother would often take my sister and I for walks while she pushed my brother in his pram. Although my sister was named Eva she was always called Sis by both parents and was known by that name by friends and relations all her life.

I started school when we first arrived at Kineton. The school was in Thornbury which was over a mile away from the lodge. Mother used to walk with me most of the way. It was not long before I played truant spending the time in the woods near home. On the first occasion my teacher obviously did not believe me when I told her I had been ill the day before. She gave me a note addressed to mother. This, of course, caused me some trouble at home but after it had cooled down I decided to absent myself again and spent the day in the woods.

Unfortunately I misjudged the time and arrived home much earlier than I should have. This time I was chastised and mother threatened to tell my father which I knew would have meant the stick! From then on I turned up at school daily and on time! On my seventh birthday I was given a watch - an Ingersol Crown so the need for excuses was removed!!

Our happy era at Kineton came to an end after war broke out in 1914. The following year my father was called up and would have been put into an infantry regiment but he failed the medical examination through varicose veins and was obliged to undertake alternative service. He was given the choice of working on a farm or becoming a tram driver in Bristol. He chose to drive trams which was probably the worst choice he could have made since a tram driver stands all the time he is driving which is not the best treatment for varicose veins. However he liked the job despite periods off work when he was compelled to have treatment to his legs.

We moved from Kineton to a house in Soundwell, a suburb of Bristol, where we remained about a year. After which we moved to Staple Hill and became caretakers of a large house in which the ground floor and cellars were used as lecture rooms, offices, and armoury for

the Territorial Army. The advantage of this house was its accommodation, size, and the fact that it was on the tram route Staple Hill to Fishponds. Father, after a period of training in tram driving, passed his tests and was allotted the route Fishponds to the Tramway Centre, now called City Centre since there are no longer any trams! He remained on this work for the rest of the war.

Mother used to take sandwiches and tea in a basket to Fishponds for father. She knew his timetable and when he would be at Fishponds. She would then join the inevitable queue for margarine at a Maypole shop. She would take me with her and we would both stand in the queue. On more than one occasion after waiting in the queue for hours we would get nearly to the door only to be told by one of the staff that they had sold out and were closing the doors!

At Staple Hill I of course had to go to school. I joined the Wolf Cubs and thoroughly enjoyed the activities and wearing the uniform. I had a friend who was the son of a tailor who had his business and shop quite near us in the main street. My friend had a sister older than himself but about my age which at that time was about ten years. Her name was Jenny and I fell for her literally and metaphorically. It did not last long, however, for Jimmy her brother and I were climbing a stone wall in their garden, which was about eight feet high, when I pulled a stone from the top which crashed down on my right leg as I fell to the ground. This caused a gash on the front of my leg and a large graze on the back. The damage at the back became septic and I had to have treatment.

At about this time the war ended. It was November 1918 and father could not get back to gardening quickly enough. He obtained a job as head gardener to a Lady Wolfrey at Wells in Somerset. This was a small estate and father had only one man under him. He, however, took a dislike to her ladyship right from the start. To complicate matters my leg became very bad and I went into Wells cottage hospital where I remained for a month. Our home was quite near the hospital so my parents and brother and sister came to see me frequently. My memories of the hospital are very pleasant so I must have been spoiled because I was the youngest in the ward.

After leaving hospital mother would take my sister and I into Wells. There she showed us the cathedral with its fascinating clock. I always wanted to wait to see the knights strike the bells which occurred every quarter of an hour. Then we would be taken on to the Bishop's palace where we would wait until the swans on the moat pulled a chain which rang a bell to indicate that they wanted food. Finally we would be taken to the shops where we would see the water running constantly down the main street.

Those were the pleasant things about our life in Wells. There were some which were not quite so pleasant for after the war certain things were difficult to obtain. One of them was coal for the fires. My father would take me to the coal yard at Wells station where he would buy coal and borrow a truck to take it home. The truck was heavy with four iron shod wheels. My father would pull and steer while I pushed behind. The way home from the station was mostly uphill; which made the job most unpleasant. The only nice part was that which passed the cathedral where I could see and hear the clock chime again.

Our stay in Wells was short - no more than six months I think. Father obtained a head gardener post to the Reverend Brocklebank at Longbridge Deverill in Wiltshire. He was a very wealthy man and a charming one too. We quickly settled down in our cottage next to Longbridge House and which overlooked the River Wylye. At our end of the village were the church, the village school, and the almshouses suitably referred to as Faith, Hope, and Charity. The year was 1919.

We three children were sent to the village school which was little more than a hundred yards from home. The headmistress was a Mrs. Morgan who lived at the school house between the school and the church. My parents were happy at Longbridge and I still feel it was an attractive village. It was not long before my father became a sidesman at the church and I joined the choir. This permitted me to go up the church tower before services to watch the bell ringers at work. My brother Donald took up bell ringing and when he was qualified he loved touring round other churches with his team practising their campanology.

Our cottage faced the River Wylye. Beyond the river the ground rose up and beyond the ridge was a huge army camp which had housed many soldiers during the war. At the time of our arrival there were many Australian soldiers awaiting repatriation to their own country. During the summer of 1919 many of the soldiers flocked down to the river where they indulged in swimming, chasing the swans, and high-spirited horse play.


Figure 3. 'Charity' – the alms houses at Longbridge Deverill (in 2003)

Near the almshouses was a foot bridge across the river. The river ran as far as the school playground where it was dammed to control the flow through a water wheel house which pumped spring water piped to it and then back up the hill to Longbridge House. Before the river reached the wheel house a battery of hatches controlled the main flow released at right angles to the general direction of the river. It flowed over the hatches when they were down and dropped about fifteen feet to a lower level. A bridge spanned the water fall from the hatches so that one could look down over the deep water area below. Safety rails were fitted along the bridge and hatches. The soldiers often used the safety rail as a diving point over the fast flowing water and into the deep pool beyond - a highly dangerous manoeuvre. We could watch the antics of the divers from the school playground nearby.

The river wound about and passed another series of hatches about a mile lower down towards Warminster. The river could be dammed to water the surrounding water meadows which in summer were resplendent with irises, willows, and other water loving growths and of course water birds and swans. The area was part of the estate belonging to Lord Bath of Longleat House[6]. A keeper for the area surrounding our village lived at Foxholes and we boys avoided him like the plague since he always found some reason to order us out or away from the river. The river


Figure 4. – Footbridge & river Wylye at Longbridge (1964). Church and school ('faith' & 'hope') in the background.

[6] Longleat was in Longbridge Deverill parish. Longbridge church has a private 'Bath' chapel and members of the Thynne family are still buried in the family vault beneath their chapel.

was full of trout and fishing parties, guests of his lordship, were often to be seen.

The stream carrying the water from a bypass round the water wheel house was used on special occasions for spawning the fish. The hatch was adjusted to keep the water down to a very low level. The water operating the wheel was taken farther away and joined the stream lower down. In the tunnel beside the wheel house the water level was regulated to four inches.

One day a pal of mine saw that the tunnel and stream were full of fish splashing about because of the low level of the water. Les and I decided we wanted a trout each to take home so we stood on the tunnel over the stream and bombed them with stones killing one or two. I took one home and when my father arrived he ordered me to take it away immediately. I carried it to the bridge and threw it into the river whereupon it sank to the bottom and lay there upside down exposing its white underside for all to see. The next day Les and I were walking down the road past the keeper's cottage. When he peered over the hedge and demanded to know if we had interfered with the fish we both denied having the fish, which was true because Les got rid of his before he got home and my father had made me get rid of mine. The keeper threatened us with terrible punishment if he found us out!

After about a year at the village school Mrs. Morgan saw my father and told him she felt I ought to sit the examination for entrance to the Warminster Secondary School. The examination was held at the school itself and I felt a little over-awed at the time but was delighted when I subsequently heard I had passed the examination.

My parents bought me a bicycle since it was three miles from Longbridge to Warminster and there were no buses in those days. The roadway went up hill and down dale all the way. The route took me through Foxholes, Crockerton, and Boreham and every morning I would pass two of the teachers walking to the school - Miss Hodges who taught History and Miss Charleston - English. This meant I had to raise my cap and say "Good morning miss" whenever I passed them.

I started in Form 2A under Mr. Richardson the Form Master. He was, in my eyes, a smart handsome man and was strict and generally unsmiling. His favourite remark on my term report was "Joe's usual excuse is I forgot!" He taught arithmetic and algebra. We were a mixed school and about half the pupils were girls. The day started with assembly in the gymnasium when the Head appeared and said prayers before dismissal to classes. It was not long before we boys, after seeing the girls in the gymnasium and assembly, realised that they were different! It was probably a good thing there were separate playgrounds for the boys and the girls.

I bear a scar to this day meted out to me by a girl at school. The boys' cloakroom consisted of a long wide passage from the main hall to the gymnasium. I was about to open the door from the cloakroom to the main hall when it suddenly burst open towards me and its sharp corner struck me on my left eyebrow. A big girl who had catapulted herself at the door crashed into me and we landed on the floor - the girl on top of me. She quickly got up, screamed when she looked at my face now covered with blood, and ran to fetch a teacher who took me to the first aid room and cleaned me up. The girl and I became very good friends after that episode!

The subject I enjoyed most was chemistry. On one occasion we were in the laboratory doing experiments and there was a little larking about when the science master, a Mr. Corkhill, was not looking. We were gathered round the experiment being carried out on a bench. One boy, Eric Shaw, was behind the circle of pupils gathered close together at the bench. He had produced a pin which he proceeded to use on the bottoms of one or two boys leaning over the bench. Mr.

Corkhill, however, spotted what was going on and invited Shaw to come closer to the bench and told him to explain the experiment to the rest of the form. He then produced a pin from his own jacket lapel and, while Shaw was endeavouring to explain what was happening on the bench, gave him some of the treatment he had given the other boys. Shaw jumped and broke off his commentary so the master said "Is something irritating you Shaw?" Shaw said "No Sir" whereupon the master gave him a hundred lines!

The turning point in my life came when I was in the fifth form. Our classroom was on the upper floor the windows of which overlooked the roofs of houses and shops down the hill on which the school stood. The lesson was history in which I was not very interested and therefore not very good. We were supposed to be reading a passage which Miss Hodges had detailed us to do when the noise of an engine attracted my attention and, looking out of the window, I saw an aircraft flying very low over the roof tops towards us. I was fascinated not having seen one so close before. It was probably an aircraft belonging to Sir Alan Cobham's air circus arriving at Warminster. Next day we heard that the circus was operating from a field alongside the road from Warminster to Bath. I begged my father to take me to see the aircraft and he delighted me by paying for me to have a flight. This event made me decide I wanted to go into the Royal Air Force. By coincidence a notice was placed on the school notice board inviting boys to enter the RAF from the age of fifteen and a half either by obtaining the School Certificate or by sitting an examination set by the RAF but held at the school. My mother had always wanted me to be an architect because I was good at drawing. My father liked the RAF. I sat the examination at school and subsequently heard that I had passed. In July of that year I sat the School Certificate[7] and failed! I was accepted by the Royal Air Force and told to report for attestation on 9th September 1924.

During my school life I had a pal named Leslie Wood. He was an adopted son of Mrs. Pollard, a widow, who lived at Foxholes. She had two daughters both of them older than Leslie. He did not go to my school but to the village school at Crockerton. We spent all of our free time together usually racing about on our bicycles. Les was a happy boy always fooling about. His weakness was that when he started laughing he could not stop wetting his pants!

His mother was very kind to me and I was often invited into her home to have tea with her family. We boys often camped in the garden during the summer. We pitched our tent under an apple tree and dashed out at unearthly hours to get apples and eat them in bed. Being both in our teens we became interested in girls so when we got to know a girl we liked we would both take her out for walks or chat with her for hours. Mrs. Pollard was a good kind woman who would talk to us both about behaving ourselves at all times and being kind to others.

Les and I used to visit the Foxholes village hall where we were allowed to play billiards even when the table was booked but leaving the table if players arrived who had booked it. A few days before I was due to leave home to join the RAF Les and I were playing billiards. We were both very amused when Les missed his cue ball whereupon he reversed his cue and struck the cue ball with the blunt end. We both played this way until Les, who had become very excited, wet his pants and had to go home to change them.

The day before I left for Cranwell Les told me his mother wished to see me. She gave me a pocket wallet which I have to this day some sixty-four years later. In a letter inside it she wrote:

[7] At the time 'School Certificate' – a University entrance or 'matriculation' level, required sitting at least 8 subjects of which mathematics, English language, a foreign language, and a science (Chemistry, Physics, or Biology) were mandatory.

"My dear Joe Please accept this small gift to keep in remembrance of us all here.

Now dear Joe I wish you every success in life and don't forget Joe to keep a clean sheet, and play fair all through. I feel sure Joe that you will. I have always had a great liking for you and I feel confident that you can rise high up if you really try - so do try Joe won't you? We shall all be proud to hear of every success in life you gain. I know you will have great temptations to go wrong but Joe dear always think of your mother and Dad and don't. And if I can help you at any time I will if possible. Don't forget to write sometimes to me.

With every good wish from your sincere friend - R E Pollard"

I have always treasured that letter though I do not pretend I have lived up to all the principles she outlined.

Chapter 2

Cranwell

The time arrived for me to leave home and my father accompanied me on the train from Warminster to Westbury where I had to change to the London train. I was met at Paddington by my aunt Evie who was the widow of father's brother Reginald. She showed me some of the sights, as I had never been to London before, gave me lunch and finally put me on the train at Kings Cross for Cranwell. There was a special carriage laid on for there were about 500 boys travelling to Cranwell that day from all parts of the United Kingdom with quite a lot from London. We were all excited and chattered all the way to Sleaford where we disembarked and were directed by numerous RAF police to a waiting train which transported us to Cranwell. This train was known as the Cranwell Light Railway and belonged to the RAF. It was not nearly so comfortable as the train which brought us at speed and in comfort from Kings Cross. It was a standing joke among Cranwellians that the track had straight rails on all the bends and the ride gave the impression of rapid changes of direction!

On arrival at RAF Cranwell we were paraded and allocated to squadrons and flights. We were then marched to the barrack block and shown our dormitories where we dumped our luggage. I found myself in Number 2 Squadron in W Block and soon found my squadron commander was Flight Lieutenant A P Ledger MBE and the commander of the Headquarters and No 4 Apprentices Wing was Wing Commander R J F Barton OBE[8].

Next we were ordered out and formed up into lines and taken to the dining hall for our first meal. Here I suffered the first and only wound I was to receive while serving with the RAF. We were seated at long tables with about eight persons each side sitting on forms. One lad asked to be passed the bread which was already cut into slices and in a wicker basket. No one heard him and so he reached across two other boys with his knife to stab a piece of bread just as I was taking a piece myself. The result was that I was cut between two fingers and bled profusely. I was whisked off by a corporal to the sick quarters and very professionally repaired.


Figure 5. New boy.

Our beds were steel with a spring suspension on which were placed three horsehair mattresses called "biscuits", three blankets, and two sheets with a horsehair filled bolster. I slept well after my long rail journey. Next day we were formed up in flights and taken to the clothing stores to be fitted out with uniform and accoutrements, vests, gym shoes, etc. We were instructed to polish our buttons, boots, and brass ready for our first parade next day. I found blacking my boots almost impossible since they were made from uncoloured leather. However, in no time, we found airmen on the staff who for a few pence would dye the boots black and polishing thereafter was comparatively easy and became competitive. The next essential was a visit to the barber for a short back and sides. We finished up looking very like a style adopted by certain young men many years later and known by the long-haired proportion of mankind as skinheads!

After the visit to the barbers came what seemed like days and weeks of drill on the

[8] 'Biffy' Barton had flown Martinsyde scouts with No 4 Squadron RFC in the first World War – ed.

square[9]. Thereafter the whole wing settled down to daily colour-hoisting parades after which each squadron was marched off to the workshops where the apprentices split up and went to the particular workshop appropriate to their trade.

I had opted to be a Fitter (Aero Engine) which entailed weeks in the workshops filing, chipping, and scraping metal resulting in bruises and cut hands very frequently. I was placed in Class C Group 1 and my instructor was Mr. Winsor. He was a kind and helpful man, always ready to explain any points which we did not grasp fully at the outset. In his first lecture he dealt with files and described the principles of files, their purposes, and derivatives, types of cut and how they are manufactured. The complexity in what I had hitherto considered a simple device fascinated me and made me feel confident that I had chosen a trade in which I would be happy and could do well in.

In all I attended 29 lectures by Mr. Winsor covering all the tools an engineer would ever use in his day to day practical work. Chisels, hammers, punches, marking off instruments, vices, drills, taps and dies, are but a few. Between lectures practical work was carried out in the workshops and many hours spent filing shaping and finishing exercises set for us to do. Courses on moulding, blacksmithing, welding, machine tools including lathes, milling, drilling, and shaping machines were also carried out.

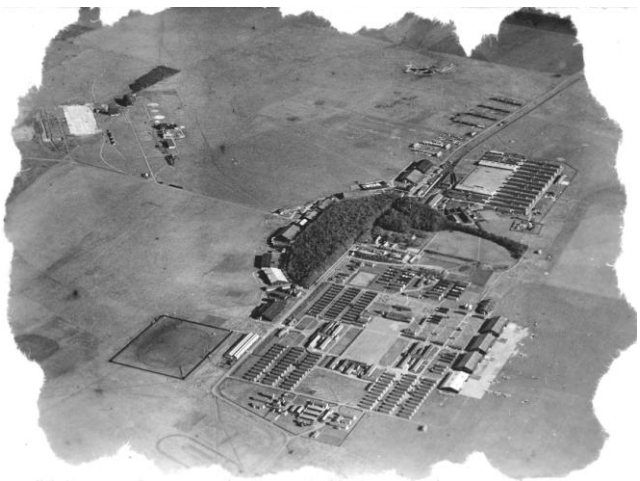


Figure 6. Cranwell camp 1924

The RAF Cadet College was located at Cranwell and still is. Here officers spent two years undergoing college training in the various branches of the Service they had joined. Those in the General Duties Branch were also taught to fly. Successful graduates of the college were awarded permanent commissions. Aircraft apprentices who passed out at a very high level could also qualify for the Cadet College. The numbers were usually one or two per entry to the apprentice training school. The types of aircraft at Cranwell and used for flying training were Avro 504K, Bristol F2B Fighter, de Havilland DH9A, Gloster Grebe and Sopwith Snipe.

On Sundays we marched to church led by a band, a distance of about half a mile. This was always a pleasant task to me because it took us out of the confines of the Apprentice School and the route itself was pleasant as the roads through the camp were tree lined and kept in immaculate order. Our dress for church parade and other formal parades was best blue with breeches and puttees. The puttees issued by the clothing store were straight pieces of cloth which, when wound round a tapering leg, assumed a series of pockets and were very uncomfortable. We were soon made wise by the station staff and the senior entry that Foxes puttees were the means of looking smart and being comfortable. Foxes puttees are shaped and when laid out flat look very like an elongated letter S.

Another smartening-up device was to have ones breeches specially shaped by an unauthorised tailor and the seams soaped inside so that the wings stood out from ones legs

[9] Military camps included a large hard-surfaced military parade ground called "the square".

instead of looking like an unpressed pair of slacks.

During working hours there was always a lot of flying going on by the cadets and the instructors. This was always of interest to me and the desire to become a pilot was always with me. This was a possibility right from the start of my training if I passed out high enough. There were often visits by special aircraft which created great interest to the apprentices since our barrack blocks were alongside the airfield.

At one time one of the Schneider Trophy aircraft came to Cranwell for flight trials. This was a biplane with a Napier engine fitted with a wheeled undercarriage instead of floats. The aircraft did a number of flights which caused considerable interest after which word was passed around that the aircraft would carry out speed trials over a measured mile across the airfield. I think the whole of the apprentice wing must have turned out to watch this test. After one or two runs the aircraft approached in a shallow dive and continued until it hit the ground leaving the undercarriage where it struck then carried on sliding along the grass for a considerable distance. We boys were shattered by the disaster and felt that the pilot must have been killed outright. However he was removed from the cockpit and taken to hospital in a very serious condition. He died about a year later. The speed with which the aircraft slid along caused the lower wings to cut the grass like a scythe.

Another interesting event which took place while I was at Cranwell was a non-stop flight to India by two RAF officers in a Hawker Horsley. Several other long distance or special flights were made from Cranwell because of its fairly isolated position but mainly because of the extensive take-off run it could provide. The airfield at that time was entirely grass which enabled take-offs to be directly into wind.

In our spare time we could, and often did, walk to Cranwell village - a distance of about a mile and a half. The village was quite small but had a general shop, cafe, and a village pond. There we could buy a bun and a drink and sit outside by the pond and watch the antics of the ducks and geese which used it.

At times when we felt a desire to see the shops or to purchase something not available on the camp at the NAAFI[10] we would step aboard the Cranwell Light Railway and put up with the somewhat uncomfortable ride to Sleaford. Once there we enjoyed seeing people in civilian clothes, looking in the shops, and going to the pictures.

Whilst at Cranwell a celebrated person, Lawrence of Arabia, was stationed there serving under the name of Aircraftsman T Shaw. He, I believe, was attached to the aircraft section of the Cadet College. He was a person who always seemed to be alone and seldom spoke to anyone. He owned a beautiful Brough Superior motorcycle and often streaked past us on the road from the camp to the village.

On joining the RAF as Apprentices our pay was ten shillings and sixpence per week of which sixpence was retained to offset barrack damages, four shillings kept in credit until the end of term, and six shillings paid to us weekly. Whilst we were under eighteen we were not allowed to drink or smoke so our pay was used mainly for sweets or chocolates, stamps writing paper and envelopes to write home, not to mention tea and buns in the NAAFI.

Pay parades were held weekly and during inclement weather they took place in the drill

[10] NAAFI = Navy, Army and Air Force Institute.

shed - a huge covered area at one end of the parade ground. We moved up by Flights before the pay table manned by accounts clerks and officers. As ones name was called each replied sharply with the last three figures of his service number, stepped forward and saluted, whereupon the clerk called out the amount and an officer paid out the money.

At the end of term we received three weeks leave, were given a railway warrant and paid the money held back from our weekly pay, and went off to our various homes. I had a fairly long journey having to first travel down to London then on to Westbury where a further change was made for Warminster. I was of course greeted with great warmth by my parents.

Whilst I was on leave my father told me the vicar wished to level all, or as many as possible of, the graves in the church yard so that the grass could be machine cut instead of with hooks or scythes as hitherto. Dad and his men were also extending the church yard as the original one was almost full of graves. My father had planted a hedge on the outer edge of the extension which was interspersed with flowering trees.

Before the vicar could authorise the levelling process in the old churchyard he required a plan indicating the positions of the graves which were not identifiable by head stones, curbs, or other means. My father asked me to do it. This was quite an undertaking for it meant the measuring, and orientating the boundary which was an irregular one. The next job was to indicate the position of every grave within that boundary. It took us several days to carry out the work. I enjoyed doing it and subsequently handed it over to the vicar. He examined it closely and thanked me for the effort. His closing remark made my day for he said "This plan will be placed in the church chest where it will remain for ever".

The Rev. Brocklebank was not married. He was a keen motorist and owned a bright yellow Vauxhall drophead car. To me it looked very sporty and sounded so. There were very few cars about on country roads in those days so the vicar's car was recognised by all the villagers the moment it appeared. He would take my father to other garden owners which he greatly enjoyed despite the fact that the vicar always drove with the hood down and at high speeds. Father visited Longleat on a number of occasions long before its grounds were made into a lion sanctuary.

After my leave and I was back at Cranwell where work continued in the workshops, in the school, and of course on the square. In the school our drawing master was a Mr. Pobjoy who was a most interesting man. He was in the process of designing and making a small radial air cooled aero engine. During drawing lessons he would produce parts of the engine which we would draw as part of our technical engineering drawing. He explained to us the various design means to keep the weight of the engine to a minimum. In the Pobjoy engine the crankcase was made from a magnesium alloy - a very light metal. He proved it was in fact magnesium by filing a piece of the metal and then lighting the filings which flared up like a firework - a brilliant white flame.

At Cranwell too we had an aircraft designer named Flight Lieutenant N Comper. The Cranwell Light Aeroplane Club was very active and in 1925 the CLA3 which Flt. Lt Comper had designed and flown was entered in races to be held at Lympe. The CLA3 won the Single Seater Scratch Race handsomely at an average speed of 81.89 miles per hour. It also won the 3 kilometre speed test at an average speed of 86.92 miles per hour. This aircraft was fitted with a flat twin cylinder engine.

In later years Comper designed aircraft were produced fitted with Pobjoy engines. Our drawing instructor had also entered the aero engine industry. A Comper Swift fitted with a

Pobjoy engine was flown from Lympe to Australia by C A Butler in 1931 in the record time of nine days and two hours. The practicability of the small low powered aeroplane was admirably demonstrated. The Comper Swift with its 75 horse power Pobjoy 'Niagara' radial engine had a top speed of 135 miles per hour and was able to cruise at 120 miles per hour. This was the production version of the engine parts of which I had drawn while under the instruction of Mr. Pobjoy at Cranwell. Comper and Pobjoy were two men I was privileged to work under. In later years I was saddened to hear Comper met an unhappy end when he died of injuries received in a brawl late one night.

During my second year at Cranwell there were persistent rumours that, when the 1923 Entry passed out, the 1924 Entry would be moved to Halton. I had mixed feelings about this move as I had settled happily at Cranwell. 1926 was exciting to us because the national strike took place. Several civilians, particularly from the Cranwell Light Railway, volunteered to work in the country railways which were all private companies at that time. Some of our instructors and serving personnel were also used to counteract the effect of the strike. We apprentices were itching to be called upon to help out but to our dismay we continued with square bashing, school, and workshops.

Chapter 3

Halton

The 1926 summer term drew to a close with the 1923 Entry passing out and the 1924 Entry preparing for their move to Halton. Among those who qualified for entry to the Cadet College was aircraft apprentice Whittle later to become the inventor of the jet engine. The move was made in August 1926 and we were housed in Number 4 Wing which was newly built complete with its own Headquarters, barrack blocks, drill square, guard room and NAAFI. It was commanded by Wing Commander R J F Barton who moved with us from Cranwell together with the Adjutant Flight Lieutenant Walmsley and some of our officers and NCO's.

Our first impressions while settling in at Halton were that we were a superior race apart from the other Wings. We had our own bagpipe band and even our own route to the extensive workshops and the school about half a mile away. Halton was quite different to Cranwell. It is sited on a wooded hillside on the edge of the Chilterns. It was a very large camp with other units established there. We had the School of Cookery, School of Tropical Medicine, and Princess Mary's RAF Hospital.

With our arrival we had to get used to new instructors and teachers as only one or two of our civilian instructors came with us and few of the RAF instructors. I was sorry that Flt Lt Comper and Mr. Pobjoy did not move to Halton which had its own aero club - the Halton Aero Club. A light aeroplane the HAC2 had been built and was completed in 1927. Halton had already built the HAC1 a two seat biplane which was then converted to the HAC2. This aircraft was very successful winning three firsts and the Wakefield Cup. It also took part in the flypast of the 1928 RAF Display at Hendon. The pilot was Flight Lieutenant C F le Poer Trench.

The school at Halton shook me up somewhat. It was more like a college than that at Cranwell. Mathematics, for example, were more advanced and I found myself learning Calculus among other things. The teachers were both civilian and Service personnel. Some time later most of the civilian teachers joined the RAF Education Branch. A C Kermode was one of them and he eventually became an Air Vice Marshall. At Halton he was greatly respected and later he produced a text book on the mechanics of flight.

In the workshops we aero engine fitters worked on Napier Lion and Rolls-Royce Condor engines. The workshops were vast places formed into bays. At the far end were the stores where small parts like split pins, washers, and emery paper could be obtained when required usually during the reassembly of an engine under instruction. On one occasion a boy who had not been paying sufficient attention was sent by the instructor to the stores to get a long stand. After being told by the storeman to wait while he sorted one out he returned after about ten minutes and sent the boy back to ask the instructor if a short stand would do instead. The boy repeated the message to the instructor who told him to sit down and that he would have to pay more attention in order to make up the time he had missed in class. He soon saw the joke!

When we arrived at Halton work was in hand to make more sports fields for the increasing apprentice population. Wednesday afternoons were sports days and all apprentices were obliged to take part in the sport of their choice. Some decided on cross country running which took them off the camp. Some did not go far from the camp and wended their way back to the dormitories where they hoped to get their heads down on their beds. They were, however, soon spotted by one of the NCO's on the lookout for such tricks and were ordered to parade outside the barrack block and then marched down to the new areas being prepared as sports

fields. There they would be handed a bucket or a bag and told to join the line of other non sporting boys who were already at work. The work involved a line of boys each about a couple of yards apart moving slowly but steadily across the field and picking up every visible stone large or small. When the bucket was full it had to be carried to the end of the field and emptied. I myself got caught one Wednesday afternoon not engaged in sport and was sent "stone picking". I did not enjoy it and quickly found I liked playing football much more!

Apprentices were permitted to smoke when they reached the age of eighteen. I became eighteen at Cranwell but don't remember staring to smoke until long after I left Halton. In our off duty moments Wendover, the nearest village, was a pleasant little place. The views of the surrounding countryside were well worth the climb up Combe Hill just beyond Wendover. On fine warm days one might be favoured with the sight of a pretty girl, who enjoyed frequent changes of boy friends, and was known to certain apprentices as Wendover Maud. I wonder did she ever find a boy friend with whom she went steady or even settled down with?

Due to my excursions at weekends to Aylesbury and Tring I began to hanker for a motor bike which apprentices were forbidden to have on the camp. One of the boys in my class did however have a motor bike which he kept at a garage which was across the road close by Number 4 Wing guardroom but he kept to the rules and never attempted to use it during term time. One day he took me down to see it. It was a delightful little Raleigh 2¼ horsepower. One day I talked him into lending it to me to go to my home at Longbridge Deverill near Warminster.

We made several visits to the garage after duty hours when I was shewn how to start it change gear etc. all within the garage confines. I do not remember ever learning to ride a motor cycle before that. However the day arrived for my weekend. I obtained my weekend pass and proceeded to the garage where I removed my blue cap band leaving the black band in place. Now the point of this is that apprentices are identified by a coloured band on their caps indicating the squadron to which they belong - red for No 1 Squadron, blue for No 2 and green for No 3. Mine was a blue band. All qualified airmen wore black bands. I started up the Raleigh and let it warm up. The garage owner knew what I was up to and kept watch for me. At last he indicated there was no one of consequence in view and I started off. I had to go a short distance down to the main road which ran through the camp where I had to turn left past the guardroom and on to Wendover. As I pulled out into the road I nearly fell off the bike because standing in the middle of the road directing traffic was the Provost Marshal - a Squadron Leader. He turned and saw me and waved me on and as I passed him I gave him a smart eyes right! I fully expected to hear a whistle blast but all was well and in due course I arrived home safely.

My parents and my brother and sister were delighted to see me but scolded me for borrowing the motor bike. I have often wondered how I managed the trip with my lack of experience with motor bikes but the fact that in 1927 there was very little traffic on the roads, especially the minor roads, must have been the reason.

