



The following is a direct transcription from audio tapes made by Gar (my dad) before he died. He left these tapes to me so that I could let his family, descendants and others understand his story and contribution to the war effort.

I have added photos from our family records, where appropriate, to enhance his story - Ian Webb

“What did you do in the War Dad, and where did you go?”

The answer to that is fairly simple. He was like everyone else. I did what I was told, went where I was sent.

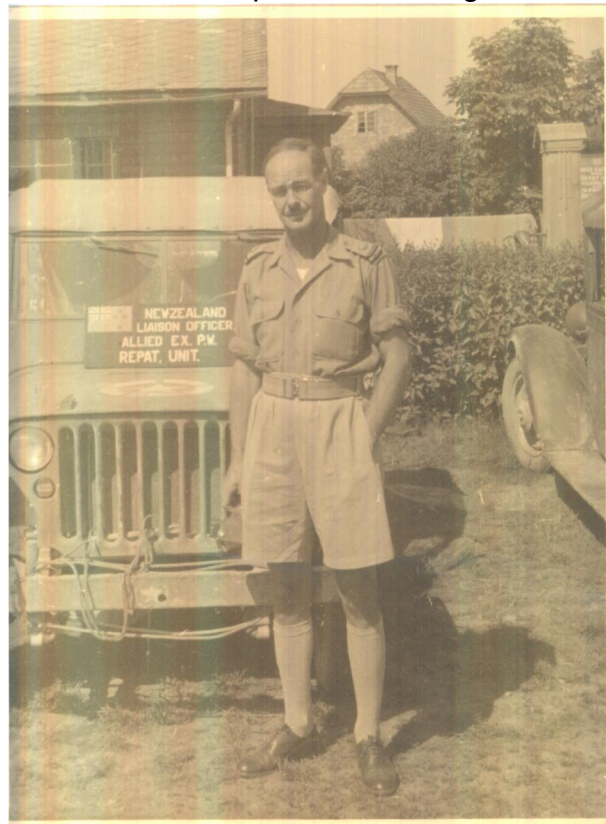
One reservation is made however in that I wanted to be a Pilot. And as these memoirs will disclose the opportunity did arise on more than one occasion to at least go where one preferred and at times where you wanted you. Briefly, I've got state that I had two attempts to join the Air Force. The first time they refused my application because they said I was colour blind and nobody was accepted into air crew if you were colour blind. The second time, they did accept me on the basis that I was trained to be a pay clerk and with the hope that I would be able to get a re-muster to air crew.

So my initial period in February 1941 was when I went to Richmond in New South Wales for a rookie period, which everybody had to go through. I then went to Melbourne in Victoria where I was taught how to add two and two and make four. Then was posted to Parkes in New South Wales as a pay clerk, from there to Darwin in the Northern Territory. When I got my re-muster from there I was sent back to Richmond and dug some holes in the ground as the Japs had appeared in the war, then was finally sent to Bradfield Park which was classified as an initial training school and after some months there, classification was made and you were sent wherever they thought you would be suitable.

Fortunately, my classification was as a trainee pilot and I was then sent to Narromine in New South Wales to an elementary flying school. After qualifying at Narromine, we came back to Sydney, boarded the USS America, called in at Auckland on route and disembarked in San Francisco, then up to Vancouver in Canada, across the Rockies, via Calgary to Edmonton, after a few months there, the advance flying training took place at a place called Claresholm in Canada where I finally was presented with a set of wings. Then we had a little break in Montreal before going to a place called Summerside on Prince Edward Island where I was trained as a navigator, necessary in general reconnaissance to which I had been allocated. After

that, we came back to New York, boarded the Queen Mary and sailed, landed in Greenock, which is the port of Glasgow in Scotland. First location in England was Brighton, then to Oxford, and then to Morkham on the East Coast of England where we boarded the Sterling Castle and eventually arrived in Alexandria in Egypt. We then had some months in Syria and Damascus, Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Cairo and finally went to a place called Gianaclis in Egypt where I was crewed up, which meant I was allocated a navigator and two wireless operator air gunners were all turned but perhaps they were landed with me and from there we were posted to our squadron, number 454 RAAF which was operating out of Benghazi.

To get there, we had to go by road and after getting to Tobruk found some Australians who gave us a lift in an air sea rescue boat to Benghazi. From Benghazi we then went to Naples, Pescara, Ancona and Ravenna in Italy operating from those places, had a couple of holidays in Rome and finally almost at the end of the war finished flying duties, went back to Naples, and then got onto a POW rescue unit,



which was quite fun, based in Klagenfurt in Austria and the wanderings that we got into around part of newly liberated Europe in a Mercedes Benz we acquired from a German General makes some interesting stories and finally we came back to Port Said, caught the Oriana back to Sydney.

That is a brief outline of my wanderings for four and a half years. I propose to elaborate on them in sequence of the various places that I went to. Fortunately, the air force has provided me with some brief sketchy details of where I went, and the period of time. My flying log book which of course had every single time I went up in the air recorded in it, hasn't been seen for many years, is missing with other lots of things, photographs, maps, my original set of wings, several other things but as they are not available, I have to rely on my memory back over the last forty odd years so some of the recordings will be fairly hazy.

Referring back to my first attempt to join the Air Force, there was a recruiting centre at Woolloomooloo, which you went, were interviewed and given a medical test if they thought your records at that stage was alright. The medical test I passed until they started to check my eye sight and by looking at what was known as a confetti book, on which I couldn't see the numbers that were located there and two or three other tests, the opinion was arrived at that I was colour blind and therefore could not be accepted into air crews. This I checked out with Cam Greenwell whose name is familiar to a lot of you listening. He in turn sent me to a specialist in Macquarie Street who said that whilst the very strict requirements of the Air Force were something I could not perhaps meet, he was quite sure that I could fly an aircraft safely and there would be no problems.

I went back to the Air Force to see a quite cooperative type down there and he said they were being very, very fussy in the early stages, suggested that if I really wanted to do so, I should join up in the ground staff and it would possibly be easier to re-muster from the ground staff into air crew, than to hang around or wait until they had a ever increasing number of possible candidates. So I accepted this advice, having first had a further check with an RAAF Doctor, who happened to be a friend of Cam Greenwell's, and he gave me some very good thoughts and agreed with the specialist that he thought I would pass.

The reason behind this colour blindness problem is that in flying, you have to be able to distinguish between red, green and amber in particular, as well as most other colours. In the elementary flying, your signals take off were given by a green light being flashed at you. If, whilst you were flying there was some reason why you shouldn't land, a red lamp was fired at you and at other times bearing other colours. In actual night flying when you were coming in to land, if you were on the correct flight descent path, you would see a green light at the beginning of the runway. If you were too low it would be red and if you were too high it would be amber. Therefore you had to be able to distinguish those colours.

In subsequent final training and again in operations, although you had wireless communications, it was still at times necessary to be able to distinguish between these colours and the fact that I did fly successfully with quite a lot of night time operations, proved that in my case at least, it was worth having a second go and being able to achieve what I had set out to do which was to become a pilot.

The rookie course at Richmond in February 1941 was something that everybody had to do, it consisted of a preliminary training period during which you were taught how to march, how to handle a rifle and a bayonet, details about air raids and shelters, lectures and air force codes and procedures, lots of medical and dental, issue of kit, none of which fitted and in general preparing you for what was to follow wherever you may have gone in the Air Force. This initial course took some three months approximately and the leave was reasonably good, it wasn't far away from Sydney.

Some of your leave was official, some wasn't and in all it was just preparatory exercise which finalised when I was passed out of my rookie course and sent down to Melbourne to the pay school for two weeks, given general instructions about what had to be done to enable everybody to be paid once a fortnight, the princely sum for the initial period as the lowest form of life, an AC1, was at the rate of five shillings per day which by the time you had made an allocation to your wife of three and six per day, you received each fortnight, twenty one shillings as sustenance. It's just as well the price of living was so very much cheaper than it is today.

From Melbourne, I was then sent to Parkes, which was a training school for air crew and I guess I must have been there about three months doing a pretty humdrum sort of a job, occasional leave, visits to the local town which weren't greatly inspiring and then it was announced that one of the other pay clerks who had gone there at the same time as myself had been posted to Darwin. He however appealed against this as his wife was due to have a baby very soon and so they allowed him to stay where he was and as I was next on the list, they sent me off to Darwin, despite my protests that I was expecting a call for air crew.

So we were sent down to Sydney to wait our transfer up to Darwin. Bradfield Park was also known as an embarkation depot and we were eventually lined up and told that we mustn't let anybody know where we were going or mention type of ship in which we were going, as it was possible it would be supported by some quite large naval ships - and a day or two later they put us into buses, took us up to Central Station and put us on a train which wandered through eventually to Broken Hill. Then, over into South Australia, and again on that rather notorious railway which gets you to Alice Springs, eventually.