I had a most enjoyable weekend at home and meeting Les my school days chum and others in the village. The time to return on Sunday came all too soon. I started off and arrived at Halton just after dark, parked the bike in the garage and changed my hat band, booked in at the guardroom and quickly found the friend who had lent me the machine. He was delighted to see me safely back. A brat had returned to the fold!

A few weeks later, whilst on a visit to Aylesbury, I saw a beautiful looking motor cycle in the show room of a garage. It was an AJS. Its black finish with gold lines appealed to me and the machine looked as good as new. However it was second-hand and priced at £30. A new one of

that type would have cost about £50. I went in, sat on it in the show room, and asked if the price could be reduced. The garage owner said it could not but that I could try it before buying it if I wished. I declined and said I would see if I could raise the money first and made my way excitedly back to Halton.

I immediately sat down and wrote to my parents asking them if they would lend me thirty pounds which I would repay by weekly instalments. I knew that my mother had received a small endowment - I think about a hundred pounds. They agreed and in due course I received the money. I had already obtained a driving licence for my trip on my friend's Raleigh.

I notified the garage that I would have the AJS and paid them for it. The next stage was to get it nearer Halton. The news that I now had a motor cycle soon spread around and I found that quite a few boys had motor cycles stashed around in villages and one even kept his in the woods nearby.

One day a boy I never suspected would have a motor cycle told me he kept his at Wendover complete with his civilian clothes. He said that if I wished he would ask the garage owner if he could take another motor bike. The boy came back and told me all was well. I soon collected the AJS from Aylesbury and took it to Wendover. The garage owner had a store room over the garage where I could leave my civilian clothes in a suitcase. I believe the weekly cost was about two shillings which, as I was now over eighteen and earned twenty-one shillings a week, I could afford. The locals were very kind to the apprentices at Halton!

Figure 7. – Aerodrome Course, Halton, 1927 (with Bristol F2B)
(Joe Lane seated front row right)

Life at Halton thereafter was very pleasant particularly as it was my last term and the approaching end of my apprenticeship. Looming up too were the final examinations.

I had been through the aerodrome course during the last term of my second year. The instruction included the man-handling of aircraft, starting up and running the engine, daily servicing, and engine removal and repairs. There were twenty-two of us on the course which covered the work of both engine fitters and the riggers.

The most exciting thing to me during the course was to have my second flight - my first had been with Alan Chobham's circus at Warminster three years before. I was taken up in a Bristol Fighter for about half an hour flying around the local countryside including Wendover Tring and Aylesbury. I knew then that I wanted to be a pilot.

So now the examinations were upon us and swotting of the copious notes I had made during the whole period at Cranwell and Halton. I still have my note books. Examinations took place in subjects we had taken in school and in the workshops. Finally came the passing out parade - the first one in the new No 4 Wing. I had completed my apprenticeship as a Fitter -

Aero Engine and, although I did not obtain such a high grade as I had hoped, I was happy.

It came as a climax at the end of three years with the same boys between whom we had built up comradeship admiration and an appreciation of the discipline and respect which had been built into us. My feelings and excitement went sky high with the news that I had been posted to the engine repair section in No 1 Flying Training School at Netheravon in Wiltshire. This could not have been better news for Netheravon was only about twenty-six miles from my home.

Chapter 4

Netheravon

I spent three weeks with the family at Longbridge Deverill and being mobile I made happy visits to my uncles and aunts. Three of them lived in Dorset within four or five miles of Sherborne. My father's youngest sister Annie was married to an insurance agent Alfred Harris and they lived at Thornford where my father was born. I also visited my father's elder brother Stephen who was the head gamekeeper to Lord Digby. A visit to his house was always interesting especially in the breeding season when he had thousands of young pheasants enclosed in pens which would eventually be released in the surrounding woods. Their fate was to be shot during organised shoots which provided exercise, excitement and no doubt satisfaction, for those invited to join the party.

At home we had a happy time both my brother and sister being there so that our family was complete. My father who, had a musical turn of mind, would often entertain. Father played the melodeon the flute and the violin. He often sang little songs which mother thought were not quite proper for children to hear; one went like this: -

"*When I was a nipper*
a giddy little kipper
Once a fellah said to me
I know where there is a tree
Its loaded up with fruit
and guaranteed to suit
anybody great or small.

So off I went to take a look at them
but my mother I met
she said come back home and look at me
that ought to be enough
so I didn't get a look at them at all!"

The song my mother thought was naughty but tickled me was: -

"*Down the street there is a blooming riot.*
Five and twenty girls are waiting there.
And the policeman cannot keep them quiet
for you know, they wont go, every maiden fair.

For me, for me, they're waiting there for me
They'll have to wait 'til my watch can walk
or a blind man see, or a dumb man talk.
For me, you see, they're waiting there for me.
If anybody knows a thing or two
its me me me you see!"[11]

I've never heard them anywhere else so I assume he must have made then up himself. My

[11] The song was written by Harry Wincott, with music by Joseph Tabrar. It was made popular in the late 19th century by the Music Hall singer Fred Earle.

father's flute lies in a drawer at our home now and has been silent since his death.

Whilst on leave I saw several of my school friends who were in the fifth form with me. I was shocked to hear that one of the girls in my form had been killed in a motor cycle accident. She was the passenger on the back of a motor cycle driven by the son of a garage owner in Warminster returning from a visit to a cinema in Frome. The driver was unhurt.

After my leave I went to Netheravon and started work in the Engine Repair Section in the large workshops. I was put under a Corporal Gill, a Scotsman, and I soon realised I could not have had a better overseer. We were in the Mono Bay and our job was to completely overhaul the Gnome Monosoupape rotary engines which were fitted to the Avro 504K elementary trainer with which the flying school was equipped. The advanced trainer was the de Havilland 9A fitted with the American Liberty engine and the school also had some Sopwith Snipe single seaters fitted with Bentley BR2 rotary engines.

Figure 8. DH9A & Bristol Fighters, Netheravon 1928

Under Corporal Gill I spent my days scraping crankcases, which were in two halves, so that the cylinders would be a perfect fit. This was a very skilled operation and required hours of meticulous work. Each cylinder had to be bedded in to the crankcase so that when bolted up the cylinder was not compressed or distorted where it was held by the crankcase. The cylinders and crankcase were all of steel because great strength was required to withstand the centrifugal forces when the engine revolved at high speed. The crankcase also had to be carefully fitted to its back plate which carried the whole weight of the engine. The crankshaft, of course, remained stationary whilst the crankcase carrying all the cylinders revolved around it. Fuel was squirted through a jet into the crankcase where it mixed with air drawn through the hollow crankshaft and then sucked into the cylinders as the pistons uncovered a ring of holes round the cylinder. The burnt gases were finally released through the top of the cylinder when the single valve opened.

Under the strict supervision of Ginger Gill I mastered all the careful fitting involved with the cylinders, the crankcase, the big end, and the obturator rings on the pistons. We finally mounted the engine on the test bed where it was put through its remaining tests. After this it was again dismantled and all the bearing surfaces examined and further careful fitting carried out where necessary.

Figure 9. - Bikers 1929 style

Life at Netheravon was very pleasant. The barracks encircling the square were all single storey buildings. Quite a number of the airmen had motor cycles and five or six of us formed a motor cycle club. During off duty periods we would cross to the far side of the airfield and indulge in some grass track racing. One of our members was Leading Aircraftsman Colin Scragg who rode a Matchless and who in later years became an Air Vice Marshall.

One of the irksome jobs we had to endure at Netheravon was guard duties. The hangars and aircraft were some distance from the domestic area. During the daytime Service Police patrolled the flying area and operated from a guardroom near the hangars. At night airman of all trades were detailed for guard duties in the hangar area. This meant patrolling with rifle and fixed bayonet for two hours on and four hours off. Sentry boxes were located at intervals so that sentries could shelter during inclement weather.

After about nine months in the Engine Repair Section I was moved to a flying training flight. This meant marching daily to and from the domestic area to the flying area. I was very happy working on the aircraft which were de Havilland DH9A two seat biplanes. A fitter and a rigger were allotted to each aircraft and the flying instructors usually flew the same aircraft. The ground crews frequently obtained flights as the instructors did a test flight before giving instruction each day.


Figure 10 – DH9A and playful crews

Most week-ends I would go home either for the week end or just for a day. On occasions when I had a long week-end - Friday to Sunday - I would go to my uncle the farmer or to Thornford to my other uncle. I often took a close friend, Jim, with me. Jim's home was in Cornwall which meant his visits home were few and far between and he did not have a motor bike.

We liked going to either place because they both had great attractions though mostly different ones. At the farm[12] my uncle Charlie made vast quantities of cider which was very powerful stuff. I was staying at the farm on leave on one occasion when it was cider making time and I was invited to go and help so I learned a lot about cider or scrumpy making.

We took a horse and wagon which uncle hosed down because the last time it was used was to move manure. Cattle were allowed into the apple orchard and most of the cider apples seemed to be on the ground. They were scooped up with shovels and loaded into the wagon and taken back to the farm yard.

The cider house was at one end of the yard beyond which was the kitchen garden and then the farm house. I mention this because it meant that my aunt, if she chose, could see what was going on at the cider house! Outside the cider house stood a mincing or cutting machine permanently fixed so it withstood all weathers which came along and made it, shall we say, a little rusty. My uncle went into a shed next door and came out with the drive belt, put it on the mincer pulley and passed it through a hole in the wall and on to the driving pulley of the Ruston paraffin-driven engine. To make things easier he then took his oilcan to the rusty mincer and oiled the bearings.

In the meantime two men were starting to build the cider "cheese" on the base of the press inside the cider house. The press consisted of a wooden base about five feet square and two feet from the ground which had a wooden trough fitted all round it with one exit point at the front. Making the cheese consisted of placing a layer of straw across the base and extending

[12] Anchor Farm, Hummer, near Trent, Dorset

beyond by about eighteen inches. Then about six inches of minced apple was laid on the straw. The opposite ends of the straw base were then folded up over the apple and another layer of straw was laid at right angles to the previous one. Another layer of chopped apple was laid on this and the ends folded up over it. This process was repeated until the cheese or heap was about four feet high. By this time apple juice was running into the trough forced out under its own weight and being collected in large milk buckets.

When the stacking of the cheese was complete the upper platform of the press was wound down using metal bars to turn the two screws. Tremendous pressure could be exerted on the cheese which forced out the juice. The straw in the cheese filtered out all the pips, cores, skins and any other extraneous substances. The juice was then poured into butts - about 108 gallons capacity.

I do not know the treatment after that or how the fermentation was started and controlled. My uncle made such quantities that he often sold cider to his farmer friends. He was a man of few words but some of those words I grew to enjoy hearing. They were "Drink Joe?" in a questioning tone of voice.

At milking time I would watch the milkers in action - usually about four at work at a time. This was before the days of automatic milking machines. I would help in the dairy when the cooler was in operation by pouring milk into the upper tank and exchanging the churns as they became full.

Harvesting and ploughing were happy times. This was before the days of the general use of tractors and everything relied on horse power; ploughing sowing reaping and threshing. Before leaving for the fields on any of these operations the horses would be loaded with a cask filled with cider which was hung onto its collar. The purpose was to refresh the workers during the long hot days.

My aunt Beatie was a happy soul full of life and on the go all the time. In the farm house she was very much in charge. She had a living-in helper, Gertie, and they made cider wine as well as butter. The wine was always put into a fresh brandy cask. She made sure that uncle Charlie and I did not make too many visits to the cider house during my stay. Her favourite greeting to me when I arrived at the farm house was to remind me that the tank was empty. This meant that I was expected to pump water up to the tank in the roof. This was done by operating a semi-rotary pump just inside the back door until the water ran down an overflow pipe in the sink beside the pump. The job usually occupied about ten minutes.

The farm meals were always most enjoyable and beef was the favoured main course. I was always impressed by uncle Charlie's carving expertise. He would first sharpen his bone-handled carving knife and then carve slice after slice of meat finally handing out each plate covered with meat. Being always hungry my eyes must have widened when I was handed my plate only to find that the beef was carved paper thin, as it should be, and that I had not got anything like as much as I had thought. I have always tried to emulate my uncle when carving at my table but I have never become as expert as he was.

Auntie Beat had hundreds of chicken in hen houses lined up neatly in a field adjoining the farm. She seemed to collect masses of eggs every day most of which were to be boxed and sold. My aunt also took part in activities in the village of Trent being on the parish council and both she and my uncle were regular churchgoers. She liked to go to dances held in nearby villages or plays put on by local performers. On one of my week-ends I took with me a friend, Len, who

lived at Wincanton. My aunt made us go with her to a village dance at Marston Magna. Len and I were still apprentices at the time and we arrived dressed in our best blue - breeches and puttees. The Charleston was all the rage at the time. My aunt told the Master of Ceremonies that we knew the Charlestone whereupon he, after a flourish of drums, announced that we would demonstrate the new dance! Being the shorter of the two I had to take the ladies' part but we put up a plausible performance with most of the others present joining in and following us round endeavouring to imitate our antics. A very happy evening seemed to be had by all!

Back at Netheravon Service life continued but was never boring. There was always something occurring such as the arrival of visiting aircraft of a type not seen before. On one occasion a Handley Page Hyderabad, a twin-engined bomber, arrived on a visit. Two of us who handled the aircraft were given a fifteen minute flight before the crew returned to their own station.

Officers Mess guest nights were always likely to produce excitement among the airmen. On one occasion a guest night was in progress at Netheravon and just as the officers and guests took their seats in the dining room a swarm of Gloster Grebe fighters from a squadron at Upavon bombed the mess with toilet paper. The result can be imagined as the paper used by the attacker was standard issue and consisted of sheets of thin buff paper about six inches by four. The next morning the Officers Mess, its lawns, quarters and the nearby airmen's barrack rooms were plastered with millions of sheets of paper. Very soon after reveille some NCO's were chasing available airmen out of their beds to form fatigue parties to collect and dispose of the litter.

One weekend my friend Jim and I were down to attend church parade. However we went to Thornford calling at my home for an hour on our way on the Friday night. My aunt Annie had two children Gilbert, who was about my age which at that time was nineteen, and Eva about two years younger. Gilbert suffered from a very bad heart. My aunt also had a lodger who was a school teacher. She was about twenty four at that time and we boys thought she was the cats whiskers. She was full of fun and we found our pyjama legs and arms tied in knots when we went to bed. In the morning we heard a knock on our bedroom door and thinking that it was my aunt bringing us some tea we called her in. It was Kathleen the lodger who promptly pulled the bedclothes off us and told us it was time to get up!

On the Saturday evening we left Thornford and arrived at my home at about eleven o'clock that night. Mother had left the door unlocked which it was safe to do in those days and we found a lovely fire still going. I was all for staying until about six in the morning as church parade was not until 9.30 next morning. Jim however preferred to get back to camp to get some sleep before breakfast. So we left home about midnight and got to Shrewton village when the engine conked out as I was changing gear before rounding a corner. All our efforts to restart the engine were of no avail. When we stopped we were outside a pub and a light was on upstairs. We knocked at the door and the light promptly went out so there was nothing we could do but push the bike.

The night had become foggy and we could see little ahead. We had stopped at the bottom of the hill out of Shrewton and by the time we had pushed the bike up we were pretty fed up. After that the going was tantalising for not being able to see far ahead. Because of the fog we would think that we were going downhill and would leap on the bike only to have to start pushing again after a few yards. This continued until we got to the Stonehenge Inn when the road to Netheravon was up hill and down hill so we knew when we could ride and when we could not. The last straw occurred when the acetylene lamp went out - either from lack of carbide or water. We pressed on to Netheravon village to meet our final and worst trial. The road

from the village to the camp is up a steep hill and both Jim and I were on our knees when we booked in at the guard room. The duty policemen gave us a silly smirk when we told him we had pushed the bike eight miles from Shrewton.

I dismantled the engine next day and found that the key in the magneto drive shaft had sheared so that the engine timing had gone haywire. This I was able to repair and the bike was soon in use again.

At about this time men's fashions in clothes took a sudden surge by the introduction of Oxford bags. I bought myself a pair of fawn coloured trousers from Burtons in Salisbury. Not long after I was again going to Salisbury wearing my Oxford bags for the second time. I had passed through Amesbury and was driving down towards Old Sarum when the rear tyre burst and I found the bike and myself sliding along the road. When I collected myself and the bike I found I had taken the seat out of the lovely new bags.

On my trips home I had a choice of routes either of which were approximately of the same mileage. I could leave Netheravon and turn right at the Stonehenge Inn and along by Larkhill camp to Shrewton village then forking left to Chitterne, Heytesbury, and Sutton Veny to Longbridge Deverill. The alternative was go from Netheravon to Amesbury then along by Stonehenge and skirting Shrewton village to Chitterne and on. This choice of routes was pleasing because they then never became monotonous. Also Amesbury always had the welcoming Antrobus Arms and Stonehenge had a cafe at the junction of the Chitterne and Wylye roads. The cafe has long since disappeared.

Other off duty attractions were the weekly dances at the Bear Hotel in Devizes which attracted a number of Netheravon motor cyclists. I often went to dances at Warminster when I was at home for week-ends. On one occasion I was at a dance at the Town Hall with Vera Waylen whose sister was killed shortly after leaving school in an accident which I have mentioned earlier. Vera and I met fairly frequently after this and I became quite fond of her. During the summer months I used to collect her from her home in Warminster and take her to Shearwater a lake in very attractive surroundings at Crockerton on Lord Bath's estate. Bathing in the lake was permitted before 9 o'clock in the morning so we usually had the place to ourselves. When Vera left school she started a sweet shop and newsagency and still runs the business. She had never married.

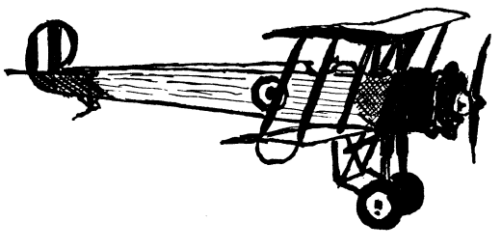
Another of my girl friends was a school teacher, Olive, whose father was the blacksmith in the next village; Hill Deverill. Olive unfortunately was about eight years older than me. I knew her when she was at school and now she had a motor bike and I often saw her on my visits home which were almost weekly. We met one day and it was suggested we go for a drive around the local countryside. After our first trip, one following the other, we agreed it would be much better if we went on one bike so she came on mine thereafter. I became very fond of her because she had a dry sense of humour and we had several very pleasant trips during the two years I was at Netheravon.

On one occasion I asked her if she had a steady boyfriend and she replied "No! I am still unmanned!" Another time, when we had been sitting on a fallen tree trunk and were preparing to leave, she found a button of her blouse unfastened. She exclaimed "Oh dear - I am undone!" There were other times when the school teacher mind in her came to the surface when I mentioned something I did "which I didn't used to". Olive flashed "Didn't used to ! didn't used too!! - used not to! used not to! you mean" I've never forgotten her correction of my bad grammar.

At Netheravon No 11 Squadron which was stationed there were ordered to move *en bloc* for India. This required a considerable amount of preparation for the personnel of the squadron would be in India for five years. This was the normal overseas posting period in those days and it meant that young unmarried airmen would be separated from their parents and relatives for that period of time.

The preparation entailed lectures, some illustrated by films and slides, and advice on the does and don'ts required in a foreign country. Some of the lectures were given by the station medical officer who gave fatherly talks and advice to young airmen on the perils resulting from association with certain types of the opposite sex. This officer had a strong deep voice and I have always remembered one of his cautions - "beware of the hoarse-voiced woman!"

After No 11 Squadron had departed to India and been located near the Northwest frontier the Flying Training School continued its work. A change was taking place however for it was being re-equipped with new aircraft. The Avro 504K rotary-engined ab initio trainer was being replaced by the Avro 504N. The main difference between the aircraft was that the 504N was fitted with an Armstrong Siddeley Lynx radial engine instead of the Monosoupape Gnome rotary engine.



AVRO LYNX.

For the senior term pupils the DH9A aircraft was being replaced by the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas aircraft. So the familiar sounds of the aircraft taking off and flying round the airfield were gradually changing.

Chapter 5

Fleet Air Arm

At about this time I, having already applied for pilot training, was sent to the Central Medical Establishment in Holborn. I spent the day there among others being thoroughly examined for fitness to undergo flying training. I was delighted when told I had passed and thereafter eagerly awaited to be posted to a flying training school. The posting did not come however.

Shortly after this a notice inviting volunteers for the Fleet Air Arm was published and remembering that a posting overseas meant five years out of England I applied. Within a very short time I was posted to HMS Argus at Portsmouth. The Argus was a flat topped aircraft carrier which was built for the Italians to be a passenger liner. Before completion however she was bought by Britain and converted to an aircraft carrier. She carried Blackburn Baffin torpedo bombers and Fairey Flycatcher fighters[13].

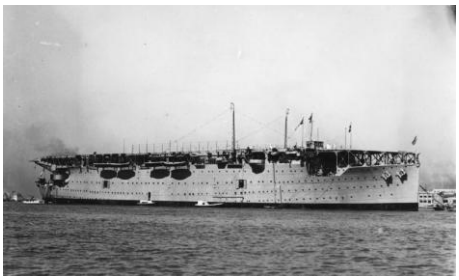


Figure 11. - HMS Argus

I was posted to the Engine Repair Section of Headquarters Flight and found myself carrying out complete overhauls on Napier Lion engines for the Blackburns. Headquarters Flight was a small flight commanded by an RAF Flight Lieutenant engineer officer. The Engine Repair Section which had a fully equipped workshop was manned by a sergeant, a corporal, and four airmen fitters. The Aircraft Repair Section was manned by a similar number of personnel of the rigger trade. The NCO in charge of Headquarters Flight was Flight Sergeant Daniels, a pleasant kindly man. Unfortunately, because of his build and the fact that his uniform was never tailored to fit him but was just as issued from stores, he never looked tidy. Because of this and the fact that he was a bit ponderous he was known as "Dapper Dan".

I quickly settled in as I quite liked the work of overhauls. We used to do a complete overhaul including ground testing of one Napier Lion engine in three months. I also got used to sleeping in a hammock which, with the other fitters, I used to sling in the workshops. All our work was below deck so we saw very little of the flying operations. However; when we had an engine ready for testing we used to install it in the fuselage of a Fairey IIID which had the wings removed. Testing was carried out when there was no flying in progress when we would take the

Figure 12. – Napier Lion engine test on deck.
Jo Lane at back near propeller.

[13] HMS *Argus*, 14,550-tons, built at Glasgow as the Italian passenger liner *Conte Rosso.* She was purchased prior to launch in 1916 and converted into an aircraft carrier, the World's first to have a full-length flight deck upon which wheeled aircraft could land and take-off. Commissioned in September 1918, laid up early in the next decade, she was later modified for use as mother ship for target aircraft and as a training carrier. *Argus* served in a training role during much of World War II, but she also served with Force H and later supported the landings in North Africa. She was reduced to reserve in late 1943. HMS *Argus* was sold for scrapping in December 1946. (from the FAA Internet web site)

fuselage up on the flight deck and lash it down securely. The engine would then be run at specified speeds and times and records made of temperatures, revolutions per minute, and pressures.

My first trip to sea was from Portsmouth and on a Friday which is also pay day. We had just got out of harbour and were approaching the Nab Tower off the Isle of Wight and the ship was pitching and rolling slightly. At that time we were on parade in the hangar below deck waiting for the pay clerk to call our names when we would move up to the pay desk and be handed our pay. The motion of the ship, which was entirely new to me, began to have its effect. There were about two airmen in front of me when I felt I could stay no more and I ran to the nearest port hole and stuck my head out. After that one time I was never seasick again.

Shortly after that we put to sea again this time for the short trip to Cowes where the ship anchored off shore to become the turning point for aircraft taking part in the 1929 Schneider Trophy race. This was a great thrill for all on board. The British entries consisted of two Supermarine S6 aircraft and an S5 which had a less powerful Rolls-Royce engine. The Italians were the only challengers and had entered three Macchi monoplanes. This race has been recorded as one of the greatest air spectacles in air history. In brilliant sunshine and blue skies the silver S6's and red Macchi's streaked around the 31 mile triangular course. The race was won by Flying Officer Waghorn in his S6 covering the 217.79 miles at a speed of 328.63 miles per hour. Watching the race from the flight deck of Argus stirred the emotions by the thunderous roar of the engines and the colossal speed of these racing seaplanes.


Figure 13. LAC Lane aboard HMS Argus.

After the race I resolved to make a model in brass of the Supermarine S6 but I immediately ran into difficulties in trying to find out the dimensions of the aircraft. I perused all the copies of Flight and Aeroplane published before and after the event but in none of them were the dimensions revealed. I decided I would have to draw the aircraft and to do this I collected all the pictures published in magazines or papers that I could lay hands on. It took me about three months to scale all suitable photographs and to draw the aircraft in plan, elevation, front and rear elevation and sections. I had a friend who was a carpenter rigger in the workshops who was very interested in my plans. He offered to make a model in wood to my drawings so that I could get it cast in the moulders' shop in the ship. This shop was manned by naval personnel. In due course the wooden model was made and after minor modifications we decided it was as accurate as we could make it. I approached the Chief Shipwright in charge of the moulding shop asking him to cast it in brass for me. In subsequent weeks I asked him how the moulding was getting on and each time he replied that they had not had any brass moulding to do. A little later I was told that a sailor had been seen filing an aluminium model of my S6. I promptly went to the moulding shop and recovered my model which they had used for moulding an aluminium version.

After that I decided to make the model in solid brass. I acquired a piece of brass and I found, on measurement, that I could carve the fuselage complete with tailplane and rudder from it[14]. I resolved to make the model during the next cruise so, as the ship was in Portsmouth, I was

[14] The family were told that this piece of brass was originally a spare stanchion for HMS Argus. When the pieces for the model had been cut off and shaped sufficiently for their origins to be disguised the remainder of the stanchion was dropped over the side one night in the Bay of Biscay - ed.

able to get home for Christmas as I still had my motor cycle.

After Christmas the Argus put to sea in January 1930 bound for the Mediterranean on its Spring cruise. Its compliment of aircraft - one squadron of Blackburn Blackburns, reconnaissance aircraft, and one squadron of Fairey Flycatchers, single seat fighters, embarked soon after we left Portsmouth and were out near the Nab Tower. The Blackburn looked a lumbering aircraft with the pilot sitting above and behind the Napier Lion engine and the navigator and gunner inside. The Flycatcher was a pretty little aircraft, very manoeuvrable, a single seater with a radial engine.

The workshop personnel had not yet started on any programme so quite a number of us managed to get up to the flight deck and into the safety nets. The nets were below each side of the flight deck and were fitted with plank floors for the aircraft ground crews to stand in safety after they had removed the chocks for take off and could leap on to the decks to seize an aircraft after landing.

During flying operations the carrier was attended by a destroyer which steamed astern and to one side. Its purpose was to get quickly to any aircraft which landed in the sea and to rescue the crew and secure the aircraft until it could be recovered. The destroyers, being faster and more manoeuvrable than the carrier, were most suitable for this purpose. Our attendant destroyer was the Tetrarch. During flying operations the destroyer carried its rescue boat slung out on the davits and lowered to within three or four feet of the water - depending of course on the state of the sea at the time. One of the crew was an airman whose purpose was to instruct the sailors on the positions the crew would normally be occupying in the aircraft in order to get them out quickly and into the rescue boat. They would then be taken aboard the destroyer and transferred to the carrier. The rescue boat would secure the aircraft which would remain afloat for some time, under the influence of its built-in buoyancy bags. The airman would then instruct the rescue crew where they could attach cables or lines to the strong points provided otherwise they were liable to put a sling round the fuselage which would result in the tail being pulled off when the carrier attempted to lift it out of the water.

Figure 14. – HMS Tetrarch, Bay of Biscay, 1930

On the trip to Gibralter one of our airman remained in the destroyer and while crossing the Bay of Biscay the weather was appalling. We waved to the destroyer each morning wondering how he was coping with the pitching and rolling it was being subjected to. The carrier was bad enough and it meant that no flying was undertaken until we were nearing Gibraltar.

Arrival at Gibraltar was a great thrill as I had never been abroad before. Soon the ship was tied up in harbour and shore leave was piped over the Tannoy[15]. Next day I went ashore with one or two friends and looked around Gibralter enjoying the sights and sounds of the colony. On another occasion we went by bus across the border into Spain and round the bay to the seaside town of Algeciras. We spent a happy couple of hours there then back to the ship to write and send picture cards to my parents.

In Gibralter work on the current Napier Lion being overhauled continued. As a team we were all very happy in our work and proud when the overhaul was completed and we were

[15] The trade name of the public address system adopted by the armed forces. - ed

running the engine on its test bed on the flying deck.


Figure 15. – Parnell Peto ex submarine M2

Flying was available to some of our pilots while the ship was in harbour. We would put an aircraft on floats for this purpose and, although all Fleet Air Arm pilots went through a short seaplane flying course, accidents would happen. The submarine M2 was in Gibralter with us. It carried its own seaplane housed in a waterproof hangar on the deck before the conning tower. One day it lowered the little seaplane, a Parnell Peto, into the water. As it took off from choppy water outside the harbour wall a strut to one of the floats was damaged. When the pilot landed back on the water in the harbour the strut collapsed and the aircraft turned turtle. The pilot was quickly rescued and the aircraft hoisted out on the dockside and subsequently repaired. Sadly the M2 and its crew and aeroplane were lost while diving off Portland some years later.

The ship put to sea for a period of exercises with the Mediterranean Fleet. On its return to harbour again the naval ratings were kept busy and painting the ship was a fairly frequent operation. Planks were suspended over the side of the ship on which sailors sat with pots of paint slung under the planks while they painted everything above the waterline using long handled brushes. It was on such an occasion that I learned why RAF personnel were called "Crabfats" by the Home Fleet sailors. Sailors referred to the ship's paint as Crabfat. The Home Fleet paint was a blue paint exactly the colour of an airman's uniform. The Mediterranean Fleet ships used a lighter blue but their sailors also referred to us as Crabfats!


Figure 16. – HMS Argus hangar

After our sojourn in Gibralter the ship set sail for Barcelona. Enroute flying was carried out in conjunction with ships of the Mediterranean Fleet. On this occasion one of our aircraft, a Blackburn Baffin, went over the side while landing and fell into the sea. The destroyer dropped the rescue boat and the crew were taken aboard and the aircraft secured under the surveillance of the airman who was aboard for the purpose. Happily the aircrew were unhurt but wet.

I found Barcelona exciting because the year previously, 1929, the International Exhibition had been staged there. The exhibition buildings and gardens had been retained on a permanent basis and were beautiful. I enjoyed it so much I made two or three visits and sent pictures of it to my parents and relations back in England. Barcelona itself was interesting and my friends and I spent hours walking round the city. However all things come to an end and we set sail again for Gibralter. After a short stay refuelling and revictualling we were on our way home to England.

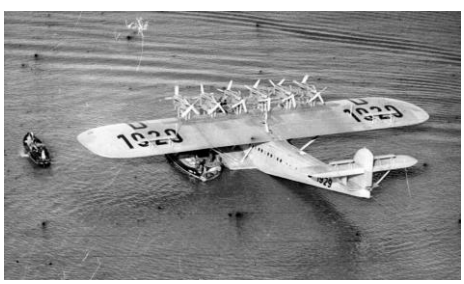


Figure 17. -Dornier DoX at Southsea

On our arrival at Spithead we were thrilled to see the German Dornier DoX, a twelve engined flying

boat which was at anchor there. It was a big machine with its engines all mounted above the wing. They were mounted in six pairs of engines one pulling and the rear one pushing.