Our engine from Broken Hill to Alice Springs



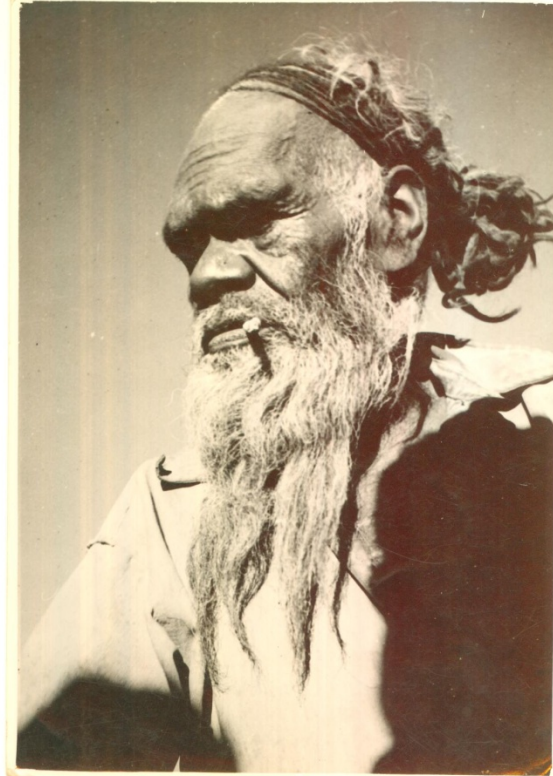
A wayside stop

We had two or three days there and in one of the local pubs who should I run across but George Hogan, one of our Katoomba mates and we had a couple of little drinks to celebrate our meeting and then eventually got into a road convoy of trucks, which set out for some hundred miles along some very dusty roads en route to Darwin. The trucks were supposed to be spaced out a sufficient period to enable the dust to settle before the one following caught up with it. But in practice this was impossible so you sat in the back of these trucks, hoping not to suffocate with all the dust you were swallowing.

A couple of stops en route, of interest and eventually to Darwin where of course the temperature was rather warmer than the winter weather which we had been used to in Sydney at that stage. Work up there was much the same old drag, filling in pay books etc, that we had been used to at Parkes.



Taken from our 'carriage' - the cattle truck
– with our lorries in the background



“ King Billy”

Darwin was of course a pretty primitive type of place in those days. It was well before Tracey Cyclone knocked it down and was not a very inspiring place to be. However in about the middle of October, my long awaited posting for a re-muster to air crew arrived and so I was able to say farewell to Darwin and I had also obtained leave from the Air Force to call in at Adelaide as I had a Court case there against one of the companies for whom I had had been an Agent pre war years and whom I had sued for commissions owed to me and the Air Force had agreed that they would allow me to go and be present for this case. It was fortunately on and I stopped off in Adelaide for a couple of days, pleaded my case, won it, and by the time I got back as I mentioned earlier, the Japs had come into the war and all training for air crew stopped.

We were sent back to Richmond digging air raid trenches and generally wasting time for quite some period until eventually they decided to proceed with their air crew training because it must be remembered that the Empire Air Scheme trained the majority of Australians. That was located in Canada. There were some training units here in Australia but not very many and so back to Bradfield Park, where we became what was known as course twenty six and the initial training period was for air crew, to ascertain your abilities in a variety of things such as Morse Code, meteorology and various other matters that would be required to be known. It was about a three months course, lots of training, marching, etc. But in the main it wasn't too bad and I was fortunate when the course finished that I was one of those selected to be a pilot.

When we arrived at Bradfield Park, there was some five of us who were re-musters, in other words had come from another section of the ground staff and the man in charge of the particular unit that we were associated with seemed to have a bit of a

soft spot, he being an old Air Force man, whether this assisted in any way, we don't know but ultimately four of us were sent to Narromine, and that is another story which I will tell again in a few moments.

The elementary flying school at Narromine was where we made our first acquaintance with the famous Tiger Moth which was a standard type of aircraft for fledgling pilots to be trained on and it was a course where you were each allocated to a certain instructor for flying duties. Although there were of course quite a lot of ground subjects which had to be studied at the same time. My flying instructor was Jack Draper who was a Sergeant and my first trip with him seemed to go off reasonably well. In that course you didn't touch the aircraft, you were just given a little detail of what the aircraft was all about, taken off did a circuit and came back, known as circuits and bumps, quite a lot of which I did over the next few weeks. The system was that if your instructor didn't consider you to be suitable to fly an aeroplane, after ten hours instructions, you were scrubbed, which meant that was the end of your flying training. If on the other hand he did consider that you were satisfactory, he then called the Chief Flying Instructor along, went up with you. At that stage of course you were flying the aircraft and when you came back and landed if he thought you were going to be able to make it, he would just get out and say "off you go", and in my case that fortunately happened and I made a circuit, came back and landed and so was considered satisfactory to consider and spend some more time and money seeing if I could complete the necessary fifty hours which had to be flown at Narromine, including cross countries, sometimes they would do quite a lot of aerobatics which you were taught and of course the old Tiger Moth was a very good aerobatic aeroplane, it could do just about everything. Sometimes they would cut your engine and tell you to find somewhere to land but never let you because surrounding country was not exactly suitable. But overall it was a most interesting period and when we finally qualified, we were all naturally very happy, although I must say that by that stage the four had been cut down to three.

Before we leave Narromine, it's worth recording some of the feelings that one had in the actual flying. One of the men who didn't make it was an ex Commonwealth Bank employee by the name of Jim Twist and he took it very badly when he was scrubbed, refused to go to a navigation school which was the normal thing for ex pilots, spent quite a bit of time in the clink for his actions and eventually finished up as a Clerk and I'm pleased to say I met him again in September 1945 when I was going for my discharge as he was one of the Clerks at Bradfield Park and he being there was quite helpful in me getting through that in a great hurry.

The actual flying at Narromine - the first time you were told to take off on your own, was a wonderful experience, elation, scared like hell, hoping you could get round, come back and land in one piece and each time you did manage to do that, you became happier and perhaps a little more confident but this same feeling applied all the way through in your later flying at Canada for your final lead up to your wings, the closer you got to getting those, the more scared you were that you wouldn't, but I will talk about that a little later on.

I can't leave the question of Narromine without mentioning parachutes. These were things to which we were introduced, shown how to pack them, how to use them, you had two escape cords, a first and primary and a second if the first one didn't work and of course throughout our flying life you never went into an aeroplane without

your parachute. Fortunately I didn't have to use them for their intended purpose although they did come in handy in subsequent years when we had a crash landing in the desert and these were spread out, the four we had and the four points of the compass, weighed down with Sahara sand and were helpful for the searching aircraft to find out where we were. Parachutes were basically of two types, the one which a pilot virtually sat on and the whole thing with its webbing was strapped around and over your shoulders and was part of you. If you had had to use it, you would go out and be strapped to this thing and if and when it opened, you gently floated down. However for other members of the crew, those that were moving around within the body of the aircraft, there was a chest type of parachute which clipped on to the front of the harness and was packed and used exactly the same way by the pulling of a rip cord and in fact I did wear that type of thing when we were being trained as navigators and flying in Ansons over the Gulf of Saint Lawrence in Canada.



Before I start talking about my two and a half years overseas which followed on the Narromine training for initial flying, there are some things which are relative to those pre and early wars conditions, some of which were relative to money.

I mentioned five dollars, five shillings I'm sorry a day, as our basic pay and that gradually increased. At one stage I became a leading aircraftsman, which got me an extra six pence a day. When we reverted to aircrew we came back to AC2 as somewhat lower form of life than that originally. But ultimately when we did qualify and were training and eventually flying, some of the remarks made by the Americans whom we met and we were discussing various aspects of our careers, one of which was the amount we were paid and when the Yanks were told what we and the British were paid in relation to the Americans, their answer was "Hell, I wouldn't be that bloody patriotic".

There's one other point perhaps, rationing was something that was in existence. It applied to just about everything and of course created a magnificent black market. Petrol rationing was achieved by everybody that had a car or any means of transport requiring petrol, had to fill in a form stating what their type of car was, its mileage per gallon and the average number of gallons that they used per annum. When they got all these figures back and added them up, it was discovered that the total amount of petrol supposed to have been used was twenty five times greater than that sold. One other thing in regard to those early days was manpower controls, quite a lot of people discovered as I did, that they had some type of medical problem which was sometimes surmountable, sometimes not, others were in occupations which the Government would not release them from as they were essential types of operations and that was a net that I escaped very luckily by getting out of the job that I was in

before I went to apply for the Air Force and of course I didn't have any qualifications that were such as to not be accepted.

One final question or thought on the matter of money, five shillings sterling is the equivalent of fifty cents in Australian Dollars.

And one more thought before we go overseas, you met and made friends in various aspects of your service life and one whom we met in the early stages, two boys, Ralph and Aub Winston who had been in the early militia all transferred to the Air Force and left Australia under a cloud of secrecy aboard the Arwotea which sailed from Woolloomooloo at 2:30pm and I and several hundred others were aware of it, were there to see them off, pass up large bottles of grog on ropes they threw down to us - and so much on that occasion for secrecy.

However Aub went to Montreal, trained as a wireless air gunner and when he left I told him I'd catch up with him. I did, but it took me two and a half years. But Aub eventually became a squadron leader in a very highly geared operation in the main bomber force in the States, in I'm sorry the United Kingdom, was injured. But I did meet him a couple of times over there and of course he did come home and his name will appear again, several times in this recording.

Our Narromine course was completed about two days before Christmas, during which we were hurrying towards completing the necessary flying hours, including our only night time flying, two hours of which had to be done and then we were sent home to have Christmas and New Year and report back to Bradfield Park on the 1st of January 1943.

Some day or two there was spent in being equipped for a cold Canadian Winter for which we were aiming and general kitting checks, basically not much to do and most days we were able to leave in the afternoon, confident that our ship was not sailing that day. However on the 6th of January leave was stopped and we were pretty sure what was going to happen and of course we were right as on the 6th taken down to the wharf and found there USS America, a troop ship which had been at Guadalcanal, came back with quite a few wounded, who were offloaded in Australia. Others who were set to return to their home and we, some hundreds, perhaps even thousands, of Australians were unloaded and sailed, without a convoy of course.

As a matter of fact convoys are of some interest because it is a fact that all crew ships, unless they were very, very slow went without any sort of assistance from war ships. They went under their own steam as it was considered they were too fast for submarines to worry them, and this applied to all the various troop ship movements that we travelled on in various parts of the world.

The food on the American ship was an eye opener and there was not much to do. You could play the odd game of cards if you had the necessary financial backing, you could get involved in many types of American gambling as well as the ever popular two up, crown and anchor and various other means of enriching some people and sending everybody else broke. We were told that our first port would be Auckland in New Zealand and furthermore that we would be allowed to disembark from about four thirty in the afternoon and would have six hours of freedom. This of course meant that everybody got spruced up, admired the city as we got closer, and eventually tied up at the wharf from which you could see the whole of the activities, hotels, people, girls, trams, everything else and we all looked forward to a break. But there was some delay and it was after six o'clock when it was finally announced that the Australian Air Force contingent would not be allowed to shore, this having been

decreed by the Officer in Charge of the Air Force in New Zealand, we told was a stiff and tough English Air Force man.

It appeared that the previous contingent of Australia Air Force troops who had been allowed ashore created a little bit of trouble, getting drunk, not paying for meals, some of them not even returning to their ship, being AWL when it sailed. And he in his wisdom had therefore decided that no more Australians would be allowed ashore. And so it was some twelve o'clock at night when the America sailed from New Zealand and it was to be thirty eight years before I managed to get back to that country.

Prior to leaving Australia, our summer gear as passed in and we were issued with winter gear because it's necessary for winter we were going to encounter when we arrived in Canada.

Our blue uniforms were dubbed in Australia, would make us blue orchids and as air crew trainees we were also given the white peak to note us as Air Force trainees. When you boarded a ship anywhere you were allocated to a certain location on deck for boat drill, which you had to attend fairly frequently and of course take your life jacket with you. There were frequent cinema shows, which we enjoyed and after we had left Auckland we found that we had missed our meal time and of course the meals served on troop ships had no other contingency. You were given time and you had to be at your meal queue at the right time, otherwise you missed out.

From the Air Force I had received a letter showing where and when I served in various parts of the world and according to this I started my service in Canada on 15th of January so I guess that must have been the date we arrived in the United States on the America and a great sight coming up under the big Golden Gate Bridge and when we finally tied up at the wharf, of course all the Americans who had been on active service were met by their friends, relatives, wives, and it was great to see them meeting and happily re-joining their family and friends. Subsequent to all the Americans being taken off, we were then onto the wharf, into buses and up to the railway station where we were placed on a very nice American train, most comfortable, all with berths and with darkies to make up our beds for us at night, nice dining cars, and although the trip up the West coast of America to Vancouver was quite a lengthy one, we enjoyed it to see country, had many stops for up to an hour at various places. We were able to stretch our legs, buy some souvenirs, post cards, etc. and eventually arrived in Vancouver, which of course is just across the American border.

The street lights, neon lights, blazing shop windows, etc. were a sight to behold as we in Australia of course have been known as a very intense and severe blackout and seeing lights going on normally was quite, a very pleasant sight. The trip from Vancouver, again by train, across the Rockies, was really astounding sight to us as the journey was firstly comfortable and it took us via Jasper the national park, and eventually to Calgary foothills in the beginning of the very vast Canadian plains where there were literally dozens of Air Force training camps. The train made various stops for fuel and water and we were able to get out and providing the snow wasn't too deep, had a few snow fights, stretched the legs and that snow seeing we had been in Australia some few weeks before in the middle of Summer, made us very glad that we did have our very warm gear instead of the lightweight clothing.

From Calgary we changed trains and headed North to a township of Edmonton which was a camp where most Australians went to, awaiting their final posting to

wherever they were going to train, as there were pilots, navigators, air gunners and not only Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans, British and Canadians themselves.

The train stopped just close to the actual camp at about three o'clock in the morning and then there was about three feet of snow as you stepped down, so we were very pleased to get inside the hospitable Canadian camp which of course was air conditioned and beautifully heated and the temperature in Edmonton while we were there was as low as fifty degrees minus and it was obligatory when you did go out to wear both ear muffs and nose muffs as in those temperatures, if you didn't cover up completely, you would certainly be getting frost bite in various parts that are rather painful and difficult to manage.

Edmonton was quite a large town and I was fortunate as my Uncle Harry had given me numerous letters of introduction to people in different parts of the world, to which we thought we might be going, as his contacts were worldwide and we had a family by the name of Baker whom I contacted and who were very hospitable, entertaining us in their home, taking us out to enjoy some of the sporting activities, skiing, tobogganing, and ice skating at which I was very much of a novice. But in general the few weeks we spent there waiting to be sent to our training school, was quite enjoyable and we were rather fortunate in having this contact.

Canada is split up into various provinces and some of them practiced prohibition, so that there were no liquor stores, no pubs, and although Edmonton was not under that category, the hotels, as we knew them didn't exist. If you wanted a beer you went in to what really looked like a restaurant and sat down and the girl came and asked you what you wanted and when the glasses arrived, they were at least a quarter to a third of froth which was not received very well by the Australians. However the old adage 'when in Canada do as the Canadians do' and that was it.

There was a liquor store to which we were able to go as strangers, foreigners, whatever and at which you had to record your name and what you were doing there and then you were given a permit which enabled you to buy some liquor. It wasn't difficult to ascertain that the liquor, which we could buy could be resold as you walked out to eager and waiting Yankee troops, who didn't have this facility. Therefore you were able to resell the bottle at a very nice profit and as we were still not being very handsomely paid, this was one way of getting a little bit of extra pocket money.

Whilst waiting directions to go to our next training school, the activity at the camp was fairly limited and until such time as you knew you were going somewhere, the question of what you did was more or less up to yourself so long as you either had a pass to be away for a few days or alternatively were there each day for roll call. However after some two to three weeks we were advised that we were leaving and our designation was a place called Claresholm, which was south and very close at any rate to the American border. We had to go back via Calgary to reach it and eventually disembarked at what was a quite a small little town but being on the prairies nice and flat and eminently suitable for flying. The only problem, which was that it was still winter and the runways were very often covered with snow.

Sometimes this could be swept away, other times it just meant that you couldn't fly at all.