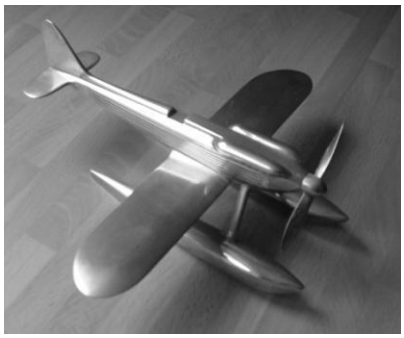


Figure 18. – Model Supermarine S6B (photographed in 2003)

Throughout the cruise on all the evenings I was on board I worked late into the nights shaping and assembling my model of the S6 seaplane. I finished it before we arrived back in England and wrapped it carefully. On arrival at Portsmouth I took it ashore to a jeweller on the Hard at Portsmouth near the dockyard. I had it silver-plated at a cost of twelve shillings and sixpence (62½p). I took it home and presented it to my mother. This was in March 1930 and she kept it and lovingly polished it until she died in 1964 when it came back to me. It is now brass again as the silver was polished away years ago by my mother's attentions.

Thus ended my first tour in the Fleet Air Arm for I was posted to No 3 Flying Training School at Spitalgate near Grantham. Before leaving Portsmouth I sold my AJS to a friend and bought an Ivory Calthorpe from a garage in Elm Grove. I was thrilled with it because it was of improved design with an overhead valve engine.

Chapter 6

Back to the RAF

Whilst I was in the Argus on the Spring Cruise in the Mediterranean my mother had mentioned, in one of her letters, that a lovely girl had joined the nursery at Longbridge House. The vicar - the Reverend Brocklebank had died and the estate was inherited by his nephew who was a Commander in the Royal navy. He was married and had three children hence the increase in the nursery staff.

The carrier remained in Portsmouth harbour until she was transferred to the Reserve. The crew remained on board or on leave awaiting their postings to other ships or establishments in the case of the naval men and to RAF units or stations in the case of the RAF contingent. I had some leave and went home to Longbridge Deverill and spent my time seeing old friends male and female! Then one day after having been to Warminster I returned home to find a young lady sitting on the kitchen table swinging her legs whilst talking to my mother and sister. I was introduced to Gladys Cornish the girl mentioned by my mother in her letters to me and something clicked! We quickly got into conversation during which I learned that she was going to a dance that evening at the Town Hall in Warminster with a boyfriend who performed in the band.

I met her later at the dance and we had several dances together since her escort who was engaged in providing some of the music could only dance with her on one or two occasions. Gladys and I got on well together and later, because there was no bar at the dance I invited her out for a drink. I took her to a pub nearby in the high street. I had never been in that particular pub before so I ordered a beer for myself and she asked for a port. Gladys was seventeen and a half. She had never drunk anything alcoholic before and I felt sure it was her first visit to a pub! I learned later that she had grandparents who owned an hotel at Southwold where she was occasionally taken as a small child but was of course never allowed near the bars. After the dance I took her home that night. We met again once or twice during my leave and had enjoyable times together.

When my leave was over I set off for Spitalgate and joined my new unit at No 3 Flying Training School. I was posted to the second year training flight equipped with Armstrong Whitworth Siskin aircraft. A number of the aircraft were dual control Siskins and the remainder were single seat aircraft similar to those in the RAF fighter squadrons. My work involved daily servicing, inspection and maintenance of aircraft which in my case was a dual control Siskin.

Figure 19. 2-seat Siskins lined up for AOC's inspection, RAF Spitalgate

The School was equipped with Avro 504N elementary training aircraft, Siskin and Avro Atlas aircraft for advanced training. The Atlas was a two seater day bomber aircraft. The flying instructors were officers and NCO's and the pupils were junior officers and airmen of the rank of Leading Aircraftsmen or above.

The work was interesting and rewarding for the instructors usually carried out a short flight test with one of the ground crew before taking pupils on instruction. It was exciting too because occasional mishaps occurred which might involve righting an aircraft and repairing the damage involved or changing a wheel, an engine, or even large items such as a wing, tail plane or rudder.

Two NCO instructors frequently flew my aircraft. One of them, Sergeant Bebb, asked me one day if I wanted to be a pilot and I told him that I had applied and had passed the Central Medical Establishment tests in London. He advised me to apply again, which I did. After that he gave me instruction, albeit of short duration during subsequent test flights together. Flight Sergeant Simpson also gave me instruction during our test flights together.

Among the pupils on the flying course was Leading Aircraftsman Don Finlay who had been an apprentice of the 12th Entry at Halton. Whilst an apprentice he set up a record time for the RAF Hurdles and held the title until 1939. During his outstanding athletic career he won many titles and became the AAA Champion and held it for twenty years. He was commissioned and rose to the rank of Group Captain.

Life at Spitalgate was very pleasant and the town of Grantham nearby at the bottom of the hill was a most interesting town. The "Angel" dates back to medieval times. In a room over the archway Richard III is reputed to have signed the death warrant of Buckingham. The 'George' is a typical inn of the coaching period and is highly praised in 'Nicholas Nickleby'. Near the parish church is the old Grammar School where Newton was a scholar. Grantham in 1930 boasted 98 pubs one of which bore a sign of distinct curiosity - The Beehive Inn and which I visited frequently. In fact it was very popular with airmen from the camp not only for its beer but probably for its attractive barmaid!

I frequently went to Nottingham where I used to meet a girl I had been introduced to by a school chum - Vera at a dance at Warminster Town hall. Despite my forays to Grantham and Nottingham I could not forget Gladys who I had met during my last leave at home. So about once a month I went home for a weekend. The distance was about a hundred and eighty miles and I would see Gladys for about an hour. However we enjoyed the short spells together.

These meetings were doomed to end after a few months because Mrs. Brocklebank was due to have another child and decided to join her husband who had been posted in Malta. In due course Mrs. Brocklebank, her three children, the nursery governess and Gladys set off for Malta overland on the Blue Train. Gladys in her subsequent letters from Malta described the journey as luxurious and exciting. They arrived at Syracuse where they had to await the arrival of the Malta Packet, as the ferry was known, which was delayed by bad weather.

Also staying at the hotel in Syracuse was Benito Mussolini who was there with his wife. At that time he was Prime Minister and Chief of the Italian State. Gladys' letters from Sliema in Malta were full of excitement over the weather, the swimming, and parties she was having. Her letters were regular and full of news but after a few months began to slow and finally stopped. After a few weeks a letter arrived to tell me that she had met a boy she liked who was in the Navy.

I was shattered at first but then became angry. I never replied to her letter but began to whoop it up by frequent visits to Nottingham with some of my pals. I began to take more interest in flying and enjoyed cross country trips which some of the instructors used to carry out. During the years I was at the flying training school I had five cross country trips. I used to

borrow the appropriate maps so that I could map-read the trips we made which was to be of considerable use to me in subsequent years.

I also greatly enjoyed the very short periods of dual instruction which I frequently received from Flight Sergeant Simpson and Sergeant Bebb during the morning test flights carried out before pupil instruction was commenced. In all I had sixty-seven flights with a total of nearly 17 hours flying time of which about two and a half hours were spent in dual instruction.

Despite the enjoyment of flying and the attractions of Grantham, Nottingham, and Skegness I still had thoughts of Gladys. I eventually came to a decision when the annual lists of postings overseas were published. These lists gave the rank, name, and trade of personnel to be posted to foreign parts of the Empire. Postings to the colonies, in those days were, in general, for five years which meant that if you, for example, found yourself posted to the North West Frontier of India, you knew that you would be away from home and your loved ones for five years.

The duration of service of RAF personnel in the Fleet Air Arm was, in general, two and a half years. So as I had quite enjoyed my previous time in the carrier Argus I volunteered again for the Fleet Air Arm in the hope that I might be posted to an aircraft carrier of the Mediterranean Fleet which were based at Malta. Instead I was posted to No 449 Flight which was one of the units aboard the aircraft carrier HMS Furious of the Home Fleet.

Chapter 7

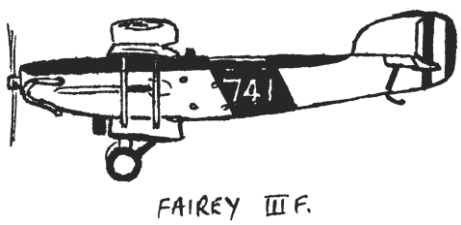
Return to the Fleet Air Arm

When my posting came through 449 Flight was ashore at Novar[16] which is between Invergordon and Dingwall. This meant that I had to travel by rail from Grantham to Dingwall to join the Flight. I was collected at Dingwall by service transport and taken to Novar. This was a hutted camp with only one hangar quite near Evantan. It was only used by the Fleet Air Arm flights for part of the year. When I saw it I liked what I saw and settled in for a good night's sleep. However the next morning I was sent for by Flight Sergeant 'Dizzy' Warrener and told that my aircraft was aboard the carrier Courageous operating with the flights aboard her. He told me to be ready to travel down to Queensferry on the River Forth the next day to replace a fitter who was posted elsewhere. That day I was issued with a fitter's tool kit and box, my kit bag was still packed so that it was no problem. I was issued with a warrant to travel by rail to Queensferry.

Figure 20. - FAA airfield at Novar

On arrival at Queensferry I found I had some distance to go from the station down to the village itself. However I was helped by a porter who carried my tool box for me to the village which involved walking down what seemed like about two hundred steps near the Forth Bridge. On arrival I could not see the Courageous or any other naval ships anchored below the bridge. Enquiries made to the slipway staff revealed that Courageous put to sea early that morning and was not expected back until the next day. As it was now evening time I decided to find somewhere to spend the night. Enquiries in the nearest pub revealed that a lady nearby let rooms so I went along to see her. She told me she had a room with two double beds in it. I could have one bed which I accepted. As it was then ten o'clock in the evening and I was tired I went straight to bed. I fell asleep quickly only to be wakened when three men came into the room talking loudly and were surprised to see me. They were also going aboard the Courageous next day having been ashore for a couple of days local leave. After introducing ourselves and chatting for a while the other three undressed and two got into the empty bed and the third got into my bed. It had been his bed the previous night!

Next day we all got up together, had breakfast, paid the landlady our dues and headed for the ferry steps where we were joined by other personnel bound for the Courageous. We saw the carrier dropping anchor just below the bridge and shortly after a pinnace arrived alongside the jetty. We were soon on our way out to the carrier. On board I found the rigger and the wireless operator and my aircraft in the hangar. Whilst looking over the aircraft, which was a Blackburn fleet spotter, the pilot Flying Officer Hartwright arrived and I was introduced to him. We remained on board Courageous for about a week flying on exercises in conjunction with her aircraft and returning to Queensferry each evening. At the end of our operations with Courageous we flew back to Novar and rejoined 449 Flight.



No 449 Flight was re-equipped with Fairey IIIF aircraft and after leaving Novar it operated, when ashore, from RAF Gosport. This was very convenient to me

[16] Later renamed Evanton, it had belonged to Novar Estates

because I could get home to Longbridge Deverill in a reasonable time being only about 62 miles from Gosport.

Whilst at Gosport we were housed in the Station barracks with all the normal RAF station facilities available to us such as the NAAFI, sports fields, cinema etc.. The alternative would have been accommodation in one of the forts such as Rowner which would not have been so comfortable. RAF Gosport was almost in the town of Gosport and Portsmouth could be quickly reached by ferry.

I enjoyed working on the Fairey III which was fitted with a Napier Lion engine with which I was quite familiar having carried out complete overhauls on this type whilst serving in HMS Argus. I did a quite a lot of flying at Gosport occupying the navigator's seat on flights which did not require a navigator.

Figure 21. 'my' Fairey IIIF, S1518, lands on

Being near my home I made frequent visits to my parents and on one occasion I spent a weekend at Gladys' home at Camelsdale. On one of my trips home I received a letter from Gladys' in Malta. It came as a shock for she asked me if we could get together again when she returned to England. I was overjoyed and wrote to her expressing my delight.

Gladys' father had suffered from valvular disease and died at the age of forty-two so I never met him. Her mother Elizabeth was left with two girls and a boy. A couple of years after her husband's death she met and later married a widower Frederick Bullock a building contractor. He was twenty-two years older than Elizabeth and had five sons and a daughter.

His eldest son Frank was a district surveyor in Africa. The next son, Dick, had served in the RNAS in the Great War. He was head of the workshop in which two more sons, Tom and John worked. There was also an apprentice carpenter. The remaining son Bill worked for an uncle who was also in the building business.

Fred Bullock was a descendant of a brother of Mary Ann Bullock who married Sir Henry Featherstonhaugh of Uppark in Sussex. Mary Ann was a dairy maid and it is said that Sir Henry heard her singing one day. He later married her when he was seventy and Mary was nineteen!

The Brocklebank family of four children and their nursery staff returned home to Longbridge House early in 1931. My trips home from Gosport became more frequent to see Gladys and we became closer as the time went on. We visited relatives of my father in Dorset. His sister Beatrice was married to a farmer and lived at Trent. He also had another sister at Thornford. My relatives became very fond of Gladys.

From Gosport the Flight flew to North Coates Fitties - a gunnery practice camp near Stranraer[17]. This was a new experience for me and quite exciting for I was able to fly as a passenger on most of the front gun firing practices carried out by the pilot. The targets were on the ground and were attacked during dives. Unfortunately a tragedy occurred during the time we were at North Coates. The naval Telegraphist in the crew of my aircraft with whom I had flown

[17] Perhaps mistaken for West Freugh; North Coates is near Grimsby.

several times was killed in very extraordinary circumstances. He came into the crew room which was adjacent to the armoury in a large hut and was squatting with his back to a wall. On the other side, in the armoury, an armourer was dismantling a gun removed from one of the aircraft when it accidentally fired and the bullet, travelling in a downward direction, passed through the dividing wall and struck the telegraphist in the head, killing him instantly. It was a great shock to us all as he was a very popular member of 449 Flight.

From North Coates the Flight moved to Novar again for about three weeks, the pilots carrying out dummy deck landing practice, range finding etc.. The Flight returned to Gosport where a replacement naval telegraphist joined the crew of my aircraft. I flew on a considerable number of occasions as a passenger on exercises consisting of attacks on targets which were recorded on a camera gun fitted to the aircraft. The results and scores were assessed from the films taken.

On one occasion I was passenger in a Hawker Horsley torpedo bomber. On this occasion the pilot launched the torpedo against a target in Stokes Bay. This was an unusual and exciting experience for me. On other exercises quite a number were carried out at Netheravon to which I was first posted after my apprentice training.

Whilst at Gosport and visiting my home frequently Gladys and I decided we would become engaged. Whilst on a weekend at her home in Camelsdale I asked her mother if we could do so. She gave us her blessing and the next day we went to Portsmouth and bought the engagement ring. On the way back and about a mile from her home Gladys asked me to stop and said she wished to wear the ring on arrival. So we became engaged at a spot beside the road near Camelsdale. We have passed the spot many times during the ensuing years and both enjoy the feeling of nostalgia that arises.

One day Gladys told me that she would be in Scotland for about a month early in the summer of 1932 with the Brocklebanks. I found that I would be back on the Furious at that time and promised to meet her at Glasgow, where she would be staying, or at Edinburgh. The Flight embarked on Furious off Portsmouth and we sailed to Queensferry where I arranged to meet Gladys at Edinburgh on a Saturday and Sunday. As she did not know Edinburgh I told her I would try to be there before her train arrived and would meet her at the top of the Waverley Steps in Princes Street. On that day the Furious had a football match arranged with Rosyth which is on the north side of the Forth. I needed to catch a liberty boat to Queensferry but to add insult to injury the officer of the watch decided to send most of the liberty boats to Rosyth in the hope of getting a lot of spectators to support the Furious team. I made my way to Dunfermline and caught the train to Edinburgh to find Gladys had been waiting in the rain for an hour afraid to move in case we missed each other. However we were happy to be together and booked rooms in an hotel, had a meal, and went to the pictures. The next day we explored the beautiful city of Edinburgh including Holyrood House and the Castle. The time passed very quickly and on Sunday evening I saw Gladys off to Glasgow from Waverley station.

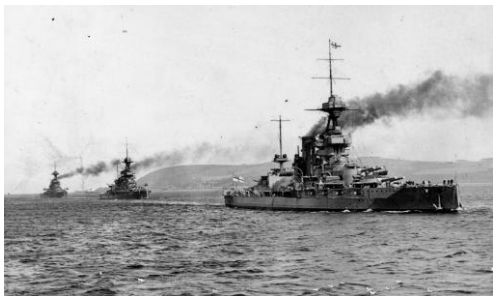


Figure 22. - Battlecruisers in Cromerty Firth

The following weekend I went by train to Glasgow where Gladys met me and took me back to the house where she was staying with the Brocklebank family. After a lovely day with her I went back to Queensferry and the Furious. The ship left Queensferry next day and we continued exercises with the home Fleet before putting into Invergordon in the Cromarty Firth. We were joined

by the battleships Nelson and Rodney and the battle cruisers Valiant, Warspite, and Malaya. The anchorage was quite near the sunken German battleship Natal which had been scuttled by the crew after capture at the end of the Great War.

From Invergordon the fleet continued on exercises until we reached Scapa Flow in the Orkneys where the Furious stayed a couple of days. I went on shore leave to Kirkwall and had a good look round the town. From the Orkneys the fleet continued carrying out exercises until our next stop which was at Lock Eriboll on the north coast of Scotland. We were there two nights then on down the west coast of Scotland. During exercises on this run an aircraft from another flight crashed and the crew were killed. Furious put into Loch Ewe for one night then on to Portree in the Isle of Skye where the crew were buried with military honours.

After leaving Portree further exercises were carried out and our next port of call was Greenock where the fleet split up and went to various seaside towns round the west and south coasts of Britain. Our next stop was Aberystwyth where we remained three or four days and the ship was thrown open to visitors. One of the aircraft of my flight - No 449 - was put on floats so that the pilots could continue flying practice while the ship remained at anchor. I had two flights as passenger in the floatplane while we were at Aberystwyth. Our next stop was at Tenby where the ship was again open to visitors.

From Tenby we sailed round Lands End to Teignmouth stopping briefly off Falmouth, Fowey, and Plymouth. I had two more floatplane flights to Torquay, Babbacombe and Paignton. Finally the ship arrived back at Portsmouth and its Flights flew ashore to Gosport. Number 449 Flight went to Netheravon and remained there until it re-embarked in January 1933.

As Netheravon was near my home at Longbridge Deverill I was there every weekend with my parents and seeing Gladys as often as I could. My Calthorpe was put to very good use during the latter half of 1932. It was during this period that we planned to marry and with the whole-hearted approval of our parents. It was also at this time that I realised that Gladys' stepbrothers tended to call her Sammy or Sam. I had not bothered about it before because I found that they were inclined to call each other by names other than their own. For instance Bill was called Yokel, Tom became Nighter because he, being single, never came home before midnight. Gladys' mother's name was shortened to Lizzie. Many years later I discovered that Dick was not short for Richard as is usual for his name was Frederick! Such were the peculiar ways of the Bullocks! However I liked Gladys' nickname - Sammy and started to use it in my letters to her. To this day some fifty-five years later I still address her as Sam in conversation.

At Netheravon 449 Flight continued the various exercises necessary to keep up efficiency and I had numerous flights as passenger including night flying for the first time. The lights of the towns and villages were a sight previously not known to me. I had put out the goose flares, which consisted of a can like a large watering can filled with paraffin with a wick in the spout, when night flying was in progress the flares were lit. From the air the parallel lines indicated the landing strip and were a reassuring sight to the aviator.

Early in January 1933 the Flights were embarked in the Furious and we left Portsmouth for the Spring Cruise to the Mediterranean with other ships of the Home Fleet. We put into Gibralter where I had been before when in the Argus and then on to Malta where various exercises were carried out with the Mediterranean Fleet.

After the exercises the Fleets broke up and individual ships proceeded to various ports or seaside towns. The Furious proceeded to Palma in Majorca and remained about a week. I enjoyed

travelling around Majorca and on one of my trips I went to Soller by bus. The journey was most enjoyable for the road climbed over hills in a zig-zag fashion creating exciting views in all directions over the island. Soller itself is located on an inland lagoon connected to the sea through a narrow entrance. It had a fishing fleet and lovely sandy beaches. I stayed a couple of hours then caught the bus back to Palma with its narrow streets, shops and trams.


Figure 23. - HMS Furious

The Furious returned to Gibralter carrying out flying exercises en route. A number of letters were awaiting me and Sammy told me the date of our wedding which was to be on 15th April at Fernhurst. I arranged for the banns to be called on the ship at Sunday church, which took place in the after end of the lower hangar. Just before we left Gibralter a signal was received from the Air Ministry stating that I was to report to Number 5 Flying Training School at Sealand for flying training. I had given up all hope of becoming a pilot and I was within three months of reaching the age of twenty-four years beyond which airmen were not accepted for training as pilots.

On arrival at Portsmouth I left the ship and went straight to Sammy's home where we discussed the advisability of postponing the wedding. I was excited about the course but at the same time apprehensive. I felt that if we married at the beginning of the training and anything happened to me it would be devastating to Sammy who was only twenty years old. However we talked about it sensibly and decided to proceed as planned. Sammy's mother had reached a late stage in the preparation and everyone was excited about the forthcoming event.

Chapter 8

Over Land

I arrived at No 5 Flying Training School at Sealand in mid-March and found myself with four other airmen pupil pilots on the new course. We were located in a barrack block retained for airmen pupil pilots. We were all excited and talked of our hopes of becoming bomber or fighter pilots. Two courses per year were accepted by the school - one commencing in February and the other in August. Each course comprising five or six airmen pupils and about ten officers.


Figure 24. – Hopefuls, Joe second from left

I was the eldest of the airmen pupils on the course we were about to start. My instructor was Flying Officer Eayers and we got on well from the start. After the first two or three flights I felt quite confident which, no doubt, was due to the unofficial dual instruction I had received when I was at Spitalgate a couple of years previously. We were taught taxiing, taking off into wind, straight and level flying, stalling, climbing, gliding, medium and gliding turns, steep turns with and without engine, landing and judging distances and spinning. After two weeks of dual instruction I was sent off solo. I had done six hours and forty-five minutes dual instruction and was the first of my course to go solo. This was five days before I was due to be married at Easter.

At Easter we had leave from Thursday after work until Monday midnight. I had bought the wedding ring in Chester and set off for Haslemere to my fiancé's home where all was ready for our wedding on Easter Saturday. We were married at Fernhurst, Sussex. My brother Donald was my best man and my sister Eva one of the bridesmaids. After the reception Gladys and I set off for Portsmouth and over to the Isle of Wight where we spent two days honeymooning at Brading. On Easter Monday we set off back to Haslemere where I left my new bride with her parents and made my way back to Sealand. On Tuesday morning my instructor took me off to do steep turns with engine, taking off into wind, landing and judging distances, then aerobatics (loops). Immediately after I was sent off solo to carry out the items which we had done that morning.

The next day I reported my marriage to the Headquarters Orderly Room which were duly published in permanent routine orders, PRO's. I fully expected a come-back since pupil pilots were not expected to be married before or during the pilots course but all was well. So life proceeded apace with flying, dual and solo, repeating all the items I had already been taught over and over again.

In between times we were taken up to do instrument flying. Our training aircraft, the Avro Lynx, were fitted with a fabric hood on the rear cockpit which could be pulled over the rear pilot's head thus concealing everything outside the cockpit. In the Avro Lynx the instructor sat in the front seat under the upper mainplane. One's first experience of flying "under the hood" can be somewhat unnerving making it extremely difficult to believe what the instruments are indicating to you.

After I had received about half a dozen blind flying lessons I was sent off to do forty minutes solo flying. The day was sunny and clear except for clouds building up to cumulus with

large gaps between them. Their bases were at about 2000 feet. I climbed to fly through a large gap but entered the cloud before I got through. After a while in cloud I found the airspeed going up so I pulled on the stick to climb steeper. Still the speed went up and I came out of the cloud in a tight spiral, nose down, and throttle wide. When I saw the ground I was able to correct things immediately and resume normal level flight but I was very shaken and realised I needed a lot more blind flying practice before I ventured into clouds again. I went back to the airfield and landed. My instructor saw me and wanted to know why I had not carried out the flying time authorised. I told him what had happened. He advised me to keep away from unfriendly clouds until I had done more instrument flying - a sobering remark!

Shortly after this the first accident occurred in which an instructor was killed. An aircraft containing an instructor and pupil was approaching the airfield to land. Above and to the right of them was a pupil flying solo who started to sideslip to lose height. In doing so he slid across the aircraft below and his tail skid caught and severed the balance cable above its upper wing. The instructor immediately ordered the pupil to bale out and leapt out himself. His parachute failed to open before he hit the ground and he was killed. His pupil, however, continued on the glide path and landed on the airfield. He was Pilot Officer P H Dunn who later rose to the rank of Air Chief Marshall. I was also in the circuit and landed close to P/O Dunn's aircraft in which he was still sitting. His aircraft had all four ailerons hanging down because of the broken balance cable.

Sammy and I wrote to each other very frequently giving news of what was happening to us both. I began looking for an apartment or rooms so that she could come to Sealand after my first course. Pupil pilots were not allowed to live off the station which meant I had to be back in barracks by 23.59 hours daily. Eventually I found rooms in Shotton near Connors Quay, in the home of a young widow with a son about ten years old. Her house was less than a mile from the camp. Sammy was thrilled when I wrote and told her and we both looked forward to being together again.

The first term of six month duration ended about mid-August. By the end of the term I had received 29 hours dual instruction and 5½ hours instrument flying together with 55½ hours solo flying. During the term we were tested by the Flight Commander after every 15 hours flying and by the Chief Flying Instructor after 60 hours. I enjoyed two proud moments during the first term. One was that I was the first pupil to go solo after 6½ hours dual instruction. The second was when I received my flying log book back from the Station Commander showing that my proficiency as a pilot was rated as "Exceptional"!

At the end of term one of the airmen pupil pilots failed the course and was taken off flying and posted back to a service unit. This left four of us. I was posted to the fighter training flight, equipped with Armstrong-Whitworth Siskins, and the others to the bomber training flight equipped with Avro Atlas aircraft.

Figure 25. Southsea honeymoon

Sammy and I had decided to spend two weeks honeymoon at Southsea and I had already booked accommodation through a friend on the course who had a relative in Southsea who let rooms. So, when the time arrived I set off from Sealand for Sammy's home at Camelsdale. After a few days with them we went to Southsea and our apartments. The owner and his wife were charming and helpful and owned a fish and chip shop on the ground floor which my friend had forgotten to tell me! We enjoyed excellent weather whilst at Southsea and swam daily and enjoyed ourselves immensely.

After Southsea we returned to Sammy's home. I always enjoyed staying with her parents. Sammy' stepfather and I got on well together. He encouraged me to do odd jobs in the workshops which resulted in me taking up woodwork as a hobby in later years. His wedding present to us was an oak gate-legged table.

From Camelsdale we went to stay with my parents at Longbridge Deverill. They always loved having us and both my brother and sister were there too.

In due course I had to return to Sealand for the second term of flying instruction, but this time with my wife. We went to our rooms in Shotton where the lady owner met us and made us welcome. A day or two after our arrival I had to return to camp and live in. I spent every evening with Sammy in our rooms during which I frequently wrote up notes or swatted up instructions given during ground training for subjects such as navigation, meteorology, engineering etc. which took place between flying training. I had to return to camp daily by midnight except when I could get occasional weekend passes.

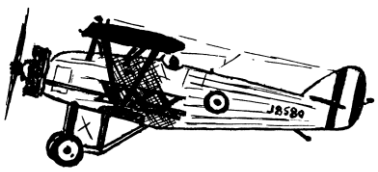
We were now in the senior term and on the first day back at camp we met the new intake of airmen pupil pilots - about six of them I believe. A week or so later one of the juniors asked me for advice as he had married just before coming on the course. He wanted to know if I had reported my marriage and I told him I simply handed in details to the NCO in charge of the Orderly Room and they were duly published later in PRO's. He did the same and a few days later he was in great distress for he was hauled up before the Station Commander. He had already started flying under instruction and was promptly grounded and told that he could be removed from the course. However a week later he was reinstated and brought his young wife and found rooms for her as I had done for Sammy.

Flying training restarted and I began receiving dual instruction on the dual control Siskins. The Siskin, with its 550 Horsepower Siddeley Jaguar double-row 14-cylinder radial engine, was very familiar to me having carried out many weeks, days, and hours servicing them when I was at Spitalgate, Grantham, together with the unofficial flying instruction which I had been given by two NCO flying instructors I have mentioned earlier.

Figure 26. - Siskin and Bulldog trainers, RAF Sealand, 1934

Dual instruction commenced going through the same procedures used in the Avro Lynx's. I was sent off on my first solo in a dual Siskin after four hours. Later in the course most of the solo flying was in the Siskin IIIA which was the same as the aircraft in operational squadrons except that they were unarmed.

In the Siskin III the centre-section of the upper wing was just above the windscreen it was said that if you were not strapped in tightly and made a bad landing or turned over you were liable to be shot forward and bang your nose on the back of the centre-section. This was known as Siskin nose!



ARMSTRONG WHITWORTH
SISKIN. IIIA

During one of my solo flying trips in a Siskin I had

been doing gliding turns, steep turns, spinning, and side-slipping lasting forty-five minutes and was returning to the airfield when there was a bang and something shot past my head. The engine was misfiring and vibrating. I reached the airfield and forced landed and stopped the engine in the middle of the airfield. There were no runways in those days and we were not fitted with radio. The fire tender came roaring out to me when I stopped the engine and on examination we found that a valve rocker arm had broken away from the cylinder head putting that cylinder out of action.

During the senior term we did cross-country flights. This involved careful plotting of the course to steer taking into account the wind speed and direction, forbidden areas to avoid, height to fly to clear obstacles and hills etc. My first cross-country was a four course one to Shrewsbury, Stafford, Ternhill, and back to Sealand. It took one hour five minutes. The next one was from Sealand to Grantham where I landed and met some of my old friends still stationed there. Then back to Sealand. This was a rough weather trip the journey to Grantham taking one hour thirty minutes and the return took forty-five minutes.

At the end of the year the Siskins were to be replaced by the Bristol Bulldog with which the RAF fighter squadrons were being armed. The Bulldog was a biplane of steel construction with fabric covering and had a Bristol Jupiter VIIF nine-cylinder radial engine. The dual control Bulldogs had slightly different flight characteristics to the fighter type. This was demonstrated when my flight commander, who had not flown a dual Bulldog before, took me up for dual instruction. We climbed to about nine thousand feet and he decided to spin the aircraft. The spin started and after three or four turns he put the controls in position to stop the spin. The aircraft however responded by doing about two more turns then the nose came up and the machine did a flat turn then dropped vertically before coming out in the normal way. He did another one with the same results then told me to do a spin. The same motion occurred with me and I cannot say I liked it.