Reverting to that liquor store for the moment, it was surprising so we were told ultimately the number of Ned Kelly's who registered for their bottle of liquor together

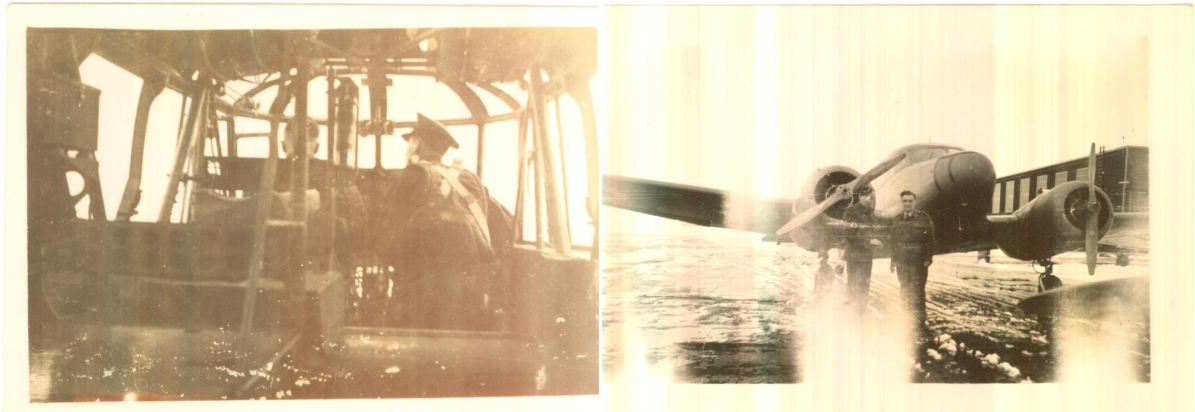
with Bob Menzies and various other famous politicians and of course they all got their share of their supplies.

Of the original five of us who started together in initial training force at Bradfield Park, we still had after myself, Graham Kingston with whom I was associated for practically the rest of my flying trips, Jack Kingham, who unfortunately didn't come back, Fred Rush, Johnnie Orham and Bill Yates are amongst the names that I can readily recall.

Unfortunately, the record of many others are missing and therefore I am very hazy about who else was with us.

The camp at Claresholm was a repeat of Narromine, except that it was much more modern, had a lot more facilities, the accommodation better but you were flying again at this time in a twin engine Anson instead of a single engine plane which was of course a different kettle of fish and there was a terrific lot more of ground study and lectures which you had to attend and ultimately pass before qualifying for your wings, which were coming a little bit closer than they had been.

The same system obtained that you had an instructor to whom you reported, who gave you your instructions about flying a twin aircraft, get you accustomed to the dear old Aggie as it was officially known and which was used very extensively for initial and advanced training in various parts of the world and was a stalwart as far as aircraft go in the early stages of war for training crews. I found that the transition into twin-engine aircraft something which I managed, alright and over a period of approximately three months, we attended lectures, flew aircraft, sometimes had to land somewhere else because the weather was bad. In these cases of course did a lot more flying on your own than with an instructor but there were various other features you had to amongst other things learn to fly in formation, which was a vee-type of activity, a leading aircraft and one on either side with their wings tucked up as close as possible underneath those leading aircraft and then others behind you following in this form.



This was vital for bombing patterns as obviously the closer collection of aircraft could be when they dropped their bombs, the greater there would be of a consolidation of them all landing reasonably close together, providing of course you were really on your targets and your bomb aimer had allowed all the corrections necessary for wind, etc. and you were driving the damn thing at the right speed, right height, and the right direction. These are all various facets that you had to learn and it was very interesting and enjoyable in many respects, a lot of fun was had in flying around the

prairies, dodging clouds, finding your way around, as you also had to be able to do that to a certain extent. You didn't have a navigator on board at this stage. The town itself was as I said, quite small. We did have some time free to ourselves to go into the town, see a picture show but in the main, all the facilities for recreation that you wanted were on the actual station. So going out was something that wasn't done very much, except at the end of the course. I must admit that after we actually got our wings we did have quite a binge up in that little township. But as there were courses going through all the time, that little township was used to this and turned a little bit of a blind eye on festivities that they might have otherwise not wanted to put up with.



The three survivors of the "old" brigade – all done up in our battle dress



Jack at the controls



How do you like this one of your old man in his "battle dress"?

It was a question uppermost in our minds as we got nearer to finalising our course as to what type of activities we might take as once you got your wings you were then expected to go somewhere, whatever part of the world might be, hopefully England as far as we were concerned, where you would do a course of learning to fly the type

of aircraft you were going to use in operations. You would be crewed up in that necessary number of bods would be put together to make a crew; a pilot, a navigator and some wireless operators and air gunners depending on the type of aircraft you were using. If they were multi engines, well of course you would have two pilots.



So that virtually as far as we were concerned, it was a case of going into bomber command or going into general reconnaissance which virtually was the type of thing that Sunderlands, Catalinas and later other types of aircraft took on. Basically covering convoys, seeking out location of enemy shipping and generally recollecting and reporting back whatever you may have seen.

But the general training that we received at Claresholm was based purely and simply on your ability to fly a two engine or ultimately a four engine aircraft and where you might have gone to after you got your wings, was something of course that was decided at that point of time.



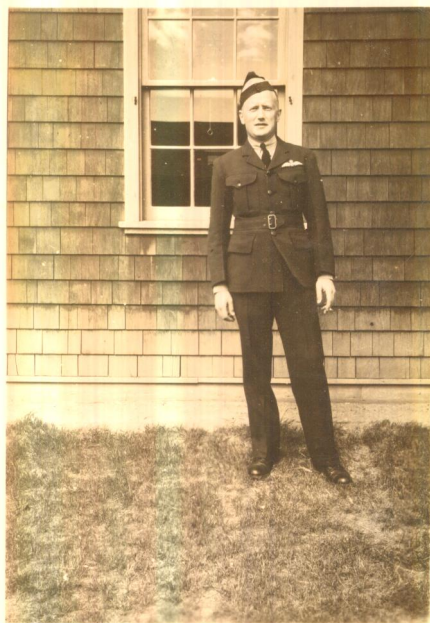
Recognise this double-chinned airman?



Well your old man got himself in this one alright as you'll see, couldn't let them eat all the chocolates could I?

The completion of our course occurred somewhere early in June when all of us were lined up on the main rectangle area of the station, with everybody else on the station attending and approximately thirty of us were paraded in front of some notable who had come from headquarters and we were marched up, saluted him and he pinned a pair of wings over our left breast pocket and that really was something, I can assure you.





Subsequent to the actual wings presentation, we were all given our allocations as to where we were going to and Graham Kingston and I were two of the course that had been told we were going to a place called Summerside on Prince Edward Island in the gulf of Saint Lawrence to do a further course virtually as navigators, not pilots, as all general reconnaissance pilots had also to achieve and pass this navigation course which it was necessary for all pilots doing general reconnaissance work. However before reporting to Prince Edward Island, we were given a couple of weeks

leave, a ticket to enable us to travel to Prince Edward Island and an approximate date on which to arrive there. At that time we were not aware that a course started every Monday at Summerside on Prince Edward Island and that each course was for one hundred and five men and the course lasted about three and a half months.



No.1 Wireless School, Montreal

However, we decided to go to Montreal, as dear old Uncle Harry had provided me with a letter of introduction to somebody there and it seemed like a nice spot to spend some time. Some of the other boys also came to Montreal and then duly booked into a pub. Then I rang the contact whose name I had, only to be told by his secretary that unfortunately he was overseas, but that he had expected that I may turn up and had left instructions if I did. During his absence he had spoken to somebody else who would be happy to meet us and entertain us and so we rang the somebody else and were given a very warm welcome, invited to their home and taken out to dinner, driven around, see the sights and generally had a very, very excellent time because this particular man's wife had a family who owned a very large brewery and in addition to having inspection of it, we of course had plenty of samples of the goods to try out and we were perhaps a little longer in Montreal than we had expected to be.

We eventually arrived at Summerside at Prince Edward Island on a Tuesday and were told at the orderly room that as the courses started on Monday, we were not required until the following Sunday, and so go and do what you like, which was a very nice thought, except for the question of money. So we actually investigated the township of Summerside, played some sport, had caught up on a bit of mail and generally lazed around, finding out what went on around the place and the following Monday our course commenced.

Once again, as with all these various places, apart from the actual flying, there were quite a lot of ground subjects to be studied and some new ones that we hadn't encountered before such as aircraft and ship recognition, advanced meteorology because a navigator has to use the stars and in the actual flying we would go into an Anson which were being flown by a staff pilot and co-pilot and having done our homework on the ground, as to where and how we were to get out over the water, you are given a destination and then make another point and eventually get home.

The aircraft went off with us doing the navigating and the pilot flying at the speed, height, direction in which we had instructed him. Quite often I am sure those pilots were well aware that the embryo of navigators they had on board weren't very clued up, but they did of course fly as told and eventually we managed to get back.

Landfall may not have been exactly at the point where he was supposed to be, but in the main over the period of time, the actual course was completed and at the end of that course, then it was a question of where were we will be going.

As we were looming up to the point where we were looking to being sent to an operational station, the majority of course went to England but there were some who were sent to the Bahamas which sounded very attractive spot until we discovered that the Bahamas was where Hampton torpedo bombers were training and crewed and the Hampton torpedo bomber was a very slow and rather unsatisfactory aircraft in that the survival rate was not very great.

And it so happened that one of our members of our course got fairly friendly with one of the WAAF ladies in the headquarters office and we were able to ascertain before doing our final exams that the directions from England to allocated where you were going, were that the Australians that had passed the course, were to be sent to the Bahamas.

It was part of the curriculum that of the eight or nine ground subjects, you had to pass in, you were permitted to failing one and go back to the next course and have another go at it and if you passed the second time, well then off you went. So having found that we were all scheduled to go to the Bahamas, we all unfortunately failed in our Astro tests and were sent back a course, did another week and having ascertained from the same source all the Australians on this occasion were going to England, we all passed.

Prince Edward Island was one of the dry provinces of Canada but the Saturday after we arrived when we were in the town, was an election day and I don't think we'd seen so many drunks for many a long time as the candidates were supplying their voters with a little bit of extra encouragement if they should vote for them. As far as we were concerned, on the Air Force station there were of course messes at which you could obtain a reasonable amount of liquid refreshment if you so desired. Having completed our course, there was of course the usual little celebration which was had and enjoyed by all and our instructions were to proceed by rail pass to New York, reporting there, the usual Transport Officer when we were told our, where and when we were going to sail to Brighton, but in the meantime had finished the course, we had a couple of weeks in which to reach our destination, the leave which was usually given at completing the course.

We decided to spend a day or two in Boston on the way to New York and had a very pleasant time seeing that famous city, making a few quick friends, one of whom I have a photograph somewhere in a bar in Boston. And from there, onto New York. Here once again, your old Uncle Harry had given me a contact and having advised of our impending arrival, we were given a very warm reception. Unfortunately the man whom I was referred was merely able to say hello and welcome. He was off on a business trip and told me that he had arranged for us to be looked after and this in fact did occur.

On our arrival at the transport office in New York, we were told we had a week before we were required to report so decided to use to the best advantage which we did as will now be revealed.

.....in a bar there which was full not only of Yanks but all various nations serving members, a couple of girls standing near us at the bar have heard to make a comment 'hey they're Australians'. The other one said yes, they're white, and they speak English.

All of us had name tags with the word Australia sown on it and this in turn was sown on to the top of our sleeves and so therefore this is how we were distinguished as coming from such a far away and unknown place.

In New York, Uncle Harry's contact arranged for us to be booked into a hotel, also to be taken to dinner at a very famous restaurant Sadi's and from there to a show known as the Rockettes which was absolutely magnificent in one of the main theatres in New York at the time, although the actual name of it escapes my mind just at the moment. We also had a car and chauffeur allocated to us to take us around and show us some of the sites of New York which were breathtaking and of course something that none of us had ever seen the like of anywhere before.

In New York there was an ABC studio, which amongst other things recorded a weekly item which was played in Australia and it was known as a Postman. Through our Australian office there, we'd heard about this and went along to see about what the chances might be of recording message to be played on the Postman with the ultimate record being delivered to our families.

I haven't yet mentioned it but young Keri was born whilst I was in Canada on the 3rd of September and as this was about a month later, when discussing with the people at the broadcasting studio, our various activities and our facts of life, etc. the fact that I had just become a new daddy was apparently thought to be newsworthy because I did actually record in that studio a short message. This was played in Australia and the record was actually eventually delivered back here and although I did have a copy of it, that disappeared long ago with all the other important parts of my various trips around the world.

We also managed to track up to the top of the Empire State Building which was of course breathtaking although it has since been dwarfed by other buildings, it was certainly something to see in those days, a trip around the harbour and a variety of sites which make you think we were on a holiday searching for something a little more important and of course that important part is fast approaching.

On the given date we reported back to the Australian Transport Office, were taken down to the wharf and discovered that our means of transport was nothing less than the Queen Mary. As we were boarding, the overwhelming supply of goodies passed to us by the local Red Cross and various other charity organizations, was overwhelming, packets, not packets, cartons of cigarettes and all sorts of goodies and we sailed out of New York on the 9th of October and my birthday, 31st was two days out en route to England on the 13th of October. So that date is well remembered. The journey was uneventful except on the sheer size of the ship and the number of people on it, it was of course blacked out, ship,???, was very frequent but the journey was completed uneventfully thank heavens, and we eventually landed at the Port of Glasgow known as Greenock.

The transfer to England brought us very close to realising stark realities of war, which had already been running four years and very, very strict and severe rationing. The damage that we saw on our train trip from Glasgow to London and Brighton on the South Coast was a long, slow journey and uncomfortable carriages, which you slept in your seat.

You were quite often quite some time pushed onto a side track as there was much more important cargo and their Air Force replacements do have priority and

eventually on arriving in Brighton, we were taken to a hotel on the beach front, the name of which escapes me but it is the same hotel which recently bombed when Margaret Thatcher was endangered by a bomb explosion and some of the other government members were in fact killed. This was an eight-storey hotel and amongst other things in the severe problems in England, it's a fact there was no electricity to run lifts.

We were allocated to the eighth floor and you got there by carting yourself up and down and originally with your gear, you had to go up to the eighth floor, every time you came down you had to walk down and I suppose that might have helped our condition, which had been very much spoilt by the flowing milk and honey in America and Canada, compared to the stark realities of besieged war torn country which we're now in.

At our hotel, which was full of Air Force people, there was a nearby theatre which we were ushered to later where we were given a speech of welcome by an Australian Wing Commander who explained a little bit what we might look forward to, told us of the limitations, into various categories of pilots being young fellas up to about twenty one and twenty two trained as pilots up to twenty seven. Twenty eight and after that, Coastal Command. In fact, having passed my thirty first birthday, I was quite an old man at that stage.

We were handed the usual collection of forms to fill in with a variety of details in them and when we sat down to fill them in, we discovered that there was even a query as to where we would like to serve and Graham Kingston and I both wrote 'somewhere where it's hot'. Whether that had any bearing on our subsequent posting to the Middle East, I would doubt but the Wing Commander had been through quite a lot, gave us a cheery welcome. Amongst other things told us about the hundred of pubs in and around Brighton of which some half a dozen were out of bounds and went on to say "I'm sure to see you in one of them tonight".

As we were right on the English channel, at Brighton there were very heavy wire emplacements, anti tank traps and a variety of such things to repel any possible invaders. The beach was a bit of a joke as we saw it because it was purely pebbles and rocks, none of our beautiful sand. But we didn't intend to do any swimming in any case but we were able to make contact with whatever friends and relatives we may have had in the country because we knew we were going to be the usual couple of weeks before they sort this out and we were sent off somewhere else.

So with that in mind, I was able to ascertain where Aub Winston was, eventually contact him, in his mess at the squadron and have a good old chin wag and arrange to meet in about a week's time in a pub at Nottingham and that is a story which was worth telling which I shall do in a few moments.

I also had relatives in Nottingham and was able to make contact with them, these being on my mother's side of the family and we did in fact manage to go and see them too.

We had the usual medical exam which you always get when you go from A to B anywhere in the Armed Services and there wasn't a great deal to do. We tried very hard to contact a name that had been given to me by Uncle Harry in London but was unsuccessful and then we did actually go looking for the location where his office was. The reason we couldn't contact him is because the thing had been blown to heavens. I endeavoured to find out his home address but eventually found out that that had also been the subject of an aerial attack and he and his family had been killed in it.

However Aub Winston recommended that if we had some time to go to a little pub down in Richmond, which we did and he knew the pub keeper very well and we were made very welcome and had a couple of very pleasant days there, done a little bit of sight-seeing and relaxing before returning to Brighton and our eventual move on from there. We still had a couple of days before our actual move, so spent a day or two wandering around London, going to Australia House, where we met up with a few cobbers and finally were told we were going up to an Air Force station near Oxford.



Aub Winston

And arrived there in due course and went through all sorts of indoctrinations relative to air raids, teaching us the type of theory at least that we would need if forced down in enemy country, taken out in buses, that were blacked out, middle of the night, shipped out, we didn't know where, told to find our way back. Some did that some got caught by the home guard, some found a friendly pub or home where they just bedded down for the night and went on the next day to report back.

At Oxford we got to know close up some of the types of aircraft including the famous Wimpy. A trip or two in a Wimpy and then were called and told from head office that we had been posted to the Middle East, the sailing date as yet unknown, in the meantime we can have some leave.

So spent the first part of this in two glorious days up at Nottingham where I was reunited with my old cobber Aub Winston and some of the other boys from the squadron whom I had met when they were in their early training days at Bradfield Park and going back to that point of interest, I did omit to mention earlier and I think it's worth recording, when Aub and his friend knew they were sailing and the camp was closed, they were having a farewell do and Aub suggested that his brother Ralph should come and join the farewell party in their camp. It appears that

arrangements were made for the guards to let us in under the wire, it's not far from the entrance. We took each of us a dozen bottles of beer, crawled in, in goon-skins which were handed to us by the guard, went to the hut, had a very nice apple pie made by the cook, the biggest I've ever seen, dispatched the two-dozen beers with the boys and came back out through the camp under the fence in the approved fashion, into the car and home. Now whether breaking into an Air Force camp was a felony, I don't know but at least it was something a little different.