By the end of the course I had completed one hundred and sixty-three hours and forty-five minutes flying of which forty-three hours twenty-five minutes were dual instruction, one hundred and four hours fifty minutes solo flying and eleven hours thirty-five minutes were instrument flying. Assessment for the senior term was "Average" which was disappointing and brought forth some leg pulling by my fellow airmen pilots on the advantages and disadvantages of having a wife nearby!

Towards the end of term one of our ground technical instructors - a civilian - said he had a car for sale. It was a Clyno and he was asking twelve pounds for it. I examined it and found it was in good condition and about seven years old. It was a four seater, mauve in colour with a drop head and according to the instructor had been owned by a lady and mostly driven by a chauffeur. I bought it and found that it was not very lively and consumed a lot of petrol. I decided that at the end of the course I would give it a good look over. In the meantime Sammy and I decided we would fit new celluloid panels in the side screens which had become yellow, brittle, and cracked. We bought new celluloid, cut it to shape and laboriously sewed them into the side screens. It smartened up the car considerably.


Figure 27. – Fighter pilot !

After our passing out parade we airmen pilots decided to have a farewell party in Chester. As there were only four of us who completed the course I said I would take them in the car. Sammy insisted that I should go and since none of the others would be

accompanied by womenfolk she declined to come with us. We had a merry time in Chester and being obliged to return to camp by 23.59 hours we left in good time so that I could call on Sammy and say good night. She had gone to bed but heard us arrive outside the house. She looked out of the bedroom window to see a foot sticking out through a celluloid window which she had so lovingly and laboriously repaired and told me to take the hilarious occupant of the back seat away before we woke up the whole street!

Next day we were paraded and inspected by the Station Commander, Group Captain Norton, with the Chief Flying Instructor, Squadron Leader John Oliver, and the flight commanders. We were awarded our wings and the four airmen pupils promoted to the rank of Sergeant. We were also notified of our postings which in my case was to 56 Fighter Squadron North Weald. The squadron was equipped with Bristol Bulldog IIA single seat fighter aircraft. The other three airmen pupils on my course were posted to units elsewhere in the country.

We said good-bye to them, packed our bags, and went on leave for two weeks. We set off in the Clyno for my home in Wiltshire. This was the first time I had driven the car any distance and after a few miles the engine began to overheat and it did not appear to pull very well. However we went on more slowly and put in more water when we stopped for petrol. Then as we approached Gloucester the fog came down. This resulted in much slower progress and more overheating. In one part of the town the fog was so thick that Sammy got out and walked in front of the car to direct me. Climbing out of Gloucester the engine boiled but because we were reaching higher ground the fog was less dense. It was then about midnight and we saw a cottage with a light on. We stopped and knocked at the door which was opened by an old boy who, when we asked for water which he gave us in a watering can, said "I know what you young 'uns have been doing - you've been speeding"! I didn't think it funny after all the frustration we had suffered but restrained myself and thanked him for his help.

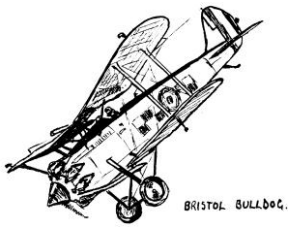
We arrived at my home in the early hours and next day I was up determined to find out why the car was not performing as it should. I checked the contact breaker points on the magneto and found the gap satisfactory. When cranking up the engine the compression seemed satisfactory so I then checked the timing and found that the contact breaker points were opening very late in the cycle. On the Clyno the magneto was driven through a rubber drive which was serrated to allow adjustment of the magneto timing. The magneto had obviously been removed at some time and reconnected incorrectly. After I had reset the magneto and checked the sparking plug gaps I cranked up the car and the engine leapt into life and ran like a Rolls! I drove it round the village and it was a different car - full of pep and on subsequent journeys I found the petrol consumption almost halved.

I wondered how the Engineering Instructor who sold me the car could have driven the car and sold it in that condition. We spent a week at my home and saw many of our friends then said good-bye to my parents and drove to Sammy's home. Her mother came out into the drive and asked whose car we had. When we said it was ours she asked if we had paid for it! After this interlude I went to my first Squadron as a fighter pilot - Number 56 at North Weald.

Chapter 9

Fighter Pilot

On arrival at North Weald I was accommodated in the Sergeants Mess and soon learned that I had no hope of a married quarter which were allotted on a points system. Having been married only a year I must have been near the bottom of the list.



I soon met a number of sergeant pilots in the mess some in my squadron No 56 and others in 29 Squadron which was also based at North Weald. I soon found too that Warrant Officers in particular were not very partial to young sergeant pilots who had reached the rank more rapidly than those who were following the trades they were trained in.

For the first week during working hours I hung around the flight office and asking when I could fly. I was put off with various excuses. On the Friday of that week the deputy flight commander called me and asked me if I would like to take a Bulldog to Bristol where they were built. I was delighted to think my first flight with 56 Squadron would be a cross country one. I then asked him when and he told me to go to the MT Section and see the Warrant Officer in charge. When I told him my business he said "come with me" and took me to one of the MT bays and there was the Bulldog aeroplane partly dismantled and secured in a Leyland lorry and trailer. The WO then told me to report to him at 8 am on Monday morning to take the vehicle and load over which I would be in charge. Furthermore the driver was a civilian who could drive only until 5 p.m. by which time I was to find billets for the two of us and restart by 8 am next day!

On Monday morning I arrived at the MT Section, was handed documents for the Bristol Aeroplane Company when we arrived, and told to get the load there safely. We set off. Leyland lorries apparently did not have windscreens in those far off days so I was glad I had brought my greatcoat. However as the day progressed the sun shone brightly and I began to enjoy the journey. The driver was a very friendly type and filled me in with the news of the day-to-day happenings and personalities at North Weald. As five o'clock approached I checked the driver's map and decided we could make Hungerford about 5 p.m. As we entered the town I saw a policeman pounding his beat so we stopped and I got out to ask him to advise me where we could stay. He took us to a pub which had a large walled-in yard used for residents' cars. The landlord agreed to the billeting conditions so we put our vehicle and its load in the yard. We were taken to our rooms then we sat before a huge fire and rested until the landlady called us for a meal. We must have arrived looking starved for she prepared us fried eggs, bacon, sausages and tomatoes covering our dinner plates. We were hungry and consumed the lot. By that time I was feeling the effect of the wind and sun on the journey which had taken us about nine and a half hours.

The next day we pressed on to Bristol, delivered the Bulldog, had lunch at the works, and then set off back. We arrived at Marlborough where we parked the now unladen Leyland in a car park and billeted ourselves at a pub in the main street. The next morning we set off early and reached North Weald that evening.

The next morning I turned up at the Flight Office feeling a bit disgruntled at what I thought was a poor joke played on me. The flight commander called me into his office and congratulated me on carrying out my instructions in the way I did. He called in an officer and

told him to give me a flight in a dual Bulldog after which I was immediately authorised to do forty minutes circuits and landings to get used to the airfield which was all grass being before the days of runways.

In the meantime I was actively searching for accommodation so that I could get Sammy with me. One night in a local pub in North Weald village I enquired of the landlord's wife if she knew of any villagers who let rooms. She told me that a friend of hers in a council house nearby sometimes took in paying guests. So next day I saw her and she agreed to let us have accommodation which would be in confidence because she was not allowed to let in a council house. I collected Sammy within a day or two and we were soon established there and living together legally as far as the RAF was concerned.

Our accommodation was quite good. We had a bedroom and sitting cum dining room and shared the kitchen and other facilities there. She was a very nice person with three children of which we saw very little. She was very cleanly and used to holystone the front step to a gleaming white. She taught Sammy to do it so the landlady did it one week and Sammy the next.

Now Sammy and I were together we had more time to enquire about and look for alternative accommodation as we wanted to have our own place. Very soon we discovered that a wealthy man who lived near Coopersdale had decided to build a number of semi-detached houses in the village some interspersed with existing cottages. We made enquiries and found that they were to be three bedrooms, a lounge, kitchen, dining room with French doors to the garden. There were no garages but space was left beside each house for a garage if required. The cost was £500 for a pair, £300 each bought separately or 16 shillings (80p) per week rented.


Figure 28. – Sgt Pilot Lane at West Freugh

We could not wait to get one for the village was lovely and the location excellent being about a mile and a half from the camp. We were very fortunate to obtain one of the second pair built on a weekly rental base. We quickly bought as much furniture as we could afford - a bedroom suite, a lounge suite, we had our oak dining table which Sammy's stepfather had given us as a wedding present. We moved in as soon as possible and were the first RAF family in the newly built houses.

By this time Sammy was about three months pregnant so we continued to buy furniture, curtains, rugs etc. for the house as and when we could afford them. My pay as a Sergeant pilot was about £4 10/- (£4.50) per week which was quite good in 1934. We quickly made friends with a number of the villagers who were very helpful and gave us lots of good advice. I got to know a number of the village men on my occasional visits to the pub who were always willing to help us on any problems we might have. Our nearest town was about two miles away. We did our shopping there using the Clyno and parking was no problem in the broad main street of Epping as it then was. We liked the town which could provide everything we were likely to need. In the summer it was quite a pleasant walk across the fields to Epping.

Building continued apace in the village until our particular area bounded by the road through the village on the north side, the railway on the west and south, and large properties on the east side. Soon more RAF families moved into the village. One particular couple - a sergeant pilot Dick Howell and his wife, newly married moved into one of the houses in the next road to us. Dick Howell was in B Flight 56 Squadron and I was in C Flight. We became life long friends.

I was extremely happy in a fighter squadron and found the operational Bristol Bulldog a joy to fly. My Bulldog was K2226 and it was a Mark IIA which had all the modern refinements like a radio, wheel brakes, and a tail wheel instead of a tailskid. 56 Squadron covered Sector B of the Fighting Area. Fighter stations in the area were Duxford, North Weald, Hornchurch, Biggin Hill, Kenley and Tangmere. A good deal of my flying in the early days was in formation with the other aircraft of the Squadron. The first day of the week was usually devoted to a battle flight climb to 15 or 16 thousand feet which was done without using oxygen. On other occasions the Squadron would climb to over 20,000 feet when we would use oxygen. Exercises included Sector patrols some of which were carried out at dusk, attacking other aircraft using a camera gun or acting as a target for other pilots of the squadron.

Figure 29. Restored Bulldog (Filton 1964)

Sammy and I were enjoying life in our new house which we named Kilcoran after my birthplace in Ireland. Sammy had said in the early days of our marriage that she wanted children and would like six boys! As the time was now near I wondered how she would feel about it if the first child was a girl. It was arranged for her to go into a nursing home in Loughton, Essex. When the time came I drove her there on the evening of 16th November 1934. The following morning the matron rang me to say Sammy had produced a lovely boy and that both were doing well. I could not wait to see them both and rushed into Loughton as soon as I came off duty. I visited the nursing home every day and finally collected them and brought them home.

When Sammy went into the nursing home I did not expect to receive the shock I did whilst she was in there. Apparently she spent most of her time listening to the radio and on one occasion there was a programme dealing with members of the Royal family in which it was stated that the particular member being discussed was going to have a Dunkley pram for her baby. The programme implied that the Dunkley was the Rolls-Royce of perambulators so Sammy set her heart on a Dunkley. I called at a shop in Epping and found that the Dunkley would cost £12 10/- (£12.50). I wondered how we could afford it having bought the cot clothes etc. for my son. So I decided we would sell the car; which I did to a Flight Sergeant in the Squadron for the princely sum of £10!

At Christmas we went to Sammy's home in Camelsdale where we arranged for my son to be christened. My parents joined us at Camelsdale and with other friends we attended the service and my son was christened Michael Jeremy.

Back at Coopersale Sammy proudly pushed Michael in the gleaming new Dunkley pram about the village showing him off. I was now obliged to cycle to work a distance of a little over a mile. There were one or two other RAF personnel living in the village so we used to travel together on our bicycles to and from the camp.

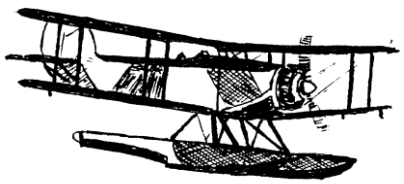
One evening while we were sitting together Sammy asked me how long I would remain in the RAF. I told her I was on a twelve year period after which I might be able to sign on for a further twelve years when I would be able to retire on a pension at the age of forty-two. Her next question was what would be my rank and what would be my pension. I told her I hoped to become a Warrant Officer and my pension at the current rates would be £2 10/- (£2.50) per week. When I asked her why she was asking the questions she simply said she was only interested!

A few days later she produced a piece of paper and presented it to me. In her calculations she reckoned that by the time I retired she would have saved £1000. Of this money she wished to buy one acre of land and build a four bedroomed house on it at a total cost £700. She would like a new Morris 8 the cost of which was then £132 10/- (£132.50). The rest could go into the Post Office and earn interest.

I was flying almost daily with the Squadron until mid-February 1935 when I was warned that I was to be posted on a Fleet Air Arm conversion course. After one year in 56 Squadron and being thoroughly happy with the work it seemed nonsensical to be posted so soon. However the powers that be put it down to the exigencies of the Service! It was a bitter disappointment to Sammy because we had settled down so well in our house at Coopersale and hopefully, planned our future. Sammy's sister and her husband had come to live in our village although his work was in Watford and my parents and my sister were visiting us.

In February I was posted to Calshot, an RAF marine camp, from which the Schneider Trophy aircraft operated in the last two races in 1929 and 1931. I had been to Calshot once before having flown from Biggin Hill to Gosport with other aircraft from 56 Squadron. We carried out affiliation exercises with Southampton flying boats during which the fighter pilots flew as passengers in the flying boats on occasions to act as observers.

The course was to train RAF pilots to fly seaplanes and consisted of ten officers and myself. The course lasted one week during which I received about an hour's dual instruction on Seatutors - an Avro Tutor on floats after which I did three hours solo flying. This was followed by twenty-five minutes dual on Fairey Seals on floats followed by three hours solo flying and practice landings. I enjoyed flying seaplanes but throughout the rest of my service career I never flew one again.



FAIREY SEAL FLOATPLANE.

At the end of the seaplane course we were transferred to RAF(T) Base Leuchers. The course there lasted about six weeks where we flew Fleet Air Arm aircraft such as the Hawker Nimrod - the naval version of the RAF Hawker Fury fighter - and the Fairey Seal and Fairey IIIF. Being a fighter pilot most of my flying was done in the Nimrod. The programme mainly consisted of practice slow flying about 15 knots above the stalling speed for the type followed by slow approaches and landings on a marked out strip of the airfield. This was known as Dummy Deck Landing Practice (DDLP) and its daily repetition became boring in the extreme. The course lasted about 6 weeks at the end of which three catapult launches were carried out, one dual and two solo. When it came to my turn the dual launch and my first solo launch went satisfactorily after which the catapult broke down. It was not repaired before the end of the training period so some months later I was sent to the Royal Aircraft Establishment Farnborough where I did two launches in a Fairey Seal. Naval aircraft used for catapult launches are fitted with adjustable head rests to enable the pilot to hold his head steady during the launch.

Figure 30. – Seaplane course, Calshot 1937
Joe top left (the only NCO pilot!)

From Leuchers we were sent to RAF Gosport for two weeks where more dummy deck landing practice was carried out on the airfield. This was followed by deck landings on an aircraft carrier which in our case was HMS Furious - a flat top carrier i.e. no superstructure or funnel on the deck. My first landing was with an instructor in an Avro Lynx trainer followed by four landings in a Nimrod fighter. I returned to North Weald and home in mid-May having been away about ten weeks.

It was lovely to be home again with Sammy and Michael who had grown apace. However the joy of home coming was spoiled after a few days when the squadron flew to Sutton Bridge for its annual practice camp. We remained there for two weeks carrying out attacks with live ammunition against flag and drogue targets towed by a Vickers Gordon tug aircraft. The training was exciting and competitive since the scores were recorded in our flying log books. The squadron returned to North Weald and I had some leave at home with Sammy and Michael during which we celebrated my twenty-fifth birthday.

Figure 31. Hawker Nimrod fleet fighter

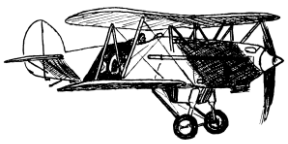
On my return to duty the squadron moved to Mildenhall and remained there for about five days. Squadrons from all RAF Commands arrived and were formed up on the airfield for the RAF Jubilee Review by King George V. They were ranged in the shape of an enormous fan hinged at the saluting base and the flagstaff and covered about half the airfield. There were 370 service aeroplanes from 38 squadrons ranged on the airfield representing just over a third of the total strength of the RAF. The King was driven in a car during his tour of inspection, the officers and ground crews lined up beside their aircraft. The car was driven over five miles before the King had reviewed all the machines.

The King left for Duxford and 182 aircraft took part in the flypast. On the dais with the King were the Queen, the Prince of Wales, and the Duke of York. The Review was described at the time by Major Oliver Stewart MC AFC as the greatest event in aerial history and gave its thousands of watchers the first real understanding of the meaning of air power and the nature of the tasks performed by RAF officers and men.

Chapter 10

Over Seas

I flew back with the squadron after the Review and about a week later I was posted to No. 800 Fleet Fighter Squadron which was temporarily located at Upavon. This was a severe blow to Sammy and myself for, in the first two years of our married life, we had spent about 9 months together in our first home. In the Fleet Air Arm I would be away most of the time. We set about packing up the house and put our furniture in store at Farnham. Sammy and Michael went to my home at Longbridge Deverill which was not far from Upavon where I joined 800 squadron.



The squadron was equipped with Hawker Nimrod aircraft which I had flown on the conversion course at Leuchers. The Nimrod was a single-seat biplane fighter with a Rolls-Royce Kestrel liquid-cooled V12 engine of some 580 horsepower. It was armed with two Vickers .303 machine guns firing through the propeller arc with the aid of synchronisation gear. Ours were painted silver and carried a pattern of nine large blue diamonds along the upper plane between the national roundels to distinguish 800 Squadron and, when at sea, we also had the "sash" painted around the rear fuselage to identify our ship. For HMS Courageous the sash was blue. The Nimrod was similar in appearance to the Fury used by the RAF but had a stainless steel primary structure, fittings for catapult launching, flotation bags in the fuselage and an arrestor hook for deck landings. At Upavon the squadron carried out intensive flying and whilst there I damaged an aircraft for the first time whilst carrying out dummy deck landing practice. The damage was not serious but simply a burst tyre. I got over to my home as often as possible to see my family and found my son being thoroughly spoiled by his grandparents.


Figure 32. – Burst tyre at Upavon

About this time there were mentions in the newspapers and on the radio of trouble brewing up between Italy and Ethiopia. At the end of the month the squadron was ordered to embark on the carrier HMS Courageous. We left Upavon and landed on the carrier on 29th August 1935. For the next two days the ship was a hive of industry embarking its other squadrons of torpedo bombers and fleet spotters and loading up with supplies, ammunition, and aircraft spares. No one quite knew the reason for all the activity but a buzz went round the ship that we were going to Portland. Sammy had written to me saying that my parents were going to Weymouth for a few days so I sent her a telegram saying I hoped to see them there. However it was not to be for in the evening all the booms except one were swung in and the gangways hoisted. The next morning the ship hoisted anchor and we were away. We steamed all day and it became obvious that we were not going to Portland. During the late afternoon the Tannoy called all hands to stand by to hear the Captain. He came on and said that we were bound for Alexandria and that the ship was at war readiness. Immediately after the Captain's announcement an order came over the Tannoy to darken ship. This meant closing all portholes and screwing down the flaps over them to prevent any light showing.

We reached Alexandria after seven days non-stop the ship being darkened each night and avoiding the main shipping routes. We entered the harbour and were tied up to the main wharf. I immediately sent Sammy a somewhat cryptic telegram saying "Arrived Alexandria. Joe". I then

wrote to her why I had not been able to get in touch with her since being at Portsmouth. Thereafter we wrote to each other weekly Sammy telling me all she and Michael had been doing. My letters to her could not include much of the flying I was involved in because all aboard the ship had been cautioned about disclosing its activities.

After a few days in harbour we put to sea and started flying doing R/T[18] calibration and camera gun attacks. During this time I was fired off the ship's catapults. These were called "accelerators" and were operated by steam pressure. The accelerator consisted of a collapsible trolley connected to a series of telescopic tubes beneath the deck. There were two accelerators one on each side at the front of the landing deck. The aircraft to be accelerated taxied to the rear end of the track and the trolley arms moved up to engage the bobbins on each side at the rear of the fuselage. The aircraft was then in flying position with its wheels still on the deck. The control officer would then signal with his flag to open the throttle to take off position. The pilot having done so he put his head against the headrest and at the same time put his hand up which he dropped when he was ready to go. The deck officer would drop his flag and the aircraft would be accelerated off the deck. The experience was quite exciting.

The Courageous was also fitted with arrester gear, consisting of cables stretched across the deck at intervals and raised automatically when aircraft were about to land on. On his approach to land on the pilot would lower his arrester hook, attached to the aircraft, which would hook on to the arrester wire which then brought the aircraft to a stop. Whilst on his approach the pilot would watch the signals from the deck officer who carried two flags one red and one green. He would indicate to the pilot whether he was too high or too low and whether he was going up or down. After landing the pilot would be signalled to release the arrester wire which he did from the cockpit and the deck officer would then signal the pilot to taxi to the forward lift where the engine would be stopped. The aircraft would then be taken down to its hangar and secured.

Figure 33. – HMS Courageous.
(Note landing aircraft above fantail)

The Courageous had two hangars one under the flying deck and one below that. There was an aircraft lift at each end. Fighter aircraft were normally housed in the upper hangar and the larger aircraft in the lower one and the rear half of the upper hangar. When ranging aircraft on the flight deck the fighters were brought up on the forward lift. The larger torpedo bombers and fleet spotters were brought up on the rear lift and ranged behind the fighters.

When landing on the carrier radio silence was usually kept and permission to land was given on an indicator affixed to the rear of the island - a superstructure containing the funnel and located on the starboard side of the landing deck. The indicator consisted of a number of louvres. These were controlled by the officer in charge of flying by means of a lever in his control position up in the superstructure. When the signal "clear to land" was to be indicated the lever was operated turning the flaps over to reveal a white cross on a red background. As each aircraft landed the signal was immediately cancelled until the deck was clear for the next aircraft to land on. There was keen competition

[18]"Radio Telephony" (R/T) was radio speech traffic. "Wireless Telegraphy" (W/T) was signal i.e. Morse Code traffic. - ed

between the squadrons to achieve the shortest time to land all the aircraft of the squadron. Time was reduced by each flight of three aircraft circling the carrier following each other closely. Thus if one aircraft missed the arrester wires and opened up to go round again the following aircraft would nip in and land on.

We put to sea for flying and target practice and to watch the movements of other ships and aircraft particularly the Italians who were sending ships and troops through the Suez canal in a build up for an attack on Ethiopia. We were armed at all times. We spent five days at sea every other week. The alternative weeks were spent in harbours and usually alongside so there was ample opportunity to go ashore and explore Alexandria.


Figure 34. – Sergeants' Mess HMS Courageous

After I had arrived at Upavon I had found that there were three other Sergeant pilots besides myself and a fifth in the Furious. He was unfortunately killed some time later when his aircraft crashed into the sea. Aboard the Courageous we were accommodated in the Sergeants Mess which was located in the bows below the front end of the flying off deck. It consisted of an area with two sides filled with metal lockers in which we had to store our clothes, shoes, etc.. There were two long tables each capable of accommodating twelve people seated on benches. The mess was used by all RAF non-commissioned officers of the squadrons aboard the ship.

In those days all aircraft servicing was carried out by RAF personnel. Aircrew consisted of RAF officer and NCO pilots, Royal Marine, and Royal Navy officer pilots. Naval officers were replacing RAF officers gradually and the officer in charge of flying was a naval commander and the deck control officer was a naval lieutenant. Life aboard was noisy, crowded and generally uncomfortable. I began to feel a little bitter that I was doing the same job as all the commissioned aircrew but that when I got out of my aeroplane I made my way to the Sergeants Mess and either got out my hammock and slung it up to hooks in the girders above the tables or sat or lay on a bench. There was no privacy whatever. In the meantime the officers made their way to the Wardroom, helped themselves to a pink gin, and sat in leather chairs and went to bed in their bunks already prepared by their batmen! I looked forward to the occasions when the squadron put some aircraft ashore at RAF station Aboukir which was near Alexandria. When we were at Aboukir the NCO's were accommodated in the Sergeants Mess where we had all the comforts of a normal RAF station.

On one of our visits to Aboukir my flight commander led the flight to practice formation flying and landings. He took us to a dried up salt lake near a village called Edcu. The surface of this area was as flat and smooth as a billiard table and extended for miles. Here we landed in formation and took off again a number of times before returning to Aboukir. I made a mental note to return as soon as the opportunity arose.

During one of our spells in Alexandria harbour and tied up alongside the jetty an Italian liner, the Ausonia entered the harbour and dropped anchor just inside. The following day it caught fire and blazed furiously and heeled over. It was later towed away and I did not see it again.

Soon after this we left Alexandria for Malta where the ship went into dry dock. Some of our aircraft were flown off to Hal Far airfield. I was accommodated at RAF Calafrana, an RAF flying boat base in Marsaxlokk Bay in the south of the island. On arrival I was given a bunk and issued with bed clothing direct from the stores. I then spent the worst night of my life being bitten by fleas which disapproved of me taking over their territory! The next morning I played hell with the NCO in charge of the stores which issued them to me. Next night I slept soundly on my new bed.

Each morning after breakfast we were collected by service transport and taken to Hal Far aerodrome which is a short distance away from Calafrana. At Hal Far we carried out target practice against towed targets and night flying. We were in Malta for about a week after which we re-embarked and returned to Alexandria. One morning quite early whilst off Alexandria I was flying with the squadron when I had engine trouble and forced landed on the carrier. It was found that the engine had a glycol[19] leak causing misfiring. This put my aircraft out of commission for about a week. I had the aircraft number K2912 ever since I had joined the squadron and would be pleased to get it back again after the engine had been changed.


Figure 35. – Landing on, HMS Courageous

On the 23rd December 1935 some of the squadron aircraft were flown to Aboukir. It was a joy to spend Christmas off the carrier and in the Sergeants Mess with all the Christmas festivities going on. On the 30th December my flight commander authorised me to do an hour's local flying. I took off immediately and made for Edcu which I remembered for the perfect billiard-table surface where I had practised formation landings with my flight. I did a perfect landing having endeavoured to check the wind direction by flying over trees and smoke coming from a fire in the distance. There appeared to be no wind so I practised landings making perfect three-pointers when on my sixth landing the aircraft swung to the left after touching down and before I could correct it my starboard tyre burst and the wheel rim bit into the sand. The aircraft turned over and I found myself upside down in the middle of nowhere. Steam from the header tank made me get out quickly. I found that while hanging in my straps I could just touch the ground with one hand. I did so and pulled my harness release and fell until the back of my head and my shoulders were on the ground. I released my parachute harness and wriggled out of the cockpit and stood up. I walked round the aircraft and surveyed the damage - a broken propeller, upper starboard wing-tip smashed and the top of the rudder and fin crushed.

I walked round the aircraft wondering how I could get in touch with Aboukir. My radio was out of operation because the aerial, which was normally connected from each wing to the fin, was now under the aircraft and crushed into the sand. However within minutes I saw figures in the distance running towards me. Soon they arrived and sat on the sand in a semicircle. There were about fifteen of them, men women and children. I went towards them and asked how far it was to a telephone. One of the young men who spoke a few words of English told me he knew where there was a telephone. I asked how far and he replied "not far"!

By now I realised that my authorised flying time was about over and the flight commander back at Aboukir would soon start a search. I waited about another half hour then

[19] "glycol" = ethylene glycol engine coolant.

decided to walk to the telephone with my volunteer guide. I picked up my parachute and slung it over my shoulder as I knew that if I left it there it would not be there when I got back. We walked for at least two miles and came to a small stone built building in which was an old looking man operating a small switchboard. He could not speak or apparently understand a word of English so my guide endeavoured to help telling him I wanted to speak to the RAF station at Aboukir. After making two or three calls and getting replies from people in no way connected with Aboukir I decided to return to the aircraft.

It was now getting hot as it was after midday and about two and a half hours after leaving Aboukir. My guide very kindly carried my parachute as he probably noticed my khaki shirt showing signs of perspiration. The onlookers were still sitting around the aircraft a little distance away from it. As I arrived back I heard an aircraft approaching. It was an Osprey which is a two seater aircraft and it circled a couple of times then made off back to Aboukir. About half an hour later a truck and trailer arrived with some airmen. Two officers from my squadron also arrived in a car. After some leg pulling about why couldn't I land properly on a billiard table of unlimited dimensions the airmen got to work and righted the aircraft and removed its wings. The officers got into their car and left me to return on the truck with the damaged aircraft.

Figure 36. – Edcu, damaged Nimrod (now the right way up!)

The next morning my Flight Commander sent for me and asked me why I went to Edcu when it was out of bounds for about two months during the rainy season. I told him I didn't know it was out of bounds to which he replied "neither did I"! The following morning my Squadron Commander sent for me and told me that an order had been issued by the Station Commander early in December placing Edcu out of bounds for two months and that a Summary of Evidence would be taken with the possible result that I would have to appear before a Court Martial. I was shaken by this information and afraid that my flying career would be terminated. However I made enquiries and could not find anyone in my squadron who had seen the Out of Bounds order which would normally be published in Daily Routine Orders and in the squadron Flying Order Book which all pilots normally have to read and sign as having seen.

I duly appeared before two officers who took down my evidence as well as evidence from officers from Aboukir responsible for issuing the order. Within a day or two I was recalled and told I would not be charged as no order had been sent to the Courageous or its Squadron Commanders before the ship left for Malta or after its return.

Figure 37. – Joe lands replacement Nimrod

The remaining aircraft were re-embarked in Courageous and I was left at Aboukir to flight test a replacement aircraft when ready. This meant a few more days ashore. In due course the aircraft was completed and I carried out an acceptance test and sent a signal to Courageous that it was ready. I got a signal back telling me the carrier's expected position and the true course to steer to reach it the next morning. I obtained the wind speed and direction and weather conditions from the meteorological officer, worked out my course to steer and took off from Aboukir at 0710 hours and landed on thirty

minutes later.

When I got aboard I found my own aircraft K2912 had been repaired. Flying exercises continued almost daily until we returned to Alexandria and remained in harbour. After two weeks in harbour we left again for exercises with other ships of the Mediterranean Fleet and other aircraft. On 6th February, on one of these exercises, my flight was ordered to carry out live ammunition attacks on supposed targets in the sea. This simply meant doing steep dives towards the sea and firing the guns. We took off and took up flight formation. After some formation flying the flight commander ordered us to break away and carry out individual dive attacks in the sea. The weather conditions were windy with a heavy sea with large troughs and white rollers. I climbed to about 3000 feet and dived in my first attack, my left gun only fired.

I re-climbed and opened the air release valve of the synchronising gear and pulled the high pressure handle. On my next dive the port gun only still operated so I climbed and repeated the air clearing procedure. On my third dive I pressed the triggers of both guns and there was a tremendous bang. Something flew past my head and the engine vibrated so severely that the exhaust pipes were moving up and down about three inches. I throttled back and turned to find the ship which was about three miles away and steaming downwind. I found that I could run the engine at about a quarter throttle without dangerous vibration. The propeller was obviously hit as I could see it was damaged. I thought the synchronising gear had failed and a bullet had hit the propeller.

I called the ship requesting immediate permission to land on. The ship answered "clear to land". I had turned towards the carrier and was slowly losing height at the highest revolutions I could use without too much vibration. I was now near enough to see by its wake that the ship was turning into wind as hard as it could. By this time I was down to about a thousand feet and realised that the next minute or two would decide whether I could get on to the deck or land in the sea as close to the attendant destroyer as possible. I called again and the ship replied "clear to land" so I decided to make the attempt. As I got into the final approach I could see that the ship was still in its turn and the deck was sloping to starboard. I caught the first wire and stopped in a short distance.

I switched off the engine and could then see that one blade of my propeller had lost its complete trailing edge from the tip to the hub. I sat for a minute to lose the tension and fright that had built up in me and looking at the state of the sea I wondered how long the aircraft would have remained afloat. The flying control officer - a naval commander - came down from his control position, looked at my propeller, and congratulated me on bringing the aircraft on the carrier in such difficult conditions.


Figure 38. – Nimrod pilot

I learned later that the flash eliminator fitted to the end of the barrel of the starboard Vickers gun had not been properly fitted. When the gun fired a bullet had taken it off and into the propeller. The armourer responsible for servicing the guns on my aircraft was charged with failing to carry out the servicing and inspection properly and subsequently severely punished.

The ship returned to Alexandria and two weeks later we set out for the UK. On leaving harbour a fire drill was ordered and all ships crew went to their posts in various parts of the ship. To reduce the hazards of fire spreading in the aircraft hangars asbestos curtains were fitted to the hangar roof. These were held by quick release devices and released by a control on the hangar wall. On

releasing the curtain it was pulled down to the hangar deck by a two inch diameter iron bar running the width of the hangar. The position of the curtain when down was indicated by a red line painted across the hangar deck. Aircraft parked in the hangar had to be clear of the red line at all times.

As the fire drill proceeded an order came over the Tannoy to lower fire curtains in the upper hangar. At that moment a Flight Sergeant in a torpedo bomber squadron was standing almost on the line talking to another NCO. When the order came to drop curtains, an over zealous rating pulled the release pin allowing the curtain fall immediately. The Flight Sergeant who, either did not hear the order to drop, or did not have time to move clear was struck by the iron bar and seriously injured. The ship turned back to Alexandria and was met at the harbour entrance by a patrol boat. The NCO was taken off the ship but he died before reaching hospital. The Courageous then set off for England once more.

During the many days spent in harbour since we had arrived in September 1935 I made a 1/72nd scale model of a Hawker Nimrod in brass. The work relieved me of boredom when aboard and in harbour. I borrowed the necessary tools from one of the squadron fitters such as hacksaw, files, scraper, drills etc.

Figure 39. Nimrod model (in 2003)

During my hours spent in the hangar working on my model I struck up a friendship with Corporal Charles Latter who was a fitter in a torpedo bomber squadron. Chas, as he was known, had been in the Fleet Air Arm some time and was known affectionately by many airmen, NCO's and officers for his keen sense of humour. He was a handsome young man, fair haired and always smart and tidy. He and later our wives all became very close friends over the following years.

I finished making the model Nimrod before we reached England. The squadron carried out some flying practice, mostly formation flying on the way to Malta. Finally when off the Isle of Wight on the 28th February 1936 we flew off and landed at Eastleigh which was to be our base for the next six months. I quickly rushed off to see my wife and son who were with her mother and stepfather at Camelsdale. My son Michael was now eighteen months old and running about. He was also obviously wondering who I was and where I came from. I wonder how many other servicemen had undergone the same experiences.

Chapter 11

Home Waters

Back at Eastleigh I began looking for a house as there was no married accommodation at the airport. We were housed in a hutted camp on the other side of the airfield away from the airport buildings. I found a nice house on the main road out of Eastleigh to Swaythling. We soon had our furniture out of store at Farnham and quickly settled down in our new home in Number 74, Southampton Road, Eastleigh. The house faced open land in front and the aerodrome to the right. I was able to get into the camp in a few minutes on my bicycle and able to get home for lunch daily.

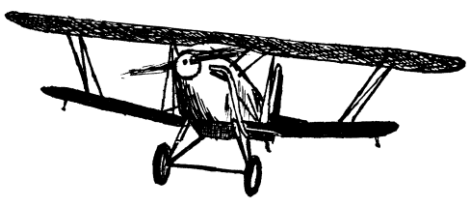
Eastleigh was then a busy railway depot and repairs base covering a large area. The shops were within walking distance of our house as was the railway station. However we felt we should be more mobile so we bought a car from a garage near the station. It was a Morris 8 two-door saloon with a sliding roof. It was one year old and cost us £70! We were delighted with it and paid frequent visits to Sammy's parents home at Camelsdale and to mine at Longbridge Deverill.

Shortly after the squadron's arrival at Eastleigh the prototype Spitfire was flown for the first time. We pilots were greatly impressed by this machine and we all wished we could have a go. So throughout the summer we saw the Spitfire taking off and landing on numerous occasions.

Flying practice continued involving formation, aerobatics, cross-country flying and map reading and night flying. On one cross-country practice I flew to North Weald and stayed for lunch with some of my pilot friends of 56 Squadron. On another occasion I flew to Longbridge Deverill and circled the village until my father appeared and waved to me.

Flying at Eastleigh was always interesting because it was so varied. Night flying for example was quite different from what I had experienced before. Take off was made down the beam of a floodlight lighting the main take off run which was on grass as runways had not up till then been built. Landing I found much easier as one came in to land over the floodlight to land on the brightly lit landing strip.

Frequent ferrying trips were undertaken taking other pilots to collect other aircraft or to attend meetings etc. For these flights I flew a Hawker Osprey, a two seater naval version of the Hawker Hart. It was during this period that my flight commander flew my aircraft K2912 which I had taken over when I first joined the squadron. He told me he was taking over my aircraft and I was allotted K2830. I suppose that action was a naval officer's privilege.



HAWKER OSPREY.

Sammy, Michael and I were greatly enjoying life together at our home in Southampton Road. By this time two other Sergeant pilots and their wives were living in Eastleigh and became friends of Sammy. Tragedy befell one of them for her husband, Sergeant Croft, was killed when he collided with another aircraft during a loop whilst the flight was carrying out aerobatics. For some unknown reason he did not bale out after the collision. The other two pilots landed safely.

During May the squadron left Eastleigh and flew an Air Day demonstration formation over Portsmouth and Bournemouth and landed at Portsmouth. The next day the squadron set

off for Leuchars in Scotland. The first leg was intended to be Portsmouth to Grantham but due to bad weather we landed at Sywell. Next day we reached Thornaby and the following day we arrived at Leuchars.

We remained at Leuchars for three weeks carrying out air firing at towed targets from the beam, astern, and quarter at Tentsmuir ranges. Other practices carried out were bombing by single attacks and Flight attacks at stationary targets. Bombing attacks were also carried out on a moving target towed by a motor boat in straight runs and in turns. The course was intensive and every form of air attack was practised as well as low bombing and dive-bombing at May Island. We returned to Eastleigh in time for me to spend my twenty-eighth birthday and a fortnight's leave with my wife and son.


Figure 40. With Fred and 'Nan' Bullock

During my leave we as usual visited our parents and in-laws at Longbridge Deverill and Camelsdale and thoroughly enjoyed our travels in the Morris 8. We were back at Eastleigh at the beginning of July.

The squadron re-embarked on the Courageous about a week later and my squadron carried out dive bombing demonstrations before the First Lord of the Admiralty, Sir Samuel Hoare after which we put into Portsmouth and anchored in the harbour. After a week there the squadron was accelerated off the ship whilst at anchor and we returned to Eastleigh. From Eastleigh we did demonstration bombing attacks on the Iron Duke during Navy Week. We remained at Eastleigh for about three weeks before re-embarking on Courageous for the autumn cruise to Scotland.

On the first day while we were off the Isle of Wight the squadron was ranged up ready to carry out front gun firing practice on a target towed by our attendant destroyer. I was number two in my flight and my aircraft was ranged on the starboard side of the deck and number three on the port side. My Flight Commander, Lieutenant Kendall, was ranged behind us on the centre line of the deck. The order was given to start engines and whilst we were idling before running up I noticed steam coming from Lt. Kendall's aircraft - which had been my aircraft for a very long time - K2912. I called him on the radio and told him he appeared to have a glycol leak. He in turn called the Squadron Commander who was at the back of the squadron and told him his engine was giving trouble. The CO told him to taxi to the forward lift and go below when it was his turn. However Lt. Kendall ran up the engine and being satisfied with the revolutions per minute, called the CO and said his engine was now OK.


Figure 41. The end of K2912

At that moment I was given the take off signal and did so followed by number three. I turned to starboard and number three to port and came up each side of the deck closing on the flight commander as he came off the deck. However he failed to climb and turned to port and landed in the sea. The destroyer quickly came to the aircraft floating nose down and secured the aircraft and took Lt. Kendall on board wet but unhurt. After all aircraft had landed back on the carrier the destroyer brought the somewhat damaged aircraft alongside and it was hoisted on to the lower flying-off deck on the bows of the carrier. The operation was watched by

a large crowd from the upper flight deck.

The ship set off again and whilst in the North Sea off Flamborough Head the squadron was airborne and carrying out air drill. The ship disappeared under a fog bank and the squadron flew around without any sign of the ship. As we had been in the air for nearly two hours and were nearing the end of our fuel endurance the ship ordered us to land at Catfoss. We were refuelled and left after about two hours and landed on before the ship dropped anchor off Whitby.

The ship stayed at Whitby a couple of days and was opened to visitors. We left Whitby and steamed north when the squadron took off and landed at Leuchars. There we carried out air firing practices and dive bombing practices. We rejoined the ship in the Firth of Forth. From there we sailed to the Orkney Islands and carried out dive bombing attacks on the Nelson at anchor in Scapa Flow. A few days later, on 25th September 1936, we were flying in Cromerty Firth, this time carrying out dive bombing on the Orion in the Home Fleet. The weather was atrocious with high winds and a heavy swell. I came over the round-down at the after end of the flight deck and it sank down after passing over a large swell and my arrester hook missed all four of the arrester wires. I looked up as I was about to open the throttle and go round again and saw that I had drifted towards the island, my starboard wing tip hit the funnel, whilst I was still about two feet off the deck, swung the aircraft completely round and it collapsed onto the deck. My last recollections of the incident were of people scattering in all directions when they saw what was about to happen. I was unhurt and my fitter Corporal Dore was soon on the aircraft undoing my safety harness and helping me out of the aircraft. A doctor saw me in the rest room in the funnel and pronounced me OK.

Figure 42. An argument with the funnel

When I got to the Sergeants Mess I was told by another pilot that after they had removed my aircraft and as he landed on he saw someone being carried away on a stretcher. I thought I must have hit someone and dashed down to the sick bay and found a young sailor, a deckhand, with a bad gash in his forehead. He told me my aircraft had not hit him but when he saw I was about to hit the funnel he dived under my wing and ran slap into a multiple pom-pom gun platform and knocked himself out. I felt sorry for him but relieved that the aircraft had not landed on him.

My aircraft was so badly damaged that the ground crew removed the engine and the remains of the aircraft were dumped overboard. The shipwrights moved in and cut out a piece of the funnel casing about 2 feet square containing the hole my Hucks starter dog on the propeller had made. They presented it to the Sergeants Mess inscribed "Sergeant Lane's Effort"! It was so heavy it took two of us to carry it out and throw it overboard.

After a couple of days ashore at Novar, where I was given a reserve aircraft, we carried out more exercises including night flying and then set off back south stopping a couple of days in the Firth of Forth below the Forth bridge. From there we steamed south and whilst off the Isle of Wight my flight was carrying out attacks on other flights in formation. When landing on again an aircraft of my flight hit the funnel as I had done when we were in Cromerty Firth. Two of us were left in the air and were told to remain within radio distance of the ship. After a few minutes I returned towards the carrier and saw the aircraft was still stuck in the funnel so I went away again. It was 4th December and by this time the sun was getting low and the shadow of the funnel casing was thrown across the deck. After another period of about ten minutes I again returned to the carrier and I was flying down the port side in a left hand circuit when I saw the landing indicator change to the land-on position. I dropped the arrestor hook and landed on catching the first wire which was raised for landing on.

When I looked up I was shattered to see the crashed aircraft was still stuck in the funnel. The deck officer turned round and saw me and threw his hands up and then threw his control bats on the deck in apparent disgust. Another sergeant pilot George Cousins came over to me, leaned into the cockpit and said "Joe I wouldn't give tuppence for you're life!" I pointed to the indicator which was still in the "land on" position. A few minutes later the crashed aircraft was removed and I taxied forward on to the forward lift. As I got out of the aircraft I heard over the Tannoy "Sergeant Lane report to the bridge". I went up to the bridge where the OC Flying tore me off a strip asking me what the hell I thought I was doing. I told him I saw the landing on signal change to affirmative and obeyed it. I pointed out that under the ship's Standing Flying Orders a pilot could be ordered to land on even with the deck partially obstructed. After telling me I should have radioed to query the position he handed me over to the Captain who merely said "A more disgraceful show I've never seen!"

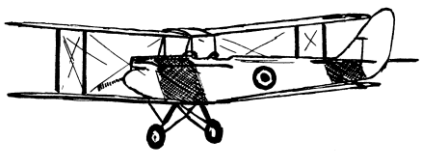
I discovered later that because so much time was taken to remove the crashed aircraft the OC Flying went down on to the deck to see what was going on. The Captain left the bridge and went to the OC Flying's position and whilst looking down to the deck he put his foot on the lever which operated the landing signal thus changing it to affirmative. I did not know it then but it was to be my last landing on an aircraft carrier.[20] The next day the Squadron was flown off to Eastleigh. My aircraft was flown off by the pilot, a naval officer, who had crashed his aircraft into the funnel while I had to go ashore by ship's pinnace to Portsmouth - such was the Navy's displeasure!

[20] HMS Courageous was sunk by U29 on 17th September 1939 with the loss of 518 of her 1200 crew.

Chapter 12

Gosport

Shortly after I arrived back at Eastleigh - now called Southampton - I was posted to C Flight of the Fleet Air Arm Training Squadron at Gosport. C Flight was commanded by an RAF officer - Flight Lieutenant Constable-Roberts. The commanding officer of the training squadron was a Naval Lieutenant-Commander.



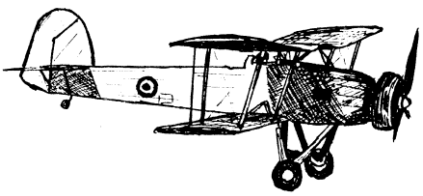
D.H. MOTH.

C Flight contained all the types of aircraft currently operating in the Fleet Air Arm squadrons, including ab initio training aircraft used for pupils first landings with an instructor on aircraft carriers. They were also used for instrument practice for trained pilots. Those at Gosport were de Haviland Moth, Avro 504N and Avro Tutor.

I remained at Southampton for about six weeks making frequent trips to Gosport to carry out flying practice on all the different types of aircraft used by the Navy. I flew the Blackburn Shark, the Fairey Swordfish, and the Hawker Osprey.

We found a house in Gosport - one of a newly built block of six which I was able to rent on a weekly basis. We moved our furniture from Eastleigh and soon settled in. In my spare time I started to make the garden first removing all the broken bricks, lumps of hardened sand and cement which seem to surround all newly built houses.

I greatly enjoyed the flying at Gosport which frequently involved collecting new aircraft from the manufacturers. I made several trips to Blackburns at Brough to collect Sharks and to Heath Row where Fairey Aviation was located to collect Swordfish. Ferrying new aircraft was achieved by taking one or two pilots as passengers to collect the new aircraft.



FAIREY SWORDFISH.

In May of 1937 the Home Fleet was assembled at Spithead for the Royal review. One day before the review the flight commander authorised all his pilots to take ground staff, the fitters, riggers, wireless operators, armourers and aircraft hands sight seeing round the fleet.

On that day in a Shark I had taken eight airmen round the fleet making four trips of about 15 minutes each. On the fifth flight and in the same aircraft I had just got airborne and was climbing when the engine suddenly started running roughly causing severe vibration. At the same time oil was being blown on to the wind screen. I managed to complete the circuit and landed back on the airfield. The front of the fuselage, wheels and struts were covered with oil. The aircraft was towed back to the hangar and it was discovered that No. 5 cylinder was cracked about three-quarters of the way round. I wonder if my passengers - Sergeant Morehen and Leading Aircraftsmen Steer remember the incident.

BLACKBURN SHARK.

Failure of the lower cylinders of the Tiger engine, due to "hydraulicing", was not uncommon and usually occurred on starting up. It became normal servicing practice after parking the aircraft to open the valves of one or more of the lower cylinders to allow any excess oil to drain. The engine was also turned by hand one or two revolutions before starting up.

As a result of the failure of a cylinder in flight I was later detailed to carry out a series of flight tests lasting two hours each at two thousand feet. Two flights were made at each boost setting, one using the mixture control and the other without. Each pair of tests was made starting with a boost setting of -2½ lb. followed by two flights at -2lb boost then two at -1½ lb. boost. The same aircraft was used throughout the tests and no trouble was experienced. I never heard the result of the tests I carried out.

About the middle of July 1937 I was posted to No. 79 Squadron, Biggin Hill. I had by then served two years in the Fleet Air Arm and was looking forward to my return to the RAF and being treated as an equal member of the squadron by both commissioned and non-commissioned pilots. Naval pilots, whilst having to accept that RAF NCO pilots could fly, tended to regard them as ship's hands once out of their aeroplanes and could then be sent forward to their uncomfortable quarters where they could rest lying on a table, a form, or the deck while the officers returned to the comfortable wardroom to enjoy their pink gins!

So after only six weeks in our new house at Gosport and a few days before I was due to report to 79 Squadron I flew to Biggin Hill in a Swordfish taking two airmen with me for the trip. I found 79 Squadron equipped with Gloster Gauntlet single seat fighters. On enquiring I also found that I was unlikely to get a married quarter for some time.

Once more we packed up our home and moved the furniture back into store at Farnham. Sammie and Michael went to Camelsdale with her parents yet again! By the time we left our new house in Gosport I had dug exactly half the garden. I wonder if the next occupants appreciated my efforts and completed the job!

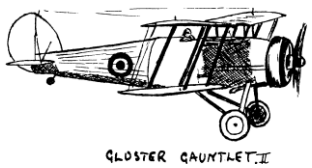
Chapter 13

Back over land

I made my way to Biggin Hill and joined No 79 Fighter Squadron. Within a couple of days after studying the fuel, oil, and brake systems of the Gloster Gauntlet Mk 2 and certifying that I understood them I was authorised to do an hour on circuits and landings. I found the Gauntlet a delight to fly. I soon realised I had lost the apprehension I experienced when taking off or being catapulted from the aircraft carrier and flying over the sea.

Figure 43. No. 79 Squadron personnel

Flying in No 79 Squadron was fairly intensive for I was in the air almost daily and often two or three flights per day were authorised. The flying involved Sector Reconnaissance, group tactical exercises, squadron formations and battle flight climbs.



The squadron was a happy one with a tough but fair commanding officer - Squadron Leader NAP Pritchett. I was in 'A' Flight which was commanded by Pilot Officer AC Heath a charming and helpful officer. In the squadron we also had a very experienced elderly NCO pilot Sergeant J Payne. To call him elderly was perhaps a little unfair but he was older than the average sergeant pilot because he had managed to extend, more than once, his flying period. Normally airmen pilots are employed flying for five years including the one year flying training period after which they revert to their original trade or may become instructors. Sergeant Jammy Payne was I believe about 30 years old when I joined the squadron. He was immensely popular very experienced and helpful to we younger pilots.

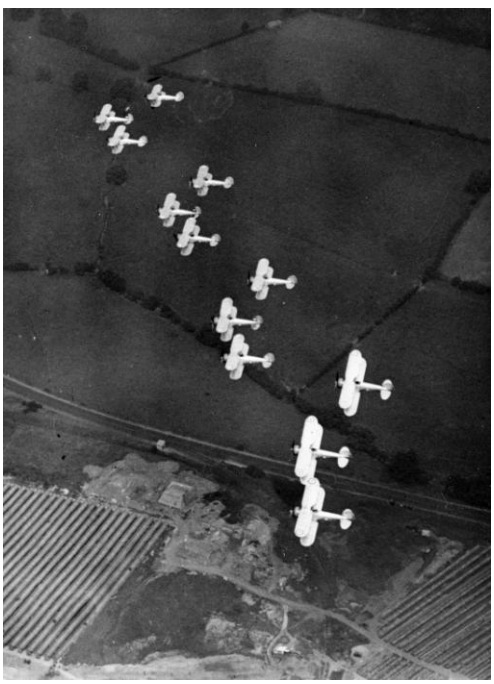


Figure 44. No. 79 Squadron aircraft

As no married quarters were available when I joined the squadron I journeyed frequently to Camelsdale or to Rickmansworth to see my wife and son. Sammy spent some time with her sister who had a new house in Rickmansworth. She had a daughter who was about the same age as Michael - 3 years.

After I had spent about two months at Biggin Hill the squadron flew to West Freugh in Wigtownshire with one stop at Catterick. There we spent two weeks at the air firing practice camp carrying out all various forms of attack on air and ground targets using live ammunition. The

squadron returned to Biggin Hill in formation stopping at Catterick again to refuel. The flying time from West Freugh to Biggin Hill was about two hours thirty minutes.

Back at Biggin Hill I found I had been selected to attend a course at the School of Navigation at Ladbroke Grove, London. Sammy joined me and we soon found a small flat in Ladbroke Grove and moved in complete with Michael. The school was within easy walking distance. We spent a few weeks at the flat which consisted of a single room where we lived, ate, and slept and were not very happy with it. Its only attraction was that we could be together as a family.

Whilst there we went to the Sergeants Mess party at Biggin Hill where I met Sergeant Foster, a fellow pilot in 79 Squadron. We told him we were not very happy in our accommodation in Ladbroke Grove whereupon he suggested I contacted his sister who lived in Brentford. This we subsequently did and she offered us a double bedroom, a small bedroom for Michael and a sitting room. We moved in as soon we could and I drove daily to the School of Navigation.

On a later visit to another function at the Sergeants Mess we were told on arrival that Sergeant Foster had met with an accident whilst riding his motorcycle to Bromley. Apparently an elderly man stepped off the pavement into his path and Foster could not stop or avoid him. The pedestrian died later and Foster suffered a broken shoulder which kept him in hospital for several weeks. When released he spent months with his arm in splints and suffered great pain. Eventually his arm was removed which ended his career in the Royal Air Force.

Whilst attending the School of Navigation I was promoted to Flight Sergeant. I did no flying during the time I was at the school over a period of two months. After Christmas leave 1937 I became eligible for a married quarter. Sammy and I had been married for nearly five years out of which we had spent about two years living together. We moved into our quarters at Biggin Hill knowing full well that another posting would soon arise as I would complete my five year stint on flying duties in about three months time and revert to my basic trade of Fitter Aero Engine.


HAWKER HART TRAINER.

When it became known by the squadron commander that I would soon be taken off flying efforts were made to persuade me to become a flying instructor. This type of flying did not appeal to me at all and I steadfastly refused the offers. I remained at Biggin Hill until June doing miscellaneous flying jobs such as giving young airmen air experience in a Hawker Hart. I continued to fly the Gauntlet doing aerobatics, cross country trips etc.. Eventually I was posted to Farnborough to No 1 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit. Before leaving Biggin Hill I received notification that I had qualified as an aircraft navigator 2nd class and licensed to navigate all aircraft.

Chapter 14

Farnborough

On arrival at Farnborough I was allocated married quarters. I fetched Sammy and Michael and we moved into a very nice quarter at the end of a row of four. By then Sammy was seven months pregnant so the first and most important job was to book her into a nursing home. We were recommended to the Huwtan Nursing Home at Aldershot owned and run by a Miss Tant.

At Farnborough, was and still is, the Royal Aircraft Establishment. Recently renamed the Royal Aerospace Establishment[21] it is where aeronautical research of all kinds is carried out including model and full scale. The RAF was also located at Farnborough with their barracks, married quarters, Officers Mess and single officers quarters, headquarters offices and two hangars located along one side of the main road Farnborough to Farnham. Army co-operation squadrons had been based at Farnborough but moved out in 1938.

Figure 45. A monoplane! Miles Magister at Farnborough

Up to the second world war there were no runways at Farnborough. It must have remained very similar to the time when 'Colonel' Cody designed and built a biplane which he flew in 1909 at Laffans Plain which is now part of Farnborough airfield. Later in the year he set up a world record by performing a flight of over 40 miles.

It was said that Cody used to tether his aeroplane to a tree in front of one of the RAF hangars which were built later. It was still alive when I arrived at Farnborough in 1938. The tree subsequently died probably due to encroaching tarmac and taxi tracks. In the 1950's the dead tree was cut into sections which were used as the patterns to cast aluminium replicas. These were assembled into the tree form and coated with plastic. The new tree was sited on the original spot as a permanent memorial to Cody.

No 1 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit was established at Farnborough in the upper floor of what had been RAF Station Headquarters and squadron offices. The Station Flight, established with miscellaneous communications aircraft, used one hangar and No 1 Maintenance Flight of No 1 AACU occupied the second hangar and the station workshops.

The Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit administered a number of aircraft flights equipped with target towing aircraft which were located at airfields close to Army battery units around the west coast of England and Wales. The flights were equipped with Westland Wallace target towing aircraft, which were soon to be replaced by Hawker Henley aircraft. The Henley was a monoplane and was designed to be a day bomber and was fitted with Hurricane wings and a Rolls-Royce Merlin III engine. It was in competition with the Fairey Battle which was accepted by the RAF. Two hundred Henleys were built subsequently as target tugs.

[21] Currently 'Quinetic'

In order to keep the establishment of personnel in the towing flights to a minimum, major inspections or repairs and engine changes were carried out by No 1 Maintenance Flight at Farnborough of which I was in charge. The towing flights would notify Headquarters of aircraft becoming due for servicing or repair and were flown in by their own aircrew.

From the time I arrived at Farnborough I flew fairly frequently to keep in practice which enabled me to draw flying pay in addition to my normal pay for my trade and rank. The Station Flight held a number of aircraft which I had not flown before, among them the Miles Mentor, DH Leopard Moth, DH Puss Moth, Percival Proctor, Vega Gull, and the latest addition - a Miles Magister. The Magister was a low wing monoplane fitted with flaps at the rear of the wing to reduce speed during the approach. Squadron Leader Housada took me up for a ten minute flight to show me the use of the flaps also the use of brakes. The visibility from the cockpit was excellent especially upwards and around and I took to the Magister. Two days later I flew one to Woodley (Reading) to the manufacturers Miles Aircraft for modification.

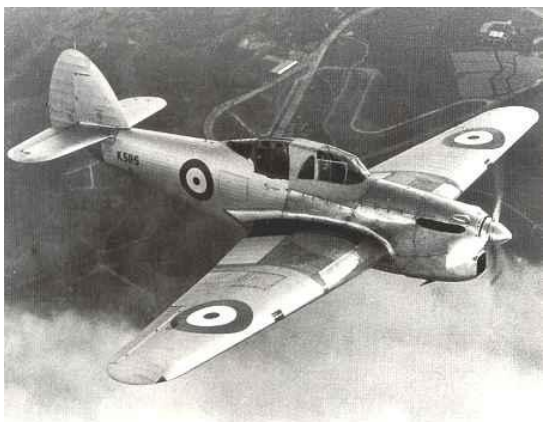


Figure 46. One of the rare views of the Hawker Henley (found on the Internet)

Units of No.1 AACU were to be re-equipped with the Hawker Henley aircraft and one was flown to Farnborough. It was checked out and prepared for flight. The Henley was fitted with a retractable undercarriage, flaps, and a two-speed airscrew. The pilot's cockpit was also entirely closed. The rear cockpit was originally designed to house a rotatable gun turret with four guns but this was replaced by a target-towing winch and the bomb bay was fitted out with containers to hold flag targets.

Squadron Leader Housada went over with me the pilots flying instructions in detail and then took me up and explained carefully every action he was making while I occupied the rear seat where I could see what he was doing and hear his commentary over the intercom. Before taxiing it was essential to see the undercarriage lights were showing green and the propeller was set in low pitch. After take-off and while climbing the undercarriage was retracted and it was necessary to see that the red lights came on. After this the propeller lever was moved to high pitch and the throttle closed slightly to hold cruising revolutions. Later Henleys were fitted with constant speed propellers.

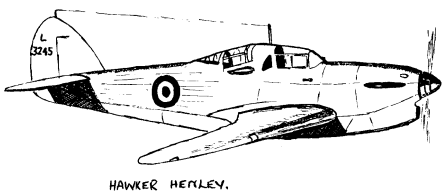
On the circuit and approach to land the undercarriage was lowered obtaining green lights and the flaps lowered. The propeller was put into fine pitch ready for landing. During flight the radiator temperature was controlled by shutters operated from the cockpit. The instructional flight took fifteen minutes after which S/Ldr Housada asked me if I was happy. I told him I was and flew the aircraft solo twice more that day. I quite liked the enclosed cockpits because the temperature could be well controlled and flying could take place in light flying overalls instead of the heavy fur lined Irvin jackets, fur lined trousers and sheepskin flying boots which were necessary in the open cockpit fighters I had flown hitherto.

Sammy and Michael and I soon settled in our married quarter, No.8 Maitland Road, which was close to Farnborough town and its shops. We were only seventeen miles from Sammy's mother and stepfather at Camelsdale and continued to visit them frequently.

Early in August Sammy started labour pains and I rushed her to the nursing home at Aldershot and took Michael, now nearly four years old, to his grandmother. The following morning before going to work I rang the nursing home to enquire after Sammy and was told I could collect her and take her home. I did so and took her back again the same evening. The next morning Miss Tant rang me to say that she had produced a boy and both were doing fine. So Sammy now had the first two of the six boys she had said she wanted! In due course I brought them both home, collected Michael from Camelsdale and polished the Dunkley pram which we had retained. My second son was christened Christopher David.

Work continued in No 1 AACU, more flights were formed and located at Weston Zoyland, Cleeve (Cornwall) Aberporth, Towyn and Badorgan (Anglesey). No 2 AACU controlled target towing flights in other parts of the country. The intensity of overhauls and inspections of aircraft increased with the new flights being formed and although I was now a reserve pilot I found myself flying more frequently, carrying out flight tests and lots of cross country trips to our flights at Weston Zoyland and Cleeve often taking officers with me who had reason to visit such units.

A few days before the outbreak of war I was approached by a WAAF who was a driver in the MT[22] Section. She told me she was Mabel Glass, one of the two Glass sisters, who had their own aeroplane and had competed in the Kings Cup air races which took place annually. She asked if I could find room in a hangar to store her aeroplane for the duration of hostilities. I told her there was room but she would have to ask the CO for permission. This she obtained and flew her aircraft in to Farnborough. I arranged for its storage on our hangar and for a fitter to turn the airscrew once a week.