Aub had already done quite a lot of flying, been injured, but he was still on the Pathfinder course and was great to hear some of his stories, chat to him, have a few drinks, in fact we had quite a celebration but that was good old times, which you came across from time to time into service life, and finally we went to Blackpool at New Year as Aub had a lady friend there whom he eventually married and who came back to Australia with him and we stopped at Sheffield for New Year's Eve which was a wonderful celebration evening and had a look around Blackpool, then back to a township called Morkham, which was somewhat difficult to get to. The method of travel was by train and of course trains didn't run to a particularly set schedule. All we knew was that we had to make five changes at various spots in the middle of the night and it was a very bedraggled couple Graham Kingston and myself at this time who arrived in Morkham the very early morning hours, went to the transport office and were eventually allocated to a private home, who were, in quite a number of instances, available to accommodate troops as they were waiting to get onto their ship.

Our time in Morkham was some four to five days and during that time we got around and saw a few things, played a game of football, horrified our landlady by requesting and eventually getting two baths in two days - but the bath of course was a tub in the laundry and you had to light up the copper and boil the water and when you eventually got into that tub you really felt it was well worth the effort.

At Morkham, we eventually boarded a ship called the Sterling Castle which sailed via Gibraltar and landed us eventually at Alexandria in Egypt and this was about the second, the third week in January 1944. We trekked through Marie Nostram(?), which Mussolini had named the Mediterranean as reasonably uneventful - as Mussolini's navy was no longer in existence. Most of it sunk, the rest of it hiding in harbours. So the journey was quite satisfactory from that point of view, cramped of course, boat drills, very meagre food compared to what we had been used to on the Queen Mary and the America.

Nevertheless there was a war on and we were very pleased to achieve the successful journey and get back onto terra firma in Alexandria and that again was a complete shock, dirt, filth, we did get to a reasonable sort of barracks where we spent a few days and then we went to Damascus in Syria where we spent some two months.

We were being given instructions in various matters relative to the Air Force flying, refreshing ourselves in some of the skills, which we had learnt that we'd been practising very much.



At times we visited Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, and then towards the end of April came back to a place called Gianaclis in the desert South of Cairo. Incidentally we did spend time looking around Cairo also but didn't get out to see the famous Sphinx and pyramids, although we did see them a little later from the air, when we were flying around that district.

At Gianaclis, the object was to form a crew and our crew was myself, as the pilot, one navigator and two wireless operator air gunners. The navigator, the young fellow from Wyalong known as Mike Wright, the other two whose names I can't quite recall but I think one was named Newton and the other was Walsh. I suppose I should remember them but their names are once again with all the missing paraphernalia that has disappeared.

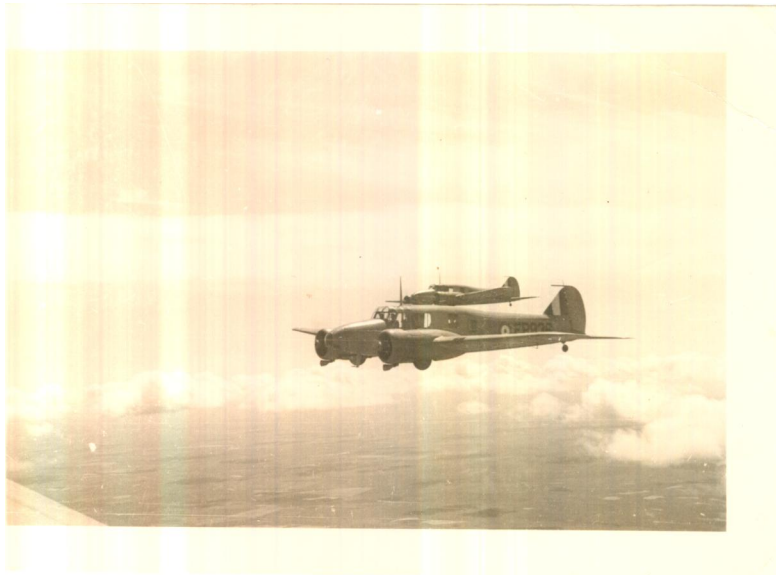


Jack, Mike, Self and Max. These photos were taken just after we'd come back from a trip, though of course we've diced most of our kit. Hope you like them darling.



Taffy and Snow. Taffy is the artist, and is the fitter, Snow being the Rigger

We were introduced to flying on a Blenheim, which was a twin engined British aircraft which had been used in the early war years for a variety of purposes apart from bombing for a type of coastal command work.



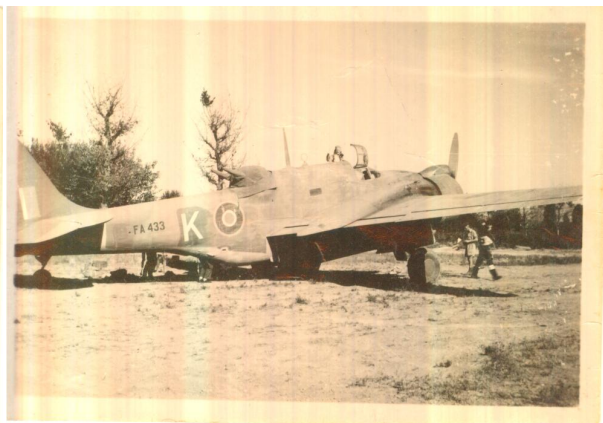
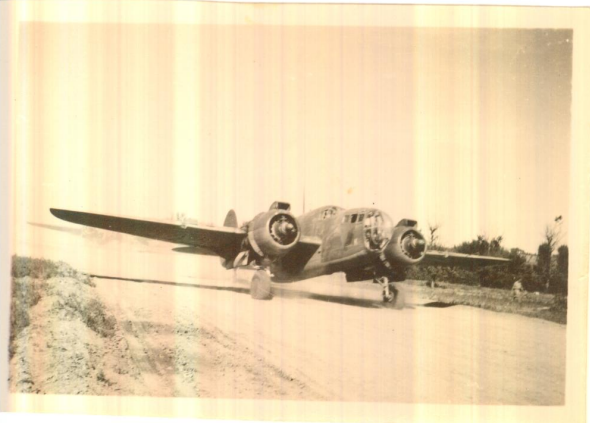
Graham took this, Jack is in the second plane and your old man is in the near one – don't I look well?

That was a very tired old aeroplane was no longer used in service. However we were taken up in this and allowed to take controls with the captain sitting alongside us, didn't actually do any landing or taking off because that was no purpose as we were eventually going to go onto another aircraft which was known as a Baltimore.

It was made in America and was an advanced form of the Boston 26A which was flying medium bombing raids and was specifically designed as a general reconnaissance aircraft, reasonably long range, fairly well equipped, there were 4.5 cannons in the wings which were operated by the pilot, there was also an air gunner turret with a couple more 0.5's in the top garret and the method of flying that was one which at least I found rather scary. The pilot's cabin was like a fighter cabin and there was no room for anybody but the actual pilot there. Forward and under him was the navigator's department and then in behind the pilot, the main body of the aircraft was where the wireless operator and the air gunner had their respective positions.



To teach me how to fly this aircraft, the instructor got into his pilot's seat, I got into the rear compartment where the wireless operator and gunner were normally located and there was a very small aperture which I could stand up and see him and watch what he was doing as we took off, flew, came back and landed a couple of times and then he said alright, off you go. No instruction other than that and this was very much faster aircraft than either the Blenheim or the Anson. It was equipped with much more powerful engines, a lot more equipment and although I had been given a lot of ground instruction as to what was what, what went where, it was virtually a case of getting into it, sitting down, going through the controls, the regulations, routine, and then taxiing out and taking off hoping that I knew where everything was, press the right buttons, came back and landed. That happened on a few occasions and then the next thing was that the crew came and joined me and we did a few more flights ourselves and eventually were considered suitable and satisfactory to go off and get involved in the real business of war.



Gianaclis, like a lot of the desert, subject to a lot of very violent and strong storms, swirling up the sand everywhere and was literally possible to get lost trying to go from your barracks to the main meal hut as the sand and the dust, dirt just obliterated everything else. However by good luck we didn't really get lost but it's not a very pleasant experience and finally we were sent back to Cairo, Graham and his crew and myself and my crew and told to report to the Transport Officer there who in turn would arrange transport for us to go where our squadron was operating which was Benghazi in Libya, the squadron was number 454 RAAF in that it was an all Australian squadron. So that was something to look forward to, but we were going to be fleeced with a lot of Australians when we got there.