HAWKER HENLEY.

A few weeks later I was notified that a Hawker Henley was due to be delivered from the makers. On the day appointed the Henley arrived, taxied up to the hangar, and stopped near where I was standing. Out stepped Miss Glass in the uniform of the Air Transport Auxiliary. She told me she had left the WAAF to join the ATA so that she could continue flying. She later obtained permission to remove her own aircraft from Farnborough to a place nearer her home.

The flying had become most interesting and useful to me since I was now flying more advanced aircraft with variable pitch propellers, retractable undercarriages, flaps and mostly monoplanes. I was frequently testing Hawker Henleys which were replacing the Westland Wallace.

Life was proceeding apace with the situation between Germany and Poland deteriorating until on the 3rd of September 1939 we found ourselves at war. I was in the station workshops with my commanding officer, Group Captain Beaumont, when the announcement came over the radio. Shortly afterwards the air raid sirens sounded. The CO and I both rushed up to the married quarters where the wives and children were about to leave the shelters which had been prepared earlier in the year. The alarm only lasted a short while before the All Clear was sounded.

During the early part of the war there was little activity and our expeditionary force were cooling their heels in France waiting to get into action. It was decided to send a target towing flight to France so that our gunners could get some firing practice. They were there for two or

[22] Motor Transport

three months when the invasion of Holland and Belgium began. The flight was immediately recalled and were due to arrive at Farnborough on a Sunday. On that day the weather broke and rain teamed down to such an extent that Farnborough airfield was awash.

The CO, myself and ground crews were sheltering in the hangar when the duty pilot came to the CO and told him that Group Headquarters had told him to divert the aircraft to Odiham. The CO told him to ignore it and to allow the aircraft to land at Farnborough. They duly arrived and were given the green light to land. The first aircraft came in and gave the appearance of a seaplane landing, such was the spray that it created. All the aircraft landed safely and were rapidly unloaded of some of the goodies obtainable only in France before they were dispersed to their own flights.

Early in the war the Air Ministry decided to form a new branch in the Service - the Technical Branch. Hitherto Engineer Officers were recruited from the General Duties Branch to which all officer pilots belonged. GD officers, after a period of flying could be sent to an engineering school for a period of technical training after which they would be posted to stations as Engineer Officers. They would remain in such appointments for about two years then would return to flying units or squadrons.

Another source of engineer officers was from Warrant Officer technical men, fitters, riggers or electricians. They would be commissioned in the rank of Flying Officer and their limit of promotion was to Squadron Leader. Few of them ever reached that rank. I had hoped that I would become an officer in the new Technical Branch.

Shortly after my thirty-second birthday in June 1940 I was telephoned by a warrant officer of 'P' Staff in Group Headquarters who told me that I was posted to an Operational Conversion Unit at High Ercall for training on Hurricanes. I was a little shattered by the news since the age limit for fighter pilots was at that time, I believe, thirty years. The next morning the same person rang me again and told me the posting was cancelled and that I had been commissioned in the new Technical Branch. Things then happened quickly for the CO sent for me and congratulated me and gave me details and the date of my appointment. He then took me to the Officers' Mess just before lunch still in my Flight Sergeant's uniform and introduced me to officers arriving in the Mess as Pilot Officer Lane. I found the welcome almost overwhelming as everyone seemed genuinely pleased and congratulated me.

Sammy and I went off to Gieves to be measured for my officer's uniform which was duly ready on time. We of course had to leave our married quarter so Sammy and my two sons went back to Camelsdale temporarily while I moved into the Officers Mess.

Events began to move even more rapidly for I was soon posted to Weston Zoyland to form and command a new maintenance flight. I was told by the CO to prepare an establishment of personnel for the new maintenance flight for approval by Headquarters and No 22 Group. I did so and my submission was approved unaltered.

Chapter 15

No 2 Maintenance Flight

It was decided to build a new metal Bellman metal hangar with flight offices alongside for my flight at Weston Zoyland which, up to the outbreak of war, had been a summer practice camp equipped with Bessonneau canvas hangars. The officers and sergeants messes, sick quarters, armoury, dining hall, MT section were all accommodated in wooden buildings.

MILES MAGISTER.

I was over the moon when I arrived there to find myself the commanding officer of No.2 maintenance flight, station engineer officer, and flight test pilot with the lowly rank of pilot officer! I was allotted my own communications aircraft - a new Miles Magister P2408 to enable me to visit the target towing flights on the west coast. I soon found rooms in a large stone built house at Greinton about four miles from the camp. Sammy and our two boys Michael now nearly six and Christopher two years old soon settled in and I lived out and drove into work daily.

The owner of the house in which we were living allowed me to leave my car in a stone built garage about 50 yards from the house. At that time I was teaching Sammy to drive when time permitted. We had got to the stage where I allowed her to drive the car into the garage which involved turning left off the road. On approaching the garage she put her left hand indicator out as instructed and turned into the garage and swept off the semaphore arm on the garage door post! It was replaced by a new one at a cost of seven shillings and sixpence (37½ p)! She did it a second time and I threatened not to give her any more instruction.

At about this time the Germans were carrying out bombing raids on Bristol. One of their aircraft was shot down by our fighters and crashed near Street. That day I had driven Sammy and the two boys to spend the afternoon with friends in Weston Zoyland village. When I got to my office I received a phone call from the Home Guard telling me the position of the shot down aircraft. As the station engineer officer it was part of my job to go to all crashes or forced landings to assess the probability of repairing or removing them and to place a guard on the aircraft until such time as it was dismantled and collected, usually by the nearest Maintenance Unit.

I drove the car back to our friends in Weston Zoyland and told Sammy I would be away some time and she must drive the car home. I told her that she was unlikely to meet anything except possibly the odd cow to which she replied that there was no need to use sarcasm! I went to the aircraft by Service transport and found it was a complete wreck. The local police had arrived and took over the arrangements for removal of the bodies.

When I arrived back home I found the car carefully parked in the drive beside the house. Sammy had quite a tale to tell me. She had driven the children home from Weston Zoyland and parked the car without incident. Michael immediately dashed round to the farmhouse next door where he often played with the farmer's daughter who was about his own age.

A few minutes later the farmer's wife came rushing round asking Sammy to drive down to the moors to fetch her husband as the children had set fire to a heap of hay. The rickyard contained three or four newly made ricks and she though as it was so windy they would all catch fire. Sammy backed the car out, drove to the moors and collected the farmer. When they got back they found one or two neighbours had arrived and put out the fire.

Needless to say Michael got a dressing down from us both. His version of the incident was that he and his girl friend decided they would like a little fire. While Michael made a little heap of hay his friend fetched some matches from the house, needless to say, without her mother's permission. They lit the heap which was obviously too close to a larger one and a gust of wind whipped a burning piece of hay on to the larger heap which rapidly caught fire. It was fortunate that the fire was put out by the farmers wife and helpers before it could reach the newly built ricks.

Shortly after this incident we heard of a cottage to let at Catcott which was quite close. We dashed over to see the owner, Mrs. Cox who agreed to let us have the cottage which we liked immensely. We brought our furniture out of store and installed ourselves in Rose Cottage.


Figure 47. Rose Cottage 62 years later.

Catcott was a nice little village on the north side of the Polden hills which ran from Bridgewater to Street. It contained an hotel, a public house, and a beer and cider house. The latter was the nearest pub to Rose Cottage. It was a thatched cottage at the end of a row on the road leading down to the moors. Its one public room had a stone flagged floor, wooden settles, perfectly scrubbed tables and a huge open fireplace with a peat fire heating a huge cauldron suspended over it.

Mrs. Cox had two daughters, Alma and Monica, who were teachers in Bridgewater. The girls came home every week end and we got to know them very well. Monica married a Polish airman pilot at Weston Zoyland and we were invited to their wedding.

The Battle of Britain had begun and most of the officer pilots in the target towing flight were itching to get into operational squadrons. One of the young pilots, Flying Officer Wade, was posted to a fighter squadron which was on operations in North Africa. He owned a Raleigh motor cycle which he had left standing outside the Officers Mess for over a year. When I heard that he was posted I asked him to sell me his bike which he did for five pounds. It was in poor condition, rusty and would not start.

In my flight I had a corporal fitter who had served in the RAF for a period after which he left and worked in an engineering firm. Being a reservist he was recalled when war broke out. I asked him if he would like to overhaul the motor bike and he jumped at the chance. He pushed it down to the village where he was billeted. A week later he came proudly riding the Raleigh, parked it outside my office then came and told me all the work he had done. I settled up with him then rode it home to lunch and to show it to Sammy. From then on I used it to go to work on fine days leaving the car for Sammy to use. Later in the year I heard that its previous owner had been shot down and killed in North Africa.

Changes were now taking place at Weston Zoyland. A Station Commander was appointed with an adjutant, senior administration officer, RAF Regiment officers and survey officers seconded to the station to organise aerodrome defences. Dozens of old cars and vehicles were obtained to scatter on the airfield in the event of invasion by the enemy.

With events of war now taking place near Weston Zoyland the officer pilots were

becoming tired of their boring job of towing a target up and down a coastal range for the gunners to practice their shooting skills. Their boredom was often relieved by hectic parties in the mess and a favourite pub in Bridgewater - the Newmarket. One of the pilots, Flying Officer Johnson, had been posted to a Hurricane squadron and was soon involved in the Battle of Britain. He was married to Ethel Formby a sister of George Formby the banjo playing comedian. She remained in rooms near Weston Zoyland after her husband was posted to an operational squadron.

On stand down periods Johnson used to fly down to Weston Zoyland to see his wife but on more than one occasion he would meet his friend Flight Lieutenant Hyde, known as Jekyl, and they would go to the popular pub in Bridgewater. One of the Johnson visits he and Jekyl went to Bridgewater, had a few drinks and returned to the mess to find no one there. In the anteroom was a beer engine - a cupboard containing a cylinder of beer under pressure with the tap on the top surrounded by glasses. Johnny - thinking things were rather dull went to the next room where an officer was asleep in bed. Seeing a shot gun leaning against the wall he seized it and put a cartridge in the breech whereupon the owner woke up, leapt out of bed and seized the gun. Johnny still holding it pulled the trigger and the shot blasted a hole in the chipboard facing of the wall just level with the top of the beer engine on the other side. All the glasses were blown over on their sides but not one of them was broken. The pellets were embedded in the opposite wall. Jekyl quickly transported Johnny off the camp to join his wife at their digs.

A week or two later Johnny came down to see his wife and brought her into the mess where one or two wives including Sammy were having a drink. I asked him how things were going with him and he jubilantly told me he had shot down a German fighter over the south coast the day before. The pilot baled out and was captured by the police. Johnny went to the police station and saw the pilot and obtained his pistol. He said he had got it in the car and fetched it to show me. I looked at it and handed it back when he said "it works too". Whereupon he pointed it up and fired two shots through the ceiling. The girls screamed and Johnny put the pistol away. Next morning we found two neat holes one each side of electric wires attached to a wooden batten across the ceiling. When the CO heard of it he told Jekyl he would ban Johnny from the mess if any further misconduct took place.

Some months later a navigation officer was sent round stations to check all pilots on their navigational ability. This officer - a Flight Lieutenant arrived in a Halifax bomber in which the pilots were taken up to practice navigational exercises. This officer joined Jekyl and others on a trip to the Newmarket. This pub was run by a young couple very strictly and efficiently. A pleasant evening was spent by Jekyl and the navigation officer and a couple of others and quite a lot of drink was consumed. At five to ten Ella, the very attractive wife of the landlord came into the bar and called time. Everyone drank up except the navigation officer who continued leaning on the bar. Ella came back and called on everyone to leave. The navigator asked "do you want the bar cleared?" Ella replied that that was exactly what she did want whereupon the officer pulled out his pistol and fired a shot at the mirror behind the bar just missing the whiskey and gin bottles but smashing the mirror and a couple of glasses.

He was immediately seized and put in the back seat of a car while others helped clear up the mess and offered to pay for the damage. They then started to drive back to Weston Zoyland but had omitted to take the pistol from him. While they were driving up a street out of town he rested his pistol on the window which was down and pulled the trigger. Unbeknown to the occupants of the car who had by then seized the pistol, a man was just closing his front window when the bullet went through the glass panel and buried itself in the stairs.

The party arrived back at Weston Zoyland and put the navigator in his room. Within

minutes the police from Bridgewater arrived and demanded that he be handed over to them. The CO arrived and told the police that the officer would immediately be put under arrest and not allowed to leave camp. The police, who were always sympathetic to Service personnel, accepted situation and left.

The officer was confined to camp and a Summary of Evidence was taken which led to a Court Martial. During the Court Martial the officer, who had been a Flight Lieutenant for some years, was promoted to Squadron Leader. The sentence of the Court Martial was that his punishment would be loss of all seniority. He lost two days!

My time at Weston Zoyland was the most enjoyable period of my service in the RAF. I was probably the most junior officer in the RAF commanding a flight of such importance in servicing, repairing, and inspecting aircraft and I was now classified as a reserve pilot, carrying out flight testing of all aircraft passing through my flight. My flying days were not without excitement as a typical page for my logbook will show: -

2/1/41	Henley	L3437	Flight test airscrew not holding set revs
4/1/41	Henley	L3437	Flight test airscrew still U/S
10/1/41	Magister	P2408	Flight test after 180 hr inspection - OK
11/1/41	Henley	L3435	Flight test airscrew U/S
11/1/41	Henley	L3435	Flight test airscrew U/S
13/1/41	Henley	L3435	Flight test Satisfactory
1/2/41	Henley	L3361	Flight test new airscrew Satisfactory
27/2/41	Magister	P2444	Flight test **trim tab controls crossed**
3/3/41	Magister	P2444	Flight test after 180 hr inspection. OK
3/3/41	Magister	P2408	Cross country W Zoyland to Cleeve, Som. Saw Blenheim crash after entering cloud
3/3/41	Magister	P2408	Cleeve to Weston Zoyland
5/3/41	Henley	L3292	Flight test after 240 hr inspection - OK
6/3/41	Henley	L3423	Flight test after repair - OK
11/3/41	Henley	L3361	Flight test with new engine - OK
13/3/41	Magister	P2408	Weston Zoyland to Cleeve
14/3/41	Magister	P2408	Cleeve to Weston Zoyland

On one occasion on a cross country flying at 7000 feet I saw above me Spitfires diving into and out of high cloud chasing German bombers attacking Bristol. I soon got down to about 1000 feet to avoid getting mixed up in anything.

Another frightening moment after a flight test occurred as I was approaching the airfield. I had put the flaps down and then the undercarriage. For some reason I retracted the flaps instead of lowering them further. The aircraft rapidly sank. I put on full power and retracted the undercarriage and made another circuit carrying out my cockpit drill correctly.

I had been just over a year at Weston Zoyland and was by then a Flying Officer when I was told by Headquarters at Farnborough that my flight was to be moved to Badorgan in Anglesey to make room for an operational squadron of Lysanders[23].

[23] An entry in the War Graves Commission register refers to No.1 AACU: -
FARWELL, F. Aircraftsman 2nd Class, RAF. Drogue Operator, 1 AACU RAF. Died 8 Nov 41. Aged 22 A Newfoundlander, serving with the RAF died in the crash of Hawker Henley, serial L3265, of No 1 Anti-Aircraft Co-operation Unit based at RAF Langham. This Aircraft spun into the ground near Holt, Norfolk, at 14.25hrs, killing the crew of 2. The Polish pilot (Kpt. J.Czapinski) is buried at New Hunstanton Cemetery

In due course the flight was installed at Badorgan on the south side of Anglesey in a hutted camp similar to Weston Zoyland and at which was located a target towing flight. Sammy and the boys remained at Catcott in the cottage. I had left the car and motor cycle there so that she could move around. On occasions I flew back to Weston Zoyland and Sammy would collect me from the aerodrome.

It was on one of these occasions when I was home for a weekend that we were driving after dark and we came upon some reflector studs in the road. Reflector studs were a new thing and Michael who invariably stood in the back of the car between the two front seats suddenly noticed the reflection of my lights on the studs. He asked why they were there and how they lit up. I do not claim to have much sense of humour but I told him that under the middle of the road was a tunnel along which a man rode on his bicycle. When he heard a car coming he switched the lights on to show the driver the bends in the road. After the car had passed he switched them off. Michael looked round and sure enough he could no longer see the reflectors!

When Michael later found out what really happened and that I had been pulling his leg he told the story to his brother Christopher who believed it until he too found out. He in turn practised the joke on his sister Judith, as yet unborn, until she too realised the truth. The joke had lasted quite a few years!

At Badorgan the work of carrying out major inspections, repairs, etc. on the target towing aircraft continued. On one occasion my Flight Sergeant informed me that a Henley was ready for flight test. I prepared for the flight and climbed in. A corporal got into the back seat normally occupied by the target operator. I did my cockpit check and all seemed well so I started to taxi out to the airfield. As the machine was moving I noticed that the green undercarriage lights flickered once. I stopped and checked that the undercarriage operating lever was in the correct position and all seemed to be well so I moved out to the take-off position with the lights remaining steady.

I took off into wind and whilst climbing selected wheels up. The green lights went out which was correct and I felt a bump which usually occurs when the undercarriage strikes the locks but the red lights did not come on. I tried to select wheels down again but the selector lever would not move. After several tries I decided to carry out the remainder of the tests required.

After completing the tests I returned to the airfield and still could not get the wheels down so I climbed and flew round for about an hour to use up fuel to lighten the aircraft. I called the airfield when I returned and told the watch tower I would have to land with the wheels up. I warned my passenger what I was going to do and on getting the OK from the tower came in to land. As I did so I saw the fire tender, ambulance and a truck tearing across the airfield parallel with me. I held off as long as possible then switched off the engine and the aircraft settled smoothly and slid along the grass.

The aircraft was duly recovered and taken back to the hangar for examination. Later that day the Flight Sergeant came to my office to tell me that he was charging the rigger on the aircraft with failing to properly carry out a pre-flight check inspection. This inspection involves the checking of the undercarriage lights by pressing a plunger in the wheel locks which closes the lock and brings on the red lights to indicate wheels up. The airman had apparently carried out his checks thus far but had failed to select wheel down afterwards. This meant that the wheels up lock remained closed and the plungers remained down so the undercarriage hooks could not enter the locks. Whilst the engine remained running the hydraulic pressure held the undercarriage

up which prevented me from selecting wheels down.

I was very disturbed at having to deal with the airman because I felt that if I had turned back the fault might have been found and the aircraft would not have been damaged. The Flight Sergeant explained that even if I had turned back the failure of the rigger would still have been discovered and he would have been charged in any case. I was still unhappy so I discussed it with the Station Commander. He told me in no uncertain terms that I was his commanding officer and must deal with him. He suggested that as his work had, until this incident, been entirely satisfactory I might fine him a days pay rather than commit him to a Court Martial. This I did next morning. In the afternoon the Flight Sergeant came to my office and told me all the airman's pals had made a collection and his loss of a days pay had left him better off!

This was by no means the end of the story for a month later I was posted to Farnborough and given the acting rank of Flight Lieutenant. The day before I was due to leave the Flight Sergeant came to my office and asked me to go down to the hangar where he had the flight lined up. I did so and the Flight Sergeant called the men to attention, and the airman I had punished stepped out and came up to me, saluted smartly and said that the flight wished to say how sorry they all were that I was leaving and they wished me to accept a small present. I was a bit staggered when he handed me a silver cigarette case and apologised for the fact that they had not had time to have it engraved but it contained a piece of paper stating what they would have had engraved. I was so shaken that I simply said I was sorry to leave but I would have the engraving done. The incident made me very happy because I then knew that the young airman bore me no grudge after he had appeared before me on the charge of failing to carry out his pre-flight inspection properly.

The next day I handed over my command to Flying Officer Petch - an engineering officer but not a pilot.

Chapter 16

Back to Farnborough

I arrived at Farnborough about the end of October 1941 to find myself promoted to the acting rank of Flight Lieutenant. My post was unit and station engineer officer. This meant that I would be required to visit all the units in No 1 AACU in turn and to supervise the operations of the two maintenance flights.

The Headquarters unit of No 1 AACU had expanded considerably with the commanding officer rank raised to Group Captain, the senior administrative officer to Wing Commander and the senior engineering officer to Squadron Leader. Sammy and the children were still at the cottage at Catcott. I flew frequently to Weston Zoyland for overnight stops or weekends. Sammy would meet me at the airfield and drive me to Catcott and back again to the airfield after my stay. The boys were growing apace and Sammy had taken in a young girl evacuee from London called Renee. Michael who was now nearly seven years old had been put in a weekly boarding school in Bridgewater, coming home every weekend.

In March 1942 Sammy's doctor telephoned me to say that she had symptoms of appendicitis and must go into hospital. I dashed down to Catcott, delivered Sammy to Bridgewater hospital then took the two boys to Longbridge Deverill to stay with my parents. Our evacuee was moved to another family. Sammy spent two weeks in hospital after her operation when I took her home to Catcott once more. The following month we put our furniture back into store at Farnham and Sammy and the two boys went to stay with her parents at Camelsdale. We sent Michael to Midhurst Grammar School as a boarder which was convenient being only about eight miles from Camelsdale.

I remained in No 1 AACU until the latter part of 1942 when I was posted to No 70 Group as senior technical officer with the acting rank of Squadron Leader. Before the posting I had attained the substantive rank of Flight Lieutenant. On posting to 70 Group I was allotted a married quarter - Pinehurst Grange[24]. This was a beautiful house, divided into two officers married quarters and standing in about three acres of woodland at the back of the Royal Aircraft Establishment. None of the officers married quarters at Farnborough were built as such but were originally private houses and later acquired by the Air Ministry. There were only four or five officers married quarters which were scattered round the town of Farnborough.

No 70 Group was located in an old school almost opposite one of the RAE entrances. My married quarter was about ten minutes walk from my office. I continued flight testing aircraft sent to No 1 AACU for major inspection, overhaul etc.. The units of the Group were also being equipped with differing types of aircraft such as the Miles Martinet and the Defiant target-towers all of which I carried out acceptance tests on. My first flight in the Defiant was rather frightening for during take-off the temperature in the cockpit rose alarmingly. I opened the shutters more but the heat was almost unbearable. I opened the hood slightly and came back to land on the airfield. I found the excessive heat came from two pipes running along the floor of the front cockpit to the radiator which was behind and below the pilot's seat. I soon found that opening the radiator before take-off gave a more comfortable ride.

Other types of aircraft were being delivered to the unit but I was the only pilot actively flying in the unit. The Group Captain used to get me to fly him about and the Wing Commander

[24] By 1957 Pinehurst Grange was visible only as stub walls in the grass!

was a first war pilot and no longer flying so I became chauffeur to all and sundry. I also spent some time taking young members of the Air Training Corps on their first flights.

It was through this I got to know an ATC officer[25] who up till the outbreak of war owned, with his brother, a furniture removal and storage business in Aldershot. We became good friends and I took him on cross country flights on various occasions. Through him I got to know Leslie Hawthorn, a former racing car driver, who owned the Tourist Trophy Garage at Farnham. His own son Michael was then a schoolboy. Soon after the war Leslie was killed in a road accident near Tilford. Mike Hawthorn grew up to be a famous racing driver when he too was killed in a road accident on the Guildford bypass apparently whilst racing his friend Rob Walker.

Figure 48. Air experience for A.T.C. cadets

Soon after my appointment as STO No 70 Group, No 2 AACU was amalgamated with No 1 AACU so I decided to visit some of its flights. Travelling by road my first stop was at Croydon where one of its flights was located. To my surprise and delight I was met by the engineering officer - Flying Officer Charles Latter who I had last seen in HMS Courageous as a corporal some nine years earlier.

From Croydon I went to Detling to another flight and spent about an hour there. On leaving the camp the air raid sirens started up and as I was descending the hill from Detling and approaching Maidstone I saw a V1 flying bomb heading for London and being attacked by a Spitfire. The bomb blew up in the air and the remains crashed about a mile ahead of me.

A few days after my return to Farnborough my assistant engineer - a Flight Lieutenant was promoted and posted away. I immediately rang Chas Latter at Croydon and asked him if he would be interested in the job and working with me. He was delighted so I contacted Command Headquarters and asked for him to be posted as my assistant. In due course he arrived and was promoted to acting Flight Lieutenant.

At that time Sammy and I were living with a Wing Commander friend and his wife in Farnborough having been ordered out of our lovely married quarter at Pinehurst Grange. It was required for quarters for a number of WAAF officers. The day after Chas arrived he asked me if he could have a couple of hours off to look for accommodation for his wife and son. As he left the office I wished him luck and told him Sammy had been searching unsuccessfully ever since we had left Pinehurst Grange. When he returned he said that he had been offered a nice bungalow in Cranmore Lane, Aldershot, by Pearsons estate agents but could not afford it. I was so angry because Sammy had been to Pearsons several times without success that I picked up the phone and asked them why I, who had been on their list for some time, had not been notified. They made some lame excuse and offered it to me.

Sammy and I looked at the bungalow which we liked and took it over on lease. Chas continued searching unsuccessfully so we suggested to him that he bring his wife and stay with us

[25] Jack Hards

so that she could search daily through all the estate agents. Sammy and Kit took to each other immediately as Chas and I had done many years before. Their son, Barry was the same age as Christopher which at that time was about five years. Christopher was already going to a private school in Aldershot[26] and Barry joined a school in Eggars Hill. So both families were happily accommodated and Chas and I motored daily to Farnborough to our work. Shortly after we moved to Aldershot Sammy found that she was pregnant again. Was this to be her third boy? Time would tell!

The CTO at Old Sarum rang me one day and asked me how long would he have to hold two Stinson 105 aircraft which were not used but simply taking up hangar space. I discovered that these two aircraft had been obtained from the USA for evaluation as Army air observation planes. They were powered by a Continental flat four engine and were three-seater light planes. One was unserviceable but the other was in flying condition.

I got on to Fighter Command to find out if they were to be retained. I was told that they were no longer required and would be struck off charge. I persuaded the officer concerned to allot the serviceable aircraft to Station Flight at Farnborough. This he did and I flew it quite frequently. It soon drew the attention of Group Captain Wheeler - senior RAF officer at the RAE for he phoned me asking me what type it was and could he fly it.

A few weeks later I was told by Command Headquarters that the Establishment Committee were about to examine establishments of personnel, aircraft and vehicles at Farnborough and that the Stinson would quickly be spotted and disposed of. I persuaded the officer concerned to allot it to one of our flights at Aberporth where the flight commander promised to look after it for me as I had by that time a secret desire to acquire it for myself when the war ended. Alas by that time I was no longer in 70 Group and I lost touch with it!

About the middle of 1944 I met Group Captain Worstall at Fighter Command. He joined the RAF as an apprentice and was in the senior entry when I joined the RAF at Cranwell in 1924. He obtained a cadetship and went to the RAF College. He asked me how I liked my job as CTO at 70 Group and I told him I would have preferred to be on an operational station with Hurricanes or Spitfires as the Station Chief Technical Officer. My remarks were to have their effect at a later date.

On 12th June Sammy started labour pains and I took her to Farnborough hospital which we had previously booked. Throughout the night the air raid sirens were sounded as the V1 buzzbombs approached the area. One crashed beside the road at Frimley severely damaging an oak tree on the green and making a huge hole in the main road. Opposite the site now stands Frimley hospital and the road is now a dual carriageway. Next day Sammy produced a daughter so the sequence was broken!

In due course I collected Sammy and baby daughter and took them back to our bungalow at Aldershot. A few nights later further V-bomb raids were made. We listened to one approaching until its engine cut out. Sammy and I leapt out of bed. Sammy seized the baby and lay on the floor protecting it. I made for Chas and Kits room and that of the two boys. They were already out of bed when the bomb crashed into large greenhouses about two hundred yards away. We suffered some cracked windows and some plaster fell from the ceilings. Shortly after this excitement we had our baby girl christened at the Garrison church at Aldershot. She was named Judith Ann Frances.

[26] "Miss Seed's school for Officers' children".

Soon after these events our lease of the bungalow was about to run out. The owner who lived next door told us she could not renew it. because her daughter was getting married and wanted it. Sammy was unable to find other accommodation by the date of expiry of the lease so she, Christopher and Judith returned to her mother's at Camelsdale. Chas and Kit and their son Barry moved to Camberley in rooms. Within a fortnight Sammy had found a furnished house in Aldershot itself in Lansdowne Road. So we all moved back together again.

I was still called upon to test aircraft after inspection or repair and new types were always coming along. I flew two Hurricane Mk 1's and a Hurricane IIC. I had flown all the Station Flight aircraft and now added the Miles Master trainer and the Miles Martinet target tower soon to be issued to the one of the AACU flights. I also found on visits to American Air Force units they were generally quite willing to offer one the opportunity to fly their aircraft. On such visits I flew a Stinson L5, an Army Co-operation aircraft, on one occasion and a Vultee Vengeance - a US day bomber, on another.

This happy state of affairs did not last long for I was notified that I was to be posted to No 38 Group as its chief technical officer with the acting rank of Wing Commander.

Chapter 17

38 GROUP

38 Group was the airborne forces group, originally under Transport Command but now under Fighter Command. It was equipped with Stirling and Halifax aircraft converted to tow gliders. The operational gliders were the Airspeed Horsa used mainly to carry troops and the GAL Hamilcar which could carry a light tank and its crew.

The headquarters of 38 Group was located at Marks Hall, a mansion acquired by the RAF for the duration of the war. It was surrounded by hutted accommodation for the officers, sergeants and airmen's messes, stores, MT section etc.

On arrival at the Group I took over from a Wing Commander who was being posted elsewhere. He took me around a number of the Group's stations to meet the engineer officers then wished me luck! I needed it for most of the Group's aircraft were unserviceable from the hammering they had taken during the battle of Arnhem which took place just before I joined the group. Also the glider force was very considerably reduced for none returned from Arnhem.

So hectic was the repairing and replacement of tug aircraft and gliders that I had little time to do much flying myself. I did however find time to have some dual instruction on a Horsa glider towed by a Halifax tug at Earls Colne - the nearest airfield to Marks Hall. On the day I was due to fly the Horsa as first pilot Chas Latter arrived having been flown up to Earls Colne by a Warrant Officer pilot from Farnborough. I asked Chas if he would like to fly in a glider and he agreed. I took the Horsa off with Chas and nine other people aboard. We did a circuit of the airfield then I cast off and made a landing. It was a great thrill to me but Chas did not enjoy it very much probably due to the steep gliding angle a glider makes when approaching to land.

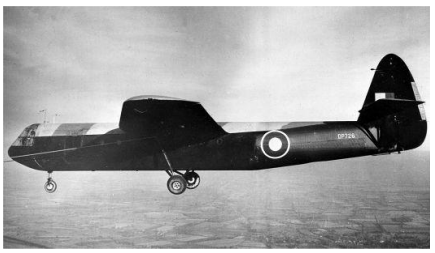


Figure 49. Airspeed Horsa glider

Shortly after I arrived at 38 Group I heard of a possible house to be let furnished at Great Leighs near Braintree and about 12 miles from my office. I went over to see a Mrs. Wilson who told me the house belonged to her aunt who was now too old to live alone and had moved in with her. She took me to see the cottage which was about half a mile from her house. The cottage had been completed just before war broke out. It was wired for electricity but had not been connected to the main supply so oil lamps were used. The garden was unmade but the aunts furniture remained in the house. It was beautifully furnished and possessed some lovely antiques including a grandfather clock. I was delighted with it and Mrs. Wilson let it to me with the remark "the trouble with you Service people is you are here today and gone tomorrow"!

Mrs. Wilson had two daughters Belinda and Claudia who were approximately the same ages as Michael and Christopher. Her husband Archie was an accountant in civilian life and was then serving in the Army Pay Corps in India.

On one of my visits to Netheravon I was asked if I would like to have a snatch take-off in a glider. For this exercise a WACO Hadrian glider was being used. The tow rope, already attached to the glider, was laid out zigzag fashion at the end of which was a big loop attached to the tops of poles ahead of the glider. The tug aircraft, in this case a Dakota was equipped with a hook on the underside of the aircraft rather like a larger version of the arrester hook on deck

landing aircraft.

I sat in the second pilots seat alongside the captain somewhat apprehensively. I heard the tug approaching and saw the hook engage the loop on the towrope. The rope seemed to thrash about then with a kick in the pants we were airborne. I found it a great thrill and another experience to remember.

Sammy and the children quickly moved into White Cottage and settled happily, hoping we would have a long stay. I drove daily to Marks Hall, had lunch in the Officers Mess than back home each evening.

Figure 50. 'The Airborne Arms'

The build up of 38 Group in tug aircraft and gliders proceeded smoothly. I was kept busy visiting the Group stations checking progress. Eventually everything was ready for a massive airborne operation. The Hamilcars with their tug aircraft were moved up to Woodbridge in Suffolk. This airfield had one massive runway about 100 yards wide and very long. It was built to enable crippled bombers returning from attacks in Germany to land often with damaged or inoperable undercarriages.

I visited Woodbridge while the Hamilcars were being loaded with their tanks and final preparations were being made. I flew from Earls Colne in an Auster AOP aircraft. When I was ready to return the wind was dead across the runway so I taxied out and took off across it which I was able to do because it was so wide.

The airborne operation, code named Varsity was on a very big scale. Over 20,000 troops were carried in 1696 transport aircraft and 1348 gliders. Nearly 900 aircraft carried out fighter sweeps to clear away any Luftwaffe fighter opposition while fighter-bombers dealt with flak sites. The RAF 38 and 46 Groups and the US 9th Troop Carrier Command lost only sixty-five aircraft shot down during the operations. In the evening of the operation the senior staff officers were able to attend the debriefing of the aircrews when films taken by cameramen carried on some of the aircraft were shown. One extraordinary film showed a Halifax aircraft ahead towing a Hamilcar glider. Flak was bursting all around and the tail of the Hamilcar was shot off. The glider immediately went into a dive releasing or breaking its tow cable. The camera followed the diving Hamilcar until its tank complete with its crew smashed through the nose loading doors and fell vertically to its doom.


Figure 51. 38 Group staff at Marks Hall 1945

After the Rhine crossing the armies proceeded at speed into Germany. So rapid was the progress of the troops that ammunition, foodstuffs and mail had to be dropped from the air. I went on one of these trips shortly after the war ended with the crew of a Stirling landing at Handorf where one runway had been repaired. The airfield was littered with wrecked German aircraft and no buildings were standing. After making our delivery we flew to Brussels where we remained overnight. The following day we flew to Wunsdorf where we dropped containers and then

to Schleswig passing over Hamburg. We approached Hamburg at a low altitude to see the damage created in heavy bombing attacks by the RAF. At low altitude Hamburg appeared to be still standing but as we passed over all the buildings were roofless shells, some still smoking. We stayed the night at Schleswig and returned to Rivenhall the following day.

The German forces in Northwest Germany, Holland and Denmark surrendered on 4th May 1945 and World War II against Germany was officially declared over on 8th May. After the German surrender our C in C flew to Germany and brought back his brother, an Army brigadier who had been captured by the Germans and kept in a concentration camp. The C in C and his brother came into the Officers Mess for a drink at the Airborne Arms. He was warmly greeted by all present.

When the German forces surrendered 38 Group began landing troops in Norway to take over from the Germans. The day after collecting his brother from prison camp the C in C flew to Norway. The weather was bad and his aircraft flew into a mountain near Oslo killing all on board. A more tragic event in the circumstances could not be imagined.

After 38 Group's final operation landing troops in Norway things quietened down and with reduced flying. Repairs to aircraft damaged during the Rhine crossing proceeded. About the middle of 1945 it was announced that the group headquarters was to be moved to Upavon.

Towards the end of that year I was sent out to Cairo with a Halifax crew who were to examine problems involved in basing a squadron with its complement of Horsa gliders in the Middle East. The flight out was made in three stages. We flew from Great Dunmow to Istres where we stayed two nights. The next stages were from Istres to Castel Benito and then on to Almaza (Cairo). At Cairo we spent three nights in an hotel where meetings were arranged to discuss the problems involved in the forthcoming transfer of the squadron. We finally left Almaza for Luqa (Malta) and the following day we returned to Great Dunmow.

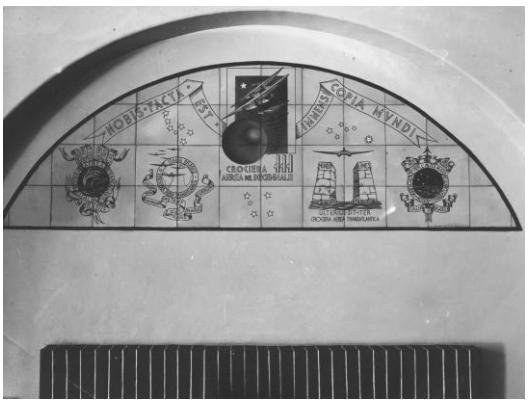


Figure 52. Balbo memorial at Castel Benito

The whole trip was done at 9000 feet and I was allowed on the flight deck for most of the journey. The navigator had planned the courses and altitude to fly which were set on the automatic pilot. I enjoyed it so much that I asked the captain when we left Malta if I could fly it by hand. The second pilot handed his seat over to me and the navigator told me the course to steer and the altitude to maintain. The trip from Malta to great Dunmow took us five minutes under seven hours out of which I flew the machine manually for the last four hours. I flew the aircraft round Great Leighs a couple of times and saw Sammy come out of our cottage and wave to me after which I handed the aircraft over to the captain. The crew thought I was crackers to want to fly it by hand when "George" - the automatic pilot would have flown it all the way. By the time we landed at Great Dunmow and cleared Customs Sammy and children had brought the car to pick me up.

Early in the new year the group headquarters moved to Upavon. Sammy and children spent a few nights with my parents at Longbridge Deverill then we moved into a married quarter at Upavon. The quarter had not been entirely refurbished after the war during which it had been

used to house WAAF officers. However we settled in for what was to be a very brief period.

When the war finished I had considered leaving the RAF because of the continual disruption of our home life. I had told a friend who was the managing director of a firm, which made metal parts for parachutes, of my intention. Later on he invited me to have lunch with him at the Savoy and to meet someone who had a proposition to make to me. The friend was the managing director of a large garage in Esher who, during the war, had built and equipped a very large machine shop where parts were made for Vickers Wellington aircraft. He told me he was looking for a works manager to take over the machine shop and garage, replacing the present works manager who wished to retire.

The job interested me very much. I liked the managing director and thanked him for the offer. At a later date we met again and he told me he would like me to take the job but he could not close the deal until the Air Ministry were prepared to confirm that contracts would continue to be placed with his firm. All the contracts had been held in abeyance when the war ended and the country now had a Labour government as a present from the voting population to Winston Churchill! From then on I was pressed by Fighter Command to say whether or not I would accept the Permanent Commission. This put me in a quandary as I wished to take the job at Esher if it was possible. Eventually at another meeting with the managing director I put the position to him. He advised me to accept the commission as he still had no reply from the Air Ministry about future contracts. So after discussing it with Sammy she felt I should take the commission. I did so and within a week I was posted to No 229 Group, Delhi. Once more Sammy, Christopher and Judith returned to Camelsdale.

Chapter 18

India

In due course I was flown to Karachi by BOAC who were using Lancastrian aircraft which were converted Lancaster bombers. They carried about six passengers and were uncomfortable and noisy. Our first stop was Lydda after 11 hours flying then on to Karachi taking another 9½ hours. At Karachi I transferred to Indian National Airways who were using Dakota aircraft for the trip to Delhi taking a further 4½ hours.

At Delhi I was accommodated in Central Vista Officers Mess where unaccompanied officers of both Air Headquarters and No 229 Group lived. My accommodation was superb and consisted of a large bedroom, lounge, and my own bathroom. A batman and cleaner were also provided. The mess faced one of the main roads, Kingsway, which led to Air Headquarters, the governor's palace and the parliament buildings. It was a very comfortable set-up in New Delhi which was an attractive city with tree lined straight roads, extensive lawns and new buildings and residences.

Fig 53 New Delhi

The mess was about a mile from the headquarters offices. I bought myself a bicycle and cycled daily along Kingsway, since renamed, to my office. On my first day in the office I applied to the Air Ministry for my wife and daughter to be sent out to join me. Accommodation for married families was available but the reply from the Air Ministry was that owing to the impending partition of India is was not proposed to send families out to India except on compassionate grounds. My first reaction was to regret accepting the permanent commission.

I knew Sammie would be disappointed not to be able to join me but she did not complain. She told me in one of her letters that Christopher had joined Easeborne Priory a prep school to Midhurst Grammar School. Both boys were boarders.

After settling myself in my new job I visited a number of stations which came under Air and Group Headquarters flying with INA. Among them were Karachi, Jodpur, Lahore and Chaklala. I also kept myself in flying practice using a little Auster aircraft of Station Flight at Palam the airport near Delhi.

Figure 54. Kingsway, New Delhi

Just before Christmas 1946 I was taken into the British military hospital at Palam and operated on for the removal of a fistula. I was in the officers surgical ward which consisted of about six individual wards. The only other patient was an Army captain in a ward a few doors from me. I had recovered by Christmas but was told I would not be released until after. I felt sure this was done so that two of us would be company. The day and night sisters persuaded us to help them decorate the common room for a Christmas party. For my part I prepared full size silhouettes of the two sisters head and shoulders from dark blue paper which we pasted to the walls each side of the fireplace.

On Christmas day a number of doctors and nurses doing the rounds of the hospital arrived at our common room and the atmosphere became very festive. Provision had been made by the Army patient, having his own car, with which he obtained the necessary liquid ingredients of a good party from his mess. In due course the matron, with her entourage, entered the room which had suddenly become very quiet. She looked around the room and then said in a matronly authoritative voice "will someone tell me which are the patients" whereupon we were presented. A little later and after further drinks I asked our night sister what the initials Q.A.I.M.N.S. on her uniform stood for. She promptly told me they meant a "Queer Assortment of Individuals Mostly Non Sexual"! I still don't believe her.

Figure 55. Patients and staff at British military hospital, Palam

A few days later I left hospital after seeing and thanking Major Smith (anaesthetist), Captain Jones (surgeon), Sister Medd (Ward sister), Sister Snarey (night sister) for all they had done for me.

After my return to work news spread that No 229 Group would be disbanded before partition took place in August 1947. I was sent for by the senior air staff officer and told that I was to take an Indian Air Force officer to the UK to visit branches of the Air Ministry and other units. This was a delightful surprise. I was told that I would be expected to complete the visits to the units he outlined within a month.

We set off by INA from Delhi to Karachi where we transferred to a York aircraft of Transport Command five days later. Our next stop was Habbanyah where we stayed overnight reaching Malta next day. After a further overnight stop we reached Lyneham. The journey so far had taken eleven days.

As soon as I was able I went to Camelsdale to see Sammie and daughter Judith now two years and ten months old. Sammie's parents and brothers were happy to see me and Tom, one of the boys, told me they were building some new houses for teachers at Bedales School at Petersfield. At the same time Sammie told me a lady who she knew wanted to sell some land she owned at Bell Vale just over the border in West Sussex.

Sammie's brothers gave me a lot of information on new building rules brought out by the governments after the war. Briefly they were that private houses could be built to a maximum total floor space of 1000 square feet and that all timber required would be limited and supplied by permit. This worked out to be enough for windows, roofing, upper floor and doors. This meant that the bottom floors of a house must be constructed of solid material.

We became excited about the possibility of building a house of our own and decided to buy the piece of land offered by the lady at Bell Vale. This we did and obtained about half an acre with a hundred and eighty foot frontage to the Haslemere to Midhurst road. At one end was a road, Fernden Drive which formed a corner to our land.

With the help and advice from Sammie's stepbrothers, all builders, I produced a plan of a house with three bedrooms, bathroom and loo upstairs with lounge and sliding doors to a dining room and French door to the garden downstairs. A small kitchen with a solid fuel boiler and a radiator in the hall together with a larder and coal outhouse and a downstairs loo!

I took the completed drawings and met the council surveyor at Midhurst. I told him of my predicament, that I was in the RAF and had a further two years to serve abroad and that my wife and daughter were unable to accompany me. They perforce were living with her parents. He examined the drawings and said they appeared satisfactory to him but would have to be examined by the planning staff. He promised my application would, if possible be submitted to the next monthly meeting for approval.

I left him and felt very grateful for his help. I then connected up once more with the Indian officer who, after I had taken him to the Air Ministry, remained in London thoroughly enjoying himself whilst I had spent the time preparing the house plans.

After further visits to RAF units he had to see, such as the parachute training school at Ringway, the Royal Aircraft Establishment and others we prepared to return to India. We made a final visit to the Air Ministry and they arranged for us to leave by Transport Command aircraft. We left Lyneham on 6th June on board a York aircraft with fourteen other servicemen passengers and our first stop was Malta. Next day we reached Habbanyah with the starboard outer engine feathered due to a fuel leak. We took off again four days later, after the starboard engine had been replaced, for Karachi where we transferred to an INA Dakota for the final leg to Delhi.

Figure 56. 'Char wallahs' greet York at Drigh Road airfield, Karachi.

On arrival at Delhi I was greeted with the news that No 229 Group was to be disbanded and that I was posted to the Parachute Training School at Chaklala by Rawalpindi, as the station engineer officer. I was also informed that on the day of my posting I would revert to the rank of Squadron Leader which was my substantive rank.

Before leaving Delhi Squadron Leader Jeary who was in the Air Staff said he had to make a trip to Karachi and asked me if I would like to accompany him. I promptly agreed and we flew there in a Harvard aircraft and shared the flying both ways. The route took us across the Sind desert making a stop at Jodpur to refuel, reaching Karachi after about five hours twenty minutes flying. We returned to Delhi after two days again stopping to refuel at Jodpur and with a tail wind we made the journey in four and a half hours.

I packed up my belongings and prepared to leave my comfortable quarters at Central Vista. I was sorry to leave Delhi but that is service life!

Chapter 19

Chaklala

I flew to Chaklala on a Bristol 170 Wayfarer of INA making a short stop at Lahore. I soon settled into comfortable accommodation near the officers mess which had been built when the RAF were first stationed in the Northwest frontier sector. The mess manager was an old Indian who had worked in the mess most of his working life. He was extremely fond of the British and dreaded their departure which would take place after the approaching partition of India.

Chaklala was a RAF station and airport for Indian National Airways. It was beside Rawalpindi in which were located British Army regiments and was virtually the Aldershot of northern India.

At Chaklala was No 3 Parachute Training School. The station was commanded by an RAF officer - Group Captain AJ Biggar, the parachute school by a squadron leader whilst I was the Chief Technical Officer. Most of the parachute instructors were RAF officers and NCO's. The aircraft used for parachute training were Dakotas and belonged to an Indian Air Force squadron.

I had met one or two of the RAF parachute instructors before in England during my term of office in No 70 Group. It soon became fairly obvious that the majority of the Pakistanis did not want the British to leave.

The parachute training aircraft flight was commanded by Flight Lieutenant Hill and as there was no aircraft available for me to fly I asked him if I could fly on the training flights. This involved short flights from the airfield to the dropping zone, dropping the parachutists under training then returning to the airfield for another load. Flight Lieutenant Hill asked me if I would like to fly the Dakota. I was very keen so he took me up, doing takeoffs and landings in the second pilots seat. At the end of the session he allowed me to occupy the first pilots seat and carry out a takeoff, general flying followed by a landing.

Shortly after that the station commander told all his officers he wished to form his own troupe of parachutists from officers serving in sections of the station other than the Parachute Training School. He asked me if I would join but I told him I had no desire to leap out of aeroplanes unless, in emergency, I had to! When I knew the day of the proposed station commanders "stick" I asked Flight Lieutenant Hill if I could be the first pilot and he agreed.

We boarded the aircraft and I closed the door from the cockpit to the main cabin. The CO and his fellow parachutists boarded the aircraft and the dispatcher came forward and reported to me that all were aboard, connected up, and door closed. I taxied out to the take-off point opened the door and held my thumb up to the parachutists. The CO promptly shook his fist at me. We took off, reached the dropping zone and the stick of parachutists were dispatched and all landed safely. In the mess later I learned that all the jumpers had been trained and had jumped before - including the CO!

My time at Chaklala would I knew be short and that after Partition I would, I hoped be posted back to the UK. I had received an excited letter from Sammy to say that the plans of our cottage were approved. She was daily urging her stepbrothers to start building it. The boys were now working for an uncle in his building business since their own father had retired. By the rules

obtaining at the time work was to commence within six months or the planning permission would lapse.

In July I took some leave and with another officer whose name escapes me we went by bus to Srinager where we rented accommodation on a house boat. The journey in a somewhat ramshackle bus over the hills called for frequent stops to refill its engine with water. The temperature down at Chaklala was about 116 degrees Fahrenheit so the lower temperatures in the hills were sheer delight. We reached Srinager and found our houseboat on the beautiful lake.

We spent our time sight seeing. I went to the beautiful Shalamar gardens and spent several hours wandering around. On other occasions we looked round Srinager itself where the shops offered beautiful Kashmir shawls, silks and woollens. In the quiet moments we would sit quietly on our houseboat and watch a Kingfisher sitting on a rope holding the boat to the shore. Every few minutes it would plunge into the water and emerge with a fish in its beak. It resumed its place on the rope, consumed the fish then proceeded to repeat the performance.

The peace and calm of the lake and the performance of that little Kingfisher provided a superb tranquillity which I will ever remember.

I started back after a week leaving my companion who had booked for two weeks on the house boat. On the way back I stopped off at the Murray hills to visit Wing Commander Curry, his wife, and young son. They had one of the large quarters which were built for service families to live in during the very hot season. I had known Wing Commander Curry when I was in Delhi and had flown with him on several occasions visiting stations in northern India particularly the frontier stations at Risalpur, Peshawar, Rawalpindi, Lahore and Quetta. I had a most enjoyable couple of days with them before returning to Chaklala.

The approaching day of Partition brought many difficulties in trying to keep the functions of the station in operation. Exchanges of personnel were taking place daily with Hindus being moved south to Agra and Delhi and Muslims being brought from parts of India to Chaklala. RAF Transport Command flying Avro York transport aircraft were brought in to assist in the exchanges of personnel.

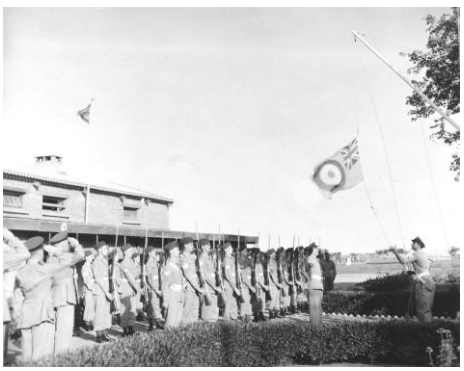


Figure 57. Partition. British flag lowered

Life among the British continued its usual course of social engagements, parties at Flashmans hotel in Rawalpindi and the general close association with the locals unmoved by the events to take place.

At last the day arrived when on 15th August India and Pakistan assumed Dominion status. Viscount Mountbatten was appointed Governor General of India and Mr. Jinnah Governor General of Pakistan. On the evening of the 14th of August all RAF personnel at Chaklala were paraded and the RAF ensign was lowered for the last time. The following morning the Royal Pakistan Air Force ensign and the Pakistan flag were hoisted.

From that day on troubles started between Pakistanis and Indians, of whom there were large numbers in Peshawar and the north generally. We had a number of incidents on and around the airfield. The Yorks were flying daily and disgorged Pakistanis who were then escorted away from the airfield by our military and civil police. The Yorks were then hosed out since numbers

of their occupants had never flown before and consequently suffered air sickness. All seats had been removed and passengers, clinging to as much of their belongings as could be permitted, were seated on the spacious floor of the aircraft. After the cleaning operation the Indians moving to India were loaded and flown to Delhi.

A couple of days after Partition day the Group Captain sent for me and told me he was taking a weeks leave and that I, as the next senior officer, would act as Station Commander until his return. The Group Captain was a keen golfing man and wished to take part in the All India Golfing Championships which was his annual habit.

The following day I received a signal from Air Headquarters at Delhi that a contingent of Indian service personnel were to board a train from Peshawar and Risalpur and would be on board two coaches in the train. When the train arrived at Rawalpindi I was to embark all Indian service personnel at Chaklala on the same train for transit to Delhi. I immediately issued an order that all Indian service personnel were to be confined to camp pending the arrival of the train. I also sent for the MT officer and asked him how many trucks we would need to carry the troops to Rawalpindi station. There were about 150 Indian troops involved and he confirmed that he had ample means of transporting them.

Figure 58. The Pakistan flags are hoisted

The next day we received news that a train carrying Pakistanis from India was derailed before reaching the border and many were killed in the fighting which occurred after the incident. This worried me and I asked the senior administrative officer for advice. He suggested that as we had several RAF NCO parachute instructors now idle, because all the dropping aircraft were flown to India on partition day, we should arm them and use them to conduct the convoy to the station. He also suggested the Army might help so I telephoned a senior officer at the barracks in Rawalpindi. He promptly removed my fears by saying the Army would station armed troops at intervals along the route, adding that they would insert the odd armoured car in the convoy!

The next day the Indians were paraded, loaded with their kit and with an armed RAF NCO in each truck we set off for the station which we reached without any trouble. The Indians were paraded on the platform and told not to leave the station. RAF NCO's surrounded the station and took up posts at every entrance and exit. Then we waited.

After about an hour the station master came to me and said the train would be about an hour late because it had been held up and attacked near Risalpur. Shortly after I heard a disturbance near the station entrance. An NCO told me that an elderly Hindu had been attacked by locals and knifed. He was picked up by local police and found to be dead.

Eventually the train arrived and the station master asked me not to embark troops until they had disengaged and moved two carriages and replaced them. I went along to see the carriages and found they had all the windows broken on both sides and were filled up to the window levels with stones. From under the stones arms and legs were protruding and considerable groaning and crying from the buried passengers. I learned from the station master that the train had been stopped by a mob, who somehow knew which carriages were loaded with Indians, and stoned them until the driver moved off again with his gruesome load. I felt sickened

by the sight and unable to reason why human beings could treat each other in this inhumane manner.

At last the train was loaded and moved off. The relief was immense so much so that my administrative officer and I together with one or two other officers retired to Flashmans where we relieved the tension which had built up in us by numerous tots of Scotch. I went to bed and slept like a log that night.

A day or two later the Group Captain returned and congratulated me on the successful evacuation of the Indian personnel who he said had reached Delhi successfully and without further incident.

Chapter 20

Singapore

A few weeks later I received a signal from Air Ministry posting me to Karachi. I felt sure I was on the way home. However two days after reaching Karachi I received a further signal from Air Ministry posting me to No 390 Maintenance Unit at Seletar, Singapore and that I was to board a Transport Command York on the fourth day of October. From Karachi we flew to Negumbo, Ceylon where we stayed the night and on to Changi, Singapore the next day.

My appointment was as Senior Technical Plans officer and the Commanding Officer was Group Captain RB Harrison. There were two maintenance units at Singapore - No 389 being a spares and equipment unit and 390 MU which held all aircraft spares and also carried out all repairs to aircraft and salvage of aircraft where necessary. There was also a flying boat squadron equipped with Short Sunderlands.

Seletar is situated on the north coast of Singapore island between the Royal Naval base and RAF Changi and looked across the separating straits of water to the Malay States. I had accommodation in the officers mess which was a very large one and which faced down the aerodrome to the straits. I soon settled in and found that the station possessed every facility with married quarters, NAAFI and Malcomb Club, a sailing club, cinema, sports field and lovely large swimming pool.

My first preoccupation was to apply for my wife and daughter to join me. The reply was that as I had only half my overseas tour left to do it was not proposed to send out my family with the usual bunkum that reconsideration would be made for compassionate grounds. I wrote and told Sammy what I had done and she replied that it might be better if she stayed and chased the boys over the building of the cottage and to be available if any serious queries arose. It seemed the sensible thing to do so I settled down to do another fourteen months abroad.

I settled into my job as Technical Plans Officer and decided to keep in flying practice as the station flight had a couple of Austers. My first flight was to take a look around Singapore Island. I also joined the sailing club and found that they had a Snipe hard chine sailing boat available to the first member who qualified as helmsman. The club had four Snipes and several Seletar one design clink1er built boats of about eleven feet six inches in length.

The club also had a Star class yacht. The Star was a famous racer in pre-war years particularly in Germany. After the war a number of Stars were obtained from Germany and one was issued to each of the five sailing clubs in Singapore Island. They were the Royal Singapore Yacht Club, the Royal Navy Sailing Club, RAF Seletar Sailing Club, RAF Changi Sailing Club and the Army Sailing Club. All five stars were raced at the annual sailing regatta.

Figure 59. Star yacht

A Leading Aircraftsman member of our club whose name I do not recall, was a qualified helmsman of all the types of boat owned by the club and offered to teach me to sail the Snipe. We got on very well together and after the necessary tuition I was issued with my helmsman's certificate. I was then allotted a Snipe named Lorna. I don't know how she came by the name but I never changed it.

My instructor was the only qualified helmsman for the Star which was used mainly in competitions with the other Stars in Singapore Island. It was a deep water boat unlike the Snipes and Seletars which could sail on to the sandy beaches of the small islands in the straits. He asked me if I would like to crew for him which I was happy to do. At the annual regatta our boat was entered and I was his other member of its crew. The course was along the straits with turning points. If my memory serves we had to do two circuits. On the first circuit we were lying third but although there was not a lot of wind and the sea smooth we won the race, which was entirely due to the expert sailing of my helmsman.

I spent every Saturday and Sunday at the yacht club and entered the weekly club races. I could usually find someone anxious to crew for me and on occasions I sailed alone. The club boats were skippered by officers and airmen, many of whom had families in married quarters. They would frequently arrange to make picnic trips to the islands and I was frequently invited. This involved an unofficial race across the channel where the bottles of beer were then stuck in the sand under water to keep them cool. So good times were had by all.

On Wednesday afternoons - officially sports days I frequently played hockey. This was quite energetic enough for me in the climate Singapore enjoyed. The temperature rarely exceeded 100 degrees Fahrenheit but the humidity was almost constantly 100%. It rained almost every day of the year even if only for a few minutes. The island was beautiful, being perpetually green and constantly flowering. There was no spring, summer, autumn, or winter. The main change was around February and March when the monsoon period covered Malaya. Then for weeks it poured with rain which could only be dispersed by monsoon ditches dug on one side of the roads. They were up to six feet deep and when in use carried immense volumes of water, not to mention unfortunate animals caught up in the weather.

So life went on smoothly with my spare time spent sailing, swimming or playing hockey until Christmas. Parties were held by the occupants of both officers and other ranks married quarters. The only thing out of place was the fact that there was no snow but the beauty of the trees and flowers made up for it.

I was invited to dinner on one of the days of the Christmas period by a Squadron Leader and his wife who lived in married quarters near the officers mess. I was also invited by other officers and their wives to drinks parties at their homes. My first Christmas at Seletar was somewhat different to the one I spent a year previously at BMH Palam.

Shortly after Christmas my CO sent me to Hong Kong where an RAF squadron was operating. The squadron based there installed an engine which they received had from No 390 MU but was found to be faulty on its first ground test. The purpose of my visit was to check that the engine was faulty on receipt or whether its installation was incorrect.

I left Singapore (Kallang Airport) in a Dakota of Cathay Pacific Airways and arrived at Bangkok five and a half hours later and was transported to an hotel for an over night stop. I reached the hotel at about three thirty in the afternoon and signed in, was shewn my room and my bag was carried up. I returned to the main lounge and ordered tea. I soon began to wonder if I was in the right place because the only other occupants were women most of them young and attractive and of various nationalities. More came and all seemed to go to another room returning shortly afterwards and standing in groups chatting or sitting at tables and drinking. My wonderment was soon to be satisfied for a lady came in from the main entrance and I immediately felt that I knew her. She walked past me to the desk then returned to me. I stood up

and she said "I'm sure we have met before" I said I too felt sure we had to which she replied that her husband Wing Commander Charles had recently been posted from India to Bangkok as the British Air Attaché. I immediately remembered having met them both at Central Vista mess in Delhi.

I asked her what was going on in the hotel with so many women present. She told me they were all there to see a fashion show which was about to begin. She said her husband would arrive at about five o'clock as they both lived in the hotel. True enough her husband arrived on time and we chatted for a while exchanging notes on our movements since we had last met. He left me and arranged that we should have dinner together.

I had expected to have a lonely evening and anticipated going to bed early. The sudden change to what turned out to be a very pleasant evening illustrates how small a world can be when friends appear out of the blue.

I left next morning, again by Cathay Pacific Dakota and reached Hong Kong after six hours flying. The airfield Kai Tak is quite a sight on approach by air. It appeared to be a single runway which projected out to sea whilst the other end appeared to be at the foot of high hills. The landing was good and I was soon transported to an hotel, previously booked, in Kowloon.

I went to the airfield on about three days carrying out checks and ground running the engine. It however presented difficulty in diagnosing the exact trouble. It had low oil pressure and would not produce maximum revolutions per minutes on ground test so I sent a signal back to Singapore recommending a new engine be dispatched as soon as possible. I left instructions that the faulty engine be removed and dispatched to 390 MU.

During my spare time in the evenings I took the ferry across to Hong Kong and spent hours walking round that amazing city. The water between Hong Kong and Kowloon appeared to be full of floating boats sampans and barges on which many of the men, women and children who lived on them had been born on them, then spent their lives on them, many died on them.

Back at the hotel I received acknowledgement of my signals regarding the troublesome engine, and confirmed that a new engine was being dispatched. I was then informed that a Dakota was leaving Hong Kong for Singapore a couple of days later and that I should join it. I did so and joined 10 other service passengers. Our captain was a Flight Lieutenant Brown. We took off and landed at Saigon where we refuelled had lunch then took off for Tengah, Singapore. The whole journey took 10 hours flying time. Service transport took me from Tengah back to Seletar.

Back in the office I made my report to the Commanding Officer and ensured that the new engine had been dispatched as promised to Hong Kong. Off duty I started sailing again during the weekends. The monsoon weather was improving so I restarted flying the Auster. I was approached by a Captain Williams who wished to photograph selected areas around the island at low altitude. This job interested me very much and he gave me prints of the photographs he had made during our flights.