Getting there was another problem. Whereas these transports went in convoy, along a road which was not particularly safe from air striking, and also some of the local

inhabitants were not averse to making your journey difficult if they could. However, eventually a convoy was formed, and we put ourselves and our gear in the back of a truck and set out en route for Benghazi through El Alamein and eventually to Tobruk.

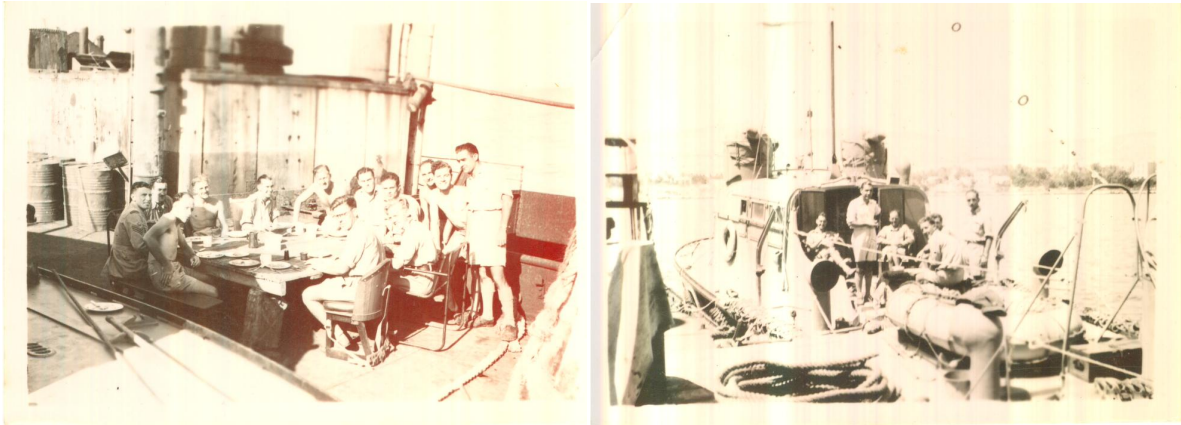


El Alamein



Tobruk Harbour

When we reported to the Transport Officer there, he said that that particular convoy was not going any further and we should hang around Tobruk for a while until another one turned up. We were able to overcome this problem by discovering that there was Australian air sea rescue craft based at Tobruk and we got to know them and had a few drinks, a meal with them and when they heard that we were sort of stranded, they said oh, come on, we'll take you.



So the eight of us went down, got onto the air sea rescue boat and sailed over the Mediterranean to Benghazi. However these air sea rescue boats were very, very fast and they didn't glide through the water, they bounced from the top of one wave to the next and you were quite lucky really to get there without falling or breaking a leg or an arm, it's the case of hanging on. The crew of course were very used to this but to us, it was quite an alarming experience but still we got there in due course of time and tied up at the wharf at Benghazi and from there found where the squadron was and went and reported there.

A friend of, mate of mine Brian Watts from Katoomba was I knew serving somewhere in the Middle East, in the capacity of a clerk but where he was I did not know. So that it was quite pleasant on arriving at the orderly room reporting to be greeted by Brian Watts and to say hello and we of course had quite a lot of time chatting about our home, families etc. and although there were messes on all airforce stations, the supply of liquid was very, very rare and it finished up that first night that Brian was able to get some bottles of Guinness stout from his mess and I was able to get a bottle of Gordon's gin from mine and we repaired to our tent and proceeded over a long chin wags and knock off three bottles of Guinness Stout together with a bottle of Gordon's gin. I can assure you all that is not a very good combination.

When I awoke the next morning I was not feeling particularly well and we had to report to the chief flying instructor who said that he would take us and introduce us to the Baltimores and suggested that we, the pilots should take the aircraft up first, not risking the lives of our crews until we made a couple of circuits and bumps. Any rate fortunately it was after lunch before that part of the inaugural meeting was coming into effect and by that time we had recovered somewhat and so I got into my Baltimore, managed to take her off, fly it round, come back and landed three or four times and the Flight Commander around us said "well that looks alright, we'll get you into the serious business in the near future".

It eventuated of course that there were lots of things about the Baltimore that we had to learn before we could really seriously get involved. A lot more equipment on as I said, different type of aircrafts to anything we had seen and it was necessary to become familiar not only for me but also for the navigator, wireless operator, the air gunners. So there were quite a few experimental trips made and that was something which eventually made it appear that we were ready for the serious action.



454 squadron was engaged in general reconnaissance, they were covering convoys as they came through, by which I meant that they would go out for a few hours to a known point where a convoy was located, fly around it, in continuing circles, reasonable distance and watching out for the possible approach of any enemy aircraft, submarines or ships and generally give some protection to the convoy as far as you could. Certainly if there was any enemy action, you would have been able to report it. This of course only happened during the daylight hours, as night time convoys were up to their own as far as being, having any help at all from aircraft.

On one early trip we were escorting a convoy for only a short period as we were new boys and on the way back over the Sahara Desert, I suddenly found that one of my motors had stopped. It was the port or left side motor which had stopped and as the Baltimore had various tanks for petrol, in both wings I tried to switch the various tanks into the motor, but it didn't come to life again and not too far long after this, the right motor, the starboard motor also ceased to function.

We had a reasonable amount of height, about six thousand feet at this stage and of course with both motors out, it's a case of land it on its belly somewhere and hope it didn't break up. The wireless operator had sent out an emergency call, a Mayday call as it was known and in the meantime I was busily occupied seeking a point to land

before I lost height, and was fortunate to be able to do a 'belly flop' as they call it and the aircraft eventually stopped and fortunately again, nobody was in anyway seriously injured.

In the landing, the starboard or right wing side motor was knocked out of the wing itself, and finished up a couple of hundred yards back from where we'd finally stopped and the forward compartment in which my navigator Mike White was located was skewed to the left but other than a few scratches he was not injured. I, personally had a tooth displaced and a bit of a scar over the top of the left eye but other than that and a few bumps and bruises, we were all able to vacate the aircraft, found it was not catching fire thank heavens and eventually went back to it and the wireless operator was able to make a brief contact with our base, from which they endeavoured to put up our location.



We did of course carry emergency rations which included tins of water, some hard tack, and we went through the recognised drill of taking our parachutes out, spreading them out in the four points of the compass 100 yards or so away, loading down with some Sahara sand and that from the air was easy to locate than an aircraft.

We spent that night under the wings and eventually late the following day, aircraft which we had seen circling in the distance, gradually closed in and located us, dropped down supplies, a message that it would be the next day before a road convoy would come out and pick us up. So we had a second night in the desert, short of cigarettes unfortunately but that was not any great problem under the circumstances and mid morning the next day, the convoy arrived from the Air Force station, together with the Wing Commander who was the Commanding Officer. His name I omitted to mention before. It's Peter Henderson, whose family had a business in Katoomba and we were all very pleased to see them.

There was an engineer with the party he endeavoured to ascertain the cause of the problem. It was most probably the refuelling, which was done by some of the local inhabitants, and it was not unknown that they threw a bit of sand in, around then.

Whether there may have been any other problem was never ascertained. But at any rate we walked away from it and that was the main thing.

On our return, we were given a great welcome by our friends, Graham Kingston and their crew and had a little bit of a celebration in the mess that night, as one would imagine. The following day after a medical check I was sent out to do some solo flying, to see if I had been affected in any way. As I wasn't, it was back to tors.

At this time lots of things were happening in the war. The allies had invaded Italy, the invasion from England onto the Continent was very close and it was decided that our aircraft and our squadron will be moved over to Italy and the majority of the aircraft were flown there with crews who had been at the unit for quite some time and we and some other recently arrived crews were instructed to go back by road transport to Alexandria where we would be taken by boat to Naples and this was a journey that was achieved eventually without any great problems.

When we arrived at Naples it was really in a mess. We found some accommodation, which was very primitive, no water, no sewer, and an empty place that was all that could be provided for us. But the one night when we first arrived there I recall well that we were in Alexandria waiting for our ship to take us to Italy on the 6th of June 1944 which of course was D-Day when the invasion of Europe was started.

At this stage I should mention something perhaps a little more detailed. I've mentioned the name Graham Kingston quite often, as one of those originally at Bradfield Park he was a solicitor who lived in Dalby in Queensland. He was a couple or three years younger than I. But we were transferred from various points together and he and his crew were of course the other Australians that we travelled with and who again came at the same time via Alexandria to meet the squadron in Italy. His school of course was the same as mine. A few of the names were Don and Garth the other one escapes my memory. It is pleasing to record that Graham and his crew came right through the whole of the Italian operation, the same time as us, and all eventually returned home safe and sound. I did actually meet Graham in Sydney on one or two occasions in the immediate post war years but haven't seen or heard of him since that date.