I had received letters from Sammy that her stepbrothers had started to build the cottage I had drawn during my trip to the UK from Delhi. They had left it as long as they dared because they had so much work on. Sammy and Judith went down to the plot each fine day and made the builders tea when required. She also bought a hen coup and started a chicken run.

In one of her weekly letters she told me that Elsie, her step sister, who belonged to the Colonial Nursing Service was returning to Singapore. Elsie Bullock had been serving in Singapore when it was invaded by the Japanese. She worked with Professor Cameron, a surgeon in Singapore Hospital at the time of the invasion. They were both incarcerated in Changi jail with hundreds of others for the duration of the war with Japan. The stories they told us in later years about the actions of the Japanese made me wonder how any Briton could bring himself to buy these cars, radios, TV etc. which now flood the country destroying our own industries.

In due course Sammy gave me the date Elsie would arrive in Singapore. Elsie telephoned me on arrival and I went to Singapore and met her at the hospital. She told me she was leaving next day for Penang where she had been appointed matron to the hospital there. She wrote to me soon after her arrival and invited me to go to Penang should I take any leave.

At about that time a Wing Commander MacLechlan - if my memory serves me correctly was posted to Seletar. He was not accompanied by his family so I saw a lot of him in the squadron bar of the officers mess most evenings. One evening he was talking to a squadron leader of 389 Equipment MU wondering where they could go to spend the Easter break. They asked me what I was doing over the holiday. I told them I had been invited to Penang and that they were welcome to come along too. The wing commander had a big American car and promptly offered to drive us to Penang.

Figure 60. Joe with 'big American car' !

We left a few days before Easter and stayed the first night at Port Kelang. We reached Penang the next day to find Elsie had found us accommodation in an hotel close to the hospital. We spent Easter there enjoying beautiful weather, sandy beaches, swimming and exploring Penang on foot and by car. We returned to Singapore after a happy Easter break making a one night stop at a hill camp at Kuala Lumpar.

A week after our return a curfew on all service personnel was imposed entailing their return to the island in daylight. At the same time travel to Malaya was forbidden. The imposition was brought in due to attacks by communist bands which had broken out in many parts of the Malay States. We saw no evidence of trouble on our visit to Penang and I felt we were very fortunate to have made the journey without trouble.

This limited sailing time especially during weekends when some members would take their families to Changi returning after dark usually with only a lantern or torch as navigation lights! It was during this period that Squadron Leader Tom Knight who had befriended me when I first arrived at Seletar told me he was going to build a motor boat. He was not very keen on sailing for he held the view that the wind was usually unreliable both in speed and direction whereas a motor boat would go wherever you pointed it. He asked me if I was interested in helping him.

His idea of boat design was to me somewhat crude when he showed me his plan which was of a flat bottomed punt type with a vertical bow half decked. Tom was an engineer officer in No 389 MU. As such he was frequently aware of surplus or out of date equipment about to

become available for disposal by auction on selected dates. He acquired an air cooled flat twin cylinder engine which was mounted to a metal stand. It drove a pump and had been standard ground equipment but was now obsolete. At the same time he obtained sheets of plywood and miscellaneous timber.

Tom was a quick and hard worker. He soon made and assembled the framework for the boat. I was sceptical about the design from the beginning and often told him so. It was however to be his own boat and he was not prepared to listen to many of my suggestions.

Eventually the hull was completed - flat bottomed and flat topped. When we put it in the water it floated nose down about 3 or 4 inches. Tom was sure that this would be rectified when the engine was installed as its position and its weight would counteract this defect.

We installed the engine and its propeller shaft which was coupled direct to the engine then completed and fitted the rudder, helm and a seat across behind the engine. The boat was ready for launching. We got it on to a flat topped trolley and ran it down the slipway until it floated off. It was necessary to get the boat pointing in the right direction before starting the engine because of the absence of a clutch. Tom started the engine by hand crank and shot back to the tiller. The boat started moving as soon as the engine started and Tom steered clear of the slipway and opened the throttle. As he did so the bow dipped deeper in the water as the speed increased which in any case was no more than walking pace. We took the boat back to the boat house and retired to the Mess for a drink and discussion.

In retrospect I feel that I may have said I told you so. I told Tom we would have to fit a keel in the form of a timber plank from bow to stern. This was to be faired in giving extra buoyancy with a V shaped form below the water line. Tom's main point in wanting a flat bottomed boat was that with such the boat could be run well up on to beaches so that passengers could step out on to dry land. We completed the new keel in due course and the boat floated well and on our first test the bow rose as the speed increased. I went out with Tom on a few trips but my love for sailing was greater so I returned to Lorna. On other occasions I crewed for my leading aircraftsman instructor in the Star which I always enjoyed.

I occasionally went to Singapore as there was such a good bus service from the camp. More often that not however I got lifts by other officers living in the mess who owned motor cars. On one occasion an officer whose name escapes me asked me if I had been to Sago Lane in Singapore. I replied that I had never heard of it. He explained that it was a street of dying houses where Chinese went, were taken to, or forced to go to die. Along the lane were shops selling coffins, candles, flowers wreathes and other things associated with death. I was so put off by the whole thing that I could not get away quickly enough. My companion was equally shaken so we returned to his car and went to the Raffles Hotel where we cured our depression.

In the mess at Seletar were two ladies living in who ran the Malcomb Club on the station. They were seldom seen except one or the other would be in for meals while the other was on duty at the Club. One of them, a Miss Oxley a Yorkshire woman who was about my age, I was then forty, approached me one day and told me that she belonged to the sailing club and she had heard that I had not got a regular crew for my Snipe. This was true, but I never found any difficulty in finding a crew member as several of the husbands, wives, or airmen were often looking for someone to take them sailing. I invited Olive (Miss Oxley) to sail with me as crew. She had sailed with other helmsmen but had no particular desire to become a helmsman herself. She was quite content to be "gibby".

We sailed together frequently in races and when no races were staged we sometimes sailed with other boats to explore and picnic on nearby islands. Because of the curfew we always had to be back at the club house before dark.

On one occasion we set off with other boats doing general sailing near the club house when a sudden wind blew up together with rain scattering the boats. The wind was offshore and one or two of the Seletars capsized fortunately near other anchored boats but one or two were blown downwind. I quickly got the main sail down and ran on for a while on the jib. Fortunately the Snipe being a hard chine boat is difficult to capsize. In fact in club mixed races which were common the Snipes usually beat the Seletars if there were good winds. It was not infrequent for a Seletar to end up the wrong way up.

Figure 61. Snipe 'Lorna'

We ran for some distance until I saw a large buoy ahead in the deep channel and unoccupied. The buoy was fitted with a mast in its centre stayed by three wire cables. I made sure I was directly up wind of the buoy then dropped the jib. I asked Olive if she would try to jump on it and hang on to the mast. She said she would try. I hit the buoy and she leapt on to it with the painter in her hand and quickly threw a couple of turns around one of the stays, Lorna swung round into the wind and Olive came back aboard.

By this time there was about four or five inches of mostly rain water in the boat and the floor boards were floating. We lifted them and bailed out what we could and sat about half an hour when the rain stopped and the wind dropped. We were not cold as everything in Singapore is warm even the rain. We cast off and hauled up the wet sails and after two or three tacks we were back at the club house.


Figure 62. Sammy with Judith and Chris at the cottage

I sailed frequently until I was due to leave Singapore. I have often wondered who took over Lorna and if Olive continued to crew in her.

I continued to fly the Auster when I could and when it was available. My last flight shortly before I left Singapore was to take Flight Lieutenant Watts on another photographic trip after which we landed at Changi to pick up another officer Flight Lieutenant Field for the return trip to Seletar. As a result of the several photographic trips I took Flt Lt Watts on I have a goodly collection covering most of Singapore Island mostly taken from an altitude of 1500 feet.

So life continued in the almost constant heat and humidity of Singapore. The daily dress was khaki shorts and shirt and life was eased by a few drinks and conversation the other living in officers of which there were quite a number. Later in the year we were joined by Wing Commander Standford-Tuck - the Battle of Britain ace.

Letters from Sammy kept me in the picture over the building of our cottage with frequent snapshots of the house and the children when they were home. I could not wait to leave

Singapore and the bitterness which I felt when posted there remained with me. My relief, a Squadron Leader, was posted in about three weeks before Christmas. He seemed a nice chap and during a conversation he said that he had put his car - a Morris 8 four seater drophead tourer on blocks until he returned to England two and a half years later. Thereafter I pressed him to sell it to me and he finally agreed. At last my sailing date was notified and as a last kick in the pants I was detailed as officer-in-charge of all service personnel which included any wives and children returning to UK on the troopship. The date of departure was Christmas Eve 1948 and the trip took about three weeks which I used to work up a hate for the postings personnel at the Air Ministry.

I recalled that I was posted to India and flown there in 10½ hours. After a year and ten months in India and Pakistan I was flown to Singapore in 16 hours making a total of 26½ hours. I served the full normal 2½ years but was not allowed to be accompanied by wife for any part of it. Finally to rub it in it took three weeks, about 500 hours, to get me home!

I will not dwell on the trip home. Suffice it to say that when I arrived home, now completed and my first sight of it, I felt it was a tiny place in a bit of field with grass, thistles etc. at least eighteen inches high. At last Sammy and I were in our own home. She had brought in our furniture from the depository at Farnham - we hoped for the last time.

Figure 63. First house of our own, 'Little Corner'

Chapter 21

Little Corner

I had a months end of tour leave and my first obligation was to report to the Air Ministry in person. I had made up my mind that I would accept a posting to Odiham, Tangmere or Farnborough, all of which were within daily reach by car. I went by train to London which is a fast run from Haslemere - our local station and reported to the "P" Staff Air Ministry. I was greeted by a Squadron Leader who asked me my preference for posting. When I told him I did not mind Odiham, Tangmere or Farnborough he replied that I was the sort of chap he to meet as nearly everyone returning from a tour abroad demanded one station without any alternative. He told me he should be able to post me to one of the three stations I had listed before my leave ended.

Before receiving any posting notice I collected the Morris 8 car I had bought from my successor at Seletar. He had stored it with relatives in a shed at their farm near Midhurst. When I arrived I found that the owner had notified his relatives that I had bought it so I found the car ready to drive off. The battery had been charged and the radiator refilled with water. It took me a little time checking it over and getting it running. I drove back to Little Corner and parked it in the track made by the builders as there was no garage as yet. The Morris was coloured red and in very good condition and Sammy was very pleased with it.

A few days later I met Mr. W D Brown who I had met several times during the war when I was with the Airborne Forces Group. This came about because the X-Type parachute designed especially for use by paratroops was new to the Services and was subject to a number of unforeseen defects during its development, some of them fatal. Any incidents had to be reported to the parachute research and development section at Farnborough immediately it happened. This department was headed by Mr. Brown MSc and a Principal Scientific Officer. He headed a team of about five scientific officers all holding academic degrees.

When we met he asked me what I was doing and having told him I was waiting a posting notice he said he wanted me and asked how he could get me. I told him I would love to work with him and suggested he get the Director of the RAE to apply for me. The Director at that time was Sir Arnold Hall. The post I was to fill was as Liaison Officer with the rank of Squadron Leader. The previous occupant had been posted elsewhere.

A couple of days later I received notice from the Air Ministry posting me to Technical Training Command at Brampton near Huntingdon. I got on the first train to London, rushed to the Air Ministry and saw the officer who had issued the posting notice and blew my top. He said he had no option because the C in C of Tech. Training Command had telephoned him and demanded the first Squadron Leader engineer available and I was he. I went home a very embittered man.

In due course I moved to Brampton and settled in the Officers Mess. The next morning I reported to a Group Captain engineer in whose department I was to work. He welcomed me and then proceeded to outline the job he wanted me to do. As I listened to him it became more obvious to me that he was trying to enlarge his own little empire. The job was apparently to set up a recording section to cover recently introduced planned flying and servicing procedures. I did not say a word until he had finished when he asked me how I liked it. I replied that it did not appeal to me at all and could be performed by a junior officer or an NCO and that I wished to apply for posting forthwith. The Group Captain blew his top and told me that I had been in the

Service long enough to know that I must go where I'm sent. He told me I could submit my application after which I was to proceed to Cosford on a Planned Flying and Servicing course.

I wrote my application in detail and stated that I was required by a Senior Scientific Officer at Farnborough on work of considerable importance and I was one of the few, if any, suitably qualified officers in the RAF. I then drove to Cosford arriving on Sunday. On Monday and Tuesday I attended lectures which were part of the Course. On Wednesday afternoon which is sports day on most stations I took myself to the swimming baths which I was enjoying when the course leader a Squadron Leader came in and called my name and asked me how I would like to be posted to Farnborough. I replied that I would bloody well drown him if he was joking with me. He replied that signals and telephone calls were flying around the place stating I was to report to the Royal Aircraft Establishment forthwith. My answer to that was "just give me time to dress"!

I was soon on my way back to Brampton where I quickly got cleared and drove to Farnborough then back to Little Corner. Sammy and I were thrilled at the posting and I would only have to travel nineteen miles door to door. I would also be allowed a travel allowance because there were no officers married quarters available.

Joe Lane's narrative ends at this point. His last chapter was written at Farringdon in March 1989 and he became ill and entered Alton General Hospital shortly afterwards. On 4th April he died - just two months before his 81st birthday.

Chapter 22

Later Years

Joe served an extended tour with the Parachute Section which was a part of the Mechanical Engineering Department of the Royal Aircraft Establishment. At that time the ejector seat was being introduced to Service aircraft and several problems were arising which the Section had to tackle together with the parachute industry. Among these were problems of spinning of the human body when free falling from altitude and the automation of the ejection seat functions to cope with unconscious or disabled aircrew. For a time he worked with the test parachutist "Dumbo" Willans who was a pioneer tester of both the Martin Baker and Folland ejection seats.

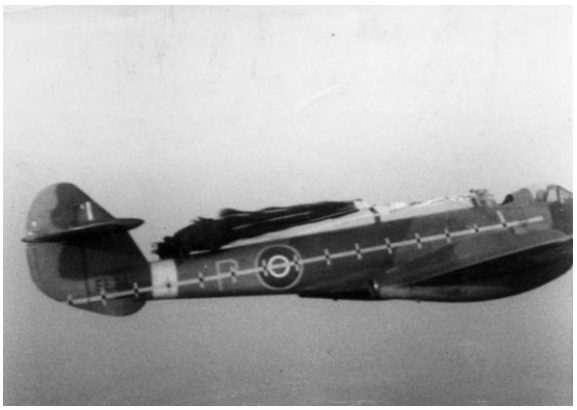


Figure 64. Sqn Ldr Devine handles a problem for the RAE Parachute Section during trials.

After duty at Farnborough the next posting was to RAF Halton as Officer Commanding No.2 Technical Training Wing. "Little Corner", at Bell Vale, was let (as an Army married quarter!) and the family moved into new RAF married quarters at Mansion Hill. At Halton he continued to fly the communications aircraft of the day. In 1953 the Station Flight at Halton still operated two Tiger Moth biplanes as well as Percival Proctors and Prentices, de Haviland Chipmunks and the ubiquitous Avro Anson. His CO was Air Commodore Tindel-Caryll Worsley who, together with his wife, were keen motor sport enthusiasts and founded a motor racing section for the apprentices. This involved the building and racing of a Buckler 90 kit car based on the Ford E93A engine and Ford running gear. Joe had his first (and only!) taste of competitive motor racing in this car which was registered PBH 1 and referred to locally as "poor bloody Halton".

Figure 65. Joe and the Halton Buckler at Silverstone

This was followed by an accompanied posting on loan to the Royal Pakistan Air Force at Mauripur near Karachi. It would appear that this was not a particularly happy period but it brought a revival of the dinghy sailing interest at Hawkes Bay and Karachi harbour with his boss; Air Commodore "Pop" Mickey and his wife "Merc". The parachute business continued to beckon and with the assistance of Mr. W D Brown Joe left the RAF at the end of his Pakistan tour and joined him at Irvin Air Chute of Great Britain at their works at Letchworth in Hertfordshire.

He took his discharge from the Royal Air Force at RAF Uxbridge in 1956 having served for 32 years. “Little Corner”, Joe and Sammy's first house was sold and they built a new one on the outskirts of Letchworth in Manor Way.

At Irving's an issue of the day was the fitting of seat belts in motor cars - later a legal necessity[27]. Irvings turned their expertise to this field. Joe became Director of a new commercial division and spent his remaining years with the Company developing and building up non-aviation aspects such as the car belts and industrial safety harnesses. A factory at Runcorn was opened for this purpose. His association with the motor trade brought him back into contact with his old pal Chas Latter who was now with Armstrong Patents in Yorkshire manufacturing motor vehicle shock absorbers. Joe and Sammy and Chas and Kit Latter were to spend many happy holidays together caravanning in France and Spain in the ensuing years.

The sport of gliding was growing in this period and a fatal accident near Lasham led to Joe visiting to advise on the storage and packing of parachutes. He found something of a horror story. To that date there had been very few serious accidents in gliding. As a result parachutes were regarded as convenient cushions or as handy weights for the wing tips of parked sailplanes. Most had been bought from government surplus sources and few had been opened and dried and repacked for years. The accident had suddenly focused attention on the parachute as a life saving aid and the gliding centre management had quickly seen the need for a change in attitudes among the pilots.

Figure 66. Stand at Farnborough Air Show. L to R B Minnis (Sales Director), Captain Cyril Turner (Managing Director), P Bolton (Rally driver), Donald Campbell (seated), Joe Lane (Commercial Director)

Parachutes, at that time, were fitted individually to the wearer who had to make adjustments as necessary with numerous sliding buckles about the harness. This led to Irving's development of a new quickly adjustable harness suited to the needs of sporting flying. At Lasham Joe flew for the first time in a sailplane with the Centre manager Derek Piggott. This must have provided an interesting contrast to his experiences in the large troop carrying gliders of the war.

Joe's parents died and were buried in the graveyard that Frank Lane had extended at Longbridge Deverill. Sammy's mother also died and her ashes were scattered at Watford, where she had lived for the last part of her life. Her surviving step-brothers still live at Camelsdale.

At the age of sixty Joe retired from industry and settled down at Verwood near Ringwood in Hampshire. Here he was near another old Service friend, Dick Bloodworth and his wife Margo. Not so far away at Dursley were Dick and Kath Howell - again friends from 56 Squadron days at North Weald. Eight years later he and Sammy moved to the village of Farringdon near Alton. He enjoyed a further twelve years of retirement with occasional but increasing occurrences of illness in the later years. His eightieth year was marked not only by a fine birthday party in his large garden among his many friends but by an hour long flight in a Druine *Petit Prince* light aircraft owned by a friend of Judith. Despite poor visibility he took the controls for a significant part of the flight and his pilot later commented that his previous experience clearly showed in his handling of the aircraft.

[27] The Company was founded by Leslie Irvin, an American who developed and demonstrated the first flat canopy free fall (as opposed to static line operated) parachute. When he registered the company in Britain it was named Irving in error and he couldn't afford to have it corrected at the time!

Mike, the eldest of his three children, had been called up for National Service aged seventeen and opted for the RAF. He stayed on with a Permanent Commission and at the time of his father's death he was a Group Captain - a fact which pleased Joe immensely. The second son Chris served an engineering apprenticeship at the Royal Aircraft Establishment at Farnborough and worked in the aircraft industry thereafter. Daughter Judith trained as a children's nurse at the Ladywood Hospital in Birmingham and later married a rising young mathematician who foresaw the forthcoming demand for computer software so that she became the wife of a Director of a major software company.

Sammy remained the loved companion of Joe in retirement as well as in his Service and industrial lives and continues to live at Farringdon among the many friends that they made there. She still spoils their six grandchildren.

Joe Lane flew operationally in an era of single-engined biplanes with limited navigational and radio aids. It was the time when the RAF has been described as "*the best club in the world*" with dashing young pilots in smart white overalls flying big silver biplanes. Engines were by this time reliable and biplanes are notably "survivable" in accidents. In the early period, flying at night would be signified by an entry in his logbook in red ink. He suffered few flying mishaps - a burst tyre and a nasty few moments with an aircraft rigged with its pitch trim control reversed. The most serious were an enforced wheels-up landing in a Henley, flipping his Nimrod on its back landing at Edcu, and ramming the funnel of HMS Courageous. The most frightening was nursing a Nimrod back to HMS Courageous over a rough sea with half the propeller shot away.

He was never injured by an aircraft and never fought in air combat. The only time he flew in armed earnest was from HMS Courageous during the Abyssinian crisis. In the second world war he had one meeting with a Messerschmidt 109 whilst ferrying a Henley. Both aircraft were following a railway line in poor visibility but in opposite directions when they passed each other. The enemy aircraft turned but did not fire presumably because it recognised a humble unarmed target tug aircraft or because, as the Henley turned left to face it, it mistook the target-towing winch pylon, protruding from the port side, for some new type of enormous cannon!

On another occasion he noticed glinting flecks passing vertically around his Magister and, on looking up, found that he was flying directly below a formation of German bombers on the same heading and releasing their bombs on Yeovil. He lifted the nose and throttled back to slow down and allowed the raid with its stream of bombs to pass on ahead of him!

The sheer variety of flying in the period is fascinating. An RAF pilot could be operating from an airfield one minute and from an aircraft carrier the next. His aircraft could be fitted with floats in a few hours and operated from water and just as quickly converted back to landplane. Pilots of this generation had to cope with many changes in aircraft technology each with significant psychological pressures. These included the change from biplanes to monoplanes, enclosed cockpits, retractable undercarriages, use of wing flaps, and radio and oxygen equipments.

The longevity of some aircraft types is noteworthy. The Avro 504 was first produced as a World War One bomber and had a Gnome rotary engine. It was still in use in the second World War as a squadron "hack" albeit with a Lynx radial engine. DH Chipmunk WB552 was a new aircraft flying at RAF Halton in 1954 and remained in service for over 30 years until destroyed in an accident at Middle Wallop in 1988.

Going through Joe's four volumes of Flying Log Books showed that he had piloted over 50 types or variants of aircraft and flew in a further 8 as crew or passenger (commercial airline flying not included). His total flying time was some 1900 hours in 1780 flights most of which were as pilot-in-command. He was credited with the flying ability of "Exceptional" on one occasion and "Above the Average" on one other indicating a natural flying ability. As far as I can tell he never flew in a balloon, a helicopter, or a jet-propelled aircraft. He did, however, fly in the immaculate turboprop-powered Vickers Viscount belonging to the President of Pakistan. Perhaps the most significant feature is that the typical flight time is only some 30 minutes. This must strike the contemporary fighter pilot as most odd in an era when an aircraft such as the Buccaneer must fly for some 75 minutes before it has burnt off enough fuel and is light enough to be landed safely!

Both Mike and Chris flew with Joe in the various RAF communications aircraft at Halton. Oddly enough he was not keen on his sons flying and expressed relief when Mike did not become aircrew and Chris gave up club flying in light aircraft. Sammy and Judith also flew with him during his last tour in Pakistan.

Various statistics from the logbooks are included in the appendices which follow. One of them lists the numbered flying exercises used at No.5 FTS at Sealand in 1929. Many are still used today in flying clubs.

Figure 67. Golden Wedding 1987
Joe and Gladys with their six grandchildren

Appendix 1

RAF Service employments

	From	***To***	***Location***	***Role***
1	9/9/1924	/8/1927	Cranwell	Aircraft Apprentice
	/8/1927	/7/1928	Halton	Aircraft Apprentice
2	/7/1928	/8/1929	Netheravon	Fitter. No 1 Flying Training School
3	/8/1929	/4/1930	HMS Argus	Fitter. HQ engine repair section
4	/4/1930	/6/1931	Spitalgate	Ground Crew. FTS
5	/6/1931	/3/1933	HMS Furious	Fitter. 449 Flight, Fleet Air Arm
6	28/3/1933	17/2/1934	Sealand	Pupil. No 5 Flying Training School
7	3/3/1934	18/3/1935	North Weald	Pilot. No 56 Squadron
	4/3/1935	8/3/1935	Calshot	Pilot. Seaplane Conversion Course
	11/3/1935	26/4/1935	Leuchers)	Pilot. Deck Landing course
	2/5/1935	14/5/1935	Gosport)	Pilot. Fleet Air Arm training
	20/5/1935	20/7/1935	North Weald	Pilot.
8	24/7/1935	29/8/1935	Upavon)	Pilot. Fleet Air Arm
	29/8/1935	5/4/1937	HMS Courageous)	Pilot. 800 FF Squadron
	1/4/1937	8/7/1937	Gosport	Pilot. FAA
9	14/7/1937	14/6/1938	Biggin Hill	Pilot. No 79 Squadron
10	26/6/1938	22/12/1939	Farnborough	Engineer. No 1 Maint Flt, 1 AACU
		3/9/1939 WAR DECLARED		
11	15/2/1940	25/8/1940	Weston Zoyland	OC No 2 Maint Flt 1 AACU
	25/8/1940	15/10/1941	Badorgan	OC No 2 Maint Flt 1 AACU
12	15/10/1941	30/10/1942	Farnborough	Ch Tech Off. No 1 AACU HQ
	12 /1942	10/1944	Farnborough	Group Eng Officer No 70 Group
		8/5/1945 WAR ENDED (Europe)		
13	20/11/1944	/5/1945	Marks Hall	CTO No 38 Group
	/5/1945	/7/1946	Upavon	CTO No 38 Group
14	/7/1946	/4/1947	Delhi (India)	Eng. Staff Officer. No 229 Gp
15	/4/1947	/9/1947	Chaklala (India)	Parachute Training School
16	/9/1947	24/12/1948	Seletar (Singapore)	No 390 MU
17	15/3/1949	31/12/1952	Farnborough	RAF Liaison Officer. RAE
18	1/1/1953	1/4/1955	Halton	OC No 2 Apprentice Wing
19	1/4/1955	31/5/1956	Mauripur (Pakistan)	Seconded to RPAF
20		1/6/1956	Uxbridge	Demobilisation

Appendix 2

Aircraft Flown (Date of 1st Flight)

1	1923	Passenger	Avro ? (Alan Cobham's flying circus)	
2	1926	Passenger	Bristol F2b Fighter	
3	1/5/28	Passenger	de Haviland 9A	
4	26/3/29	Passenger	Armstrong Whitworth Atlas	
5	4/4/29	Passenger	Handley-Page Hyderabad	
6	16/5/30	Passenger	Armstrong Whitworth Dual Siskin	
7	12/3/31	Passenger	Avro Tutor	
8	28/4/31	Passenger	Hawker Tomtit	
9	2/7/31	Passenger	Fairey IIIF	
10	12/2/32	Passenger	Hawker Horsley	
11	28/3/33	Pilot u/t	Avro 504N (Lynx)	
12	23/10/33	Pilot u/t	Armstrong Whitworth Siskin IIIA	
13	28/12/33	Pilot u/t	Bristol Bulldog TM	
14	3/3/34	Pilot	Bristol Bulldog IIa	
15	18/5/34	Observer	Short Southampton	
16	15/8/34	Pilot	de Haviland Moth	
17	4/3/35	Pilot	Avro Seatutor	
18	8/3/35	Pilot	Fairey Seal	
19	11/3/35	Pilot	Hawker Hart	
20	11/3/35	Pilot	Hawker Nimrod	
21	9/5/35	Pilot	Blackburn Baffin	
22	27/5/35	Pilot	Fairey Gordon	
23	18/6/35	Pilot	Hawker Demon	
24	26/7/35	Pilot	Hawker Osprey	
25	22/2/37	Pilot	Blackburn Shark	
26	5/3/37	Pilot	Fairey Swordfish	
27	14/7/37	Pilot	Gloster Gauntlet	
28	26/6/38	Pilot	Miles Magister	
29	18/8/38	Pilot	de Haviland Queen Bee	
30	4/11/38	Pilot	Hawker Audax	
31	10/11/38	Pilot	Hawker Henley	
32	11/1/39	Pilot	Westland Wallace	
33	4/7/39	Pilot	Miles Mentor	
34	19/7/40	Pilot	Avro Anson	
35	20/8/40	Pilot	Percival Vega Gull	
36	11/7/42	Pilot	Boulton & Paul Defiant	
37	10/7/42	Pilot	Hawker Hurricane	
38	16/7/43	Pilot	Percival Proctor 1	
39	21/1/44	Pilot	Stinson 105	
40	21/4/44	Pilot	Vultee Vengeance	
41	7/8/44	Passenger	Airspeed Oxford	
42	27/11/44	Pilot u/t	Airspeed Horsa	
43	19/2/45	Pilot	Auster AOP 3	
44	13/7/45	2nd Pilot	WACO Hadrian	
45	25/11/45	2nd Pilot	Handley-Page Halifax	
46	3/2/47	Pilot	North American Harvard	
47	9/4/47	Passenger	Avro York	
48	1/1/49	Passenger	Avro Lancaster	
49	26/9/50	Passenger	Bristol Freighter	
50	16/6/52	Pilot	Percival Prentice	
51	23/6/54	Pilot	De Havilland Chipmunk	{Deck landings 62
52	16/6/88	Passenger	Druine Robin *Petite Prince*	Catapulted 10}

Appendix 3

Family Homes

1	1933	1934	'digs' at Shotton	Sealand	
2	1934	1935	'Kilcoran', Coopersale	North Weald	Kent
3	1938	1938	quarters (5 Maitland Road)	Farnborough	Hants
4	1940	1941	Greignton	Weston Zoyland	Somerset
5	1941	1942	'Rose Cottage'	Catcott	Somerset
6	1942	1943	quarters (Pinehurst Grange)	Farnborough	Hants
7	1943	1943	Cranmore Lane	Aldershot	Hants
8	1943	1943	Lansdown Road	Aldershot	Hants
9	1944	1945	'White Cottage'	Great Leighs	Essex
10	1945	1946	quarters	Upavon	Wilts
11	1948	1953	'Little Corner'	Bell Vale	Sussex
12	1953	1954	quarters (Mansion Hill)	Halton	Bucks
13	1954	1956	quarters (RPAF Mauripur)	Karachi	Pakistan
14	1956	1956	'Little Corner'	Bell Vale	Sussex
15	1956	1959	Manor Way	Letchworth	Herts
16	1959	1962	Offley Stores	Great Offley	Herts
17	1962	1968	'Winderton'	Letchworth	Herts
18	1968	1976	'Pineridge'	Verwood	Dorset
19	1976	1993	'Aysgarth'	Farringdon	Hants

Appendix 4

RAF Flying Training exercises

No.	Topic
1	Passenger flying
2	Taxying and handling aircraft
3	Effects of controls with engine
4	Straight and level flying
5	Stalling, climbing and gliding
6	Taking off into wind
7	Landing and judging distances
8	Medium turns
9	Gliding turns
10	Steep turns with and without engine
11	Spinning
12	Elementary forced landings
13	Low flying with instructor
14	Solo
15	Climbing turns
16	Sideslipping
17	Action in the event of fire
18	Taking off and landing across wind
19	Advanced forced landings
20	Aerobatics
21	(no record)
22	Air pilotage
23	(no record)
24	Height test/Use of altitude control
25	Cross country/rough weather
26	(no record)
27	Instrument flying

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With amendments to January 2012