Reflecting for a moment now, if the Medical Officer that first examined me towards the end of 1940 had not applied the rules so rigidly, and I had been able to get into the Air Force when I first tried, this story of course would have been vastly different. In fact, it may have never been written. However that's the vagaries and fortitudes of life and it would seem perhaps to any of you who are listening, at this stage, that all of this happened to me since February 1941 up to June 1944, is that I have had quite a lot of fun, a trip around the world, and not really got stuck into the job for which I had been trained.

However from the second week in June we finally arrived at the point where we could take some active part in the operations and those operations had changed quite considerably from the work that 454 squadron had been originally doing. As the Mediterranean was no longer a threat, convoys were coming through without any trouble, the armies were pushing up through Italy and in the main fighting German troops, because the Italians were superseded by Germans who wouldn't think much of what few battalion groups are remaining so that Germany also had a much bigger problem on her mind than Italy and that was the invasion of Europe.

Supplies to Germany, from Germany rather to the Italian area were very limited and they were fighting a rear guard and eventually a hopeless action. But still, those that were there were pretty tough as the men on the ground will tell you.

The aircraft which we were flying, the Baltimore, was originally designed, as I said, for general reconnaissance aircraft which main job was convoy work and seeking out enemy shipping and whilst some of that was still done, as we were operating from the Eastern side of Italy originally at a place called Pescara, and that was on the Adriatic Sea with Yugoslavia on the other side and there was quite a bit of activity there with regard to seeking out enemy shipping and quite a few attacks were made in that area.

But in the main the job allocated to our squadron from the time in which Pescara was close support with the army forces in front of us. Actually in front of us, were the New Zealand army and we were originally located not far behind them. Our job and close support we basically take off with bombs and attack the targets designated by the army as well as our own spotter fighter aircraft as being too far forward or the allied armies to reach them but of course well within striking distance of flight of bombers, not of course carrying anything like a load, that the heavy bombers were carrying from England.

Most of the Italian airfields had been destroyed by allied bombers and as and when repaired were used by heavy bombers again and for our operation small airfields were created along the coast. These were made up simply of levelling the ground and installing on them a type of landing field which was made of heavy strips of metal, all joined together and these of course could be uplifted and moved to a new location because over a period of time, we moved up behind the armies and were located in four different places, operating from these same type of air strips. The seaside type of towns from which we were operating, were all much the same. Fairly small, had been overrun for quite some time by German troops and as far as the locals were concerned we were just another foreign invader. But we did find them cooperative.

In our squadron we had two Chaplains and where they did it and how they did it, nobody knows but as we moved they always had some sort of a mess arranged for us, equipped and generally looked after us. There was no air conditioning in these places and it would get to be fairly cold. But although Italy was practically denuded of any trees – at least that area was, they always managed to find wood and have fires for our messes and generally do a really wonderful job and everybody that was there couldn't speak a bad word about them. Unfortunately their names are missing from my memory. But I can only repeat that they did a wonderful job in every respect.

With regard to the aircraft, at this stage we were becoming a little more acquainted with them and there were quite a few features about them, which I think I should mention.

They could carry a respectable load of bombs, nothing like the ten tonners that were delivered over Europe, but enough to do quite a little bit of damage. Flying in formation there were three squadrons in the wing and we were given various tasks to bomb various areas, because of their value to the Germans, and the desire that they were destroyed by our army's requirements.

In the main I suppose for the first few months, we did sorties in squadron, sometimes wing strength, on various targets some of which may have taken us an hour to get to and after the bombing run of course an hour to get back. Interspersed with this will be sent over to the other side of the Adriatic seeking out reported concentrations of

ships, not that they were very large but if they were carrying supplies for the enemy, then they had to be sought out and if possible, destroyed.

Now this Adriatic Sea and the area around it was subject to very heavy changes, fog descending quickly, wind by very high mountains and the weather could change quite dramatically.

As will perhaps be appreciated, before taking off on a flight, you are told what the wind is estimated to be, from which direction, which strength, and what may be expected in the area to which you are going because obviously a wind behind you or a wind against you or a cross wind will make quite a difference in the actual flying that is required. And it was not uncommon that you would get over to the other side of the Adriatic Coast and find the whole place covered in fog and had to abort your mission, drop your bombs somewhere in the ocean and come back and land. The dropping of bombs was obligatory once you had got into the air because it was considered far too dangerous to come back and land with bombs underneath you in case any of them might drop off and if they did, and they're already fused, well then it would make one hell of a mess of you and the plane and others nearby. So you had to always drop your bombs if you had to abort a mission, unless you had a secondary target, to which you could go.

All told, within approximately eleven months speeding up the coast of Italy and with time taken away for some leave, bad weather, I guess we must have averaged something like two flights a week, they might be consecutive days, you might have several days off, for a variety of reasons, aircraft maintenance, bad weather, illness and so on. But it was from June until May the next that was spent gradually creeping up the coast of Italy. We did have a break of a week or so and going to Rome on three occasions and that was certainly something to see because Rome was declared an open city which meant that neither of the opposing forces would defend it and therefore it had not been touched in any way.

The flights we made in these early few months were pretty routine in regard to approaching a target at something like sixteen thousand square feet in formation, tucked in underneath the wings of the other aircraft as close as possible and the best pattern on the bombs you've dropped. The fighter opposition was negligible, occasionally we had to fly for cover but the ack-ack was still quite heavy and that was pretty accurate too.

Just a word on ack-ack, it was purely and simply a machine gun which is guided by radar, the approaching aircraft are picked up by radar, they can tell what force you are flying, what speed and what direction and as you get close they have a pretty good idea of where you are going to bomb and for this reason of course you never just flew straight on level to your target. You vary your height, you vary your course, and you vary your speed, although on the actual approach to the target, you always had to fly straight and level so that the bomb aimers would get the target in his sights and correctly indicate when to drop. The anti aircraft fire appeared around you as little black logs which exploded and of course as they exploded near enough, they were quite lethal. We did lose some crews but fortunately they never got close enough to me, or Graham to worry us on the tour.

We got to know the Kiwi Army blokes pretty well as we used to cohabitate with them on various occasions as they would take a township, find a winery, we would suddenly find something like a hundred gallons or litres of wine would arrive in our mess and of course it was most enjoyable because there was very little of the normal

type of liquor refreshment that was available. We also did find various other types, in fact once at a place called Ancona, we came across a Canadian submarine, and on it, one of the members was in Australia, we explained how they appeared everywhere and even with our own squadron, although it was a RAAF squadron. We did finish up with quite a few English people on staff and the South African squadron which was flying in our wing basically South African the same thing to happen but because of postings others will be sent to various places and finish up in a squadron which actually wasn't from their own country.

Our life on the ground was a continual hunt for a bath because our actual accommodation was a tent city, occasionally mobile baths would appear from somewhere but they were fairly irregular and if we knew you weren't flying, we usually took a truck into the nearest town and endeavour to find somewhere to have a bath or a hot shower. And as those facilities were quite often completely lacking as far as we were concerned. You could of course always find a tap of cold water but that wasn't always the answer to what you were seeking. Any rate life was not really too bad and after some few months at Pescara the squadron moved up the coast up for a hundred miles to a place called Ancona, which was somewhat bigger than our previous place, that was the township.

Once again we had this wire stripped matting along the coast and once again the Padres had been up ahead and scrounged, begged, borrowed and I shouldn't stay steal, but somehow a reason why he turned up with a good sort of a mess hut for us, some amenities, we even had a billiard table at one place, and again leave was always available to us in between flying periods and again a trip to Rome, in fact we had three in all the time we were there. These leave periods were not anything that just happened for no reason at all because it was considered that after a certain number of flights, there was a stand-down period as I mentioned before. One of the trips to Rome in a stand down period and it was eye opening to see it.

The New Zealand army was very much in evidence. They also had their depot that looked after you pretty well, with regard to anything you wanted, any information. The Australian comforts fund also had an office there and the Sergeant in charge of that was most helpful.

It may be mentioned again here, whilst money wasn't a problem, the purchasing of goods was not one that the Italians wanted money for, they wanted goods, underwear, soap, clothes, cigarettes of course was a marvellous form of barter not only in Rome but everywhere else.

Another means of barter of course was clothing and footwear and it was quite possible on many occasions that you would go to the Officer's shop, pay about a pound, or the equivalent thereof, of a pair of shoes and you didn't have to go and flog them yourself, you took them along to the comfort's fund and the obliging charge gave you something like seven hundred percent profit on the deal.

It was possible to buy or barter with some quite nice souvenirs but getting them back by post was another rather dicey type of operation and the word soon spread that it wasn't much use, somewhere along the road, quite a lot of it, just couldn't get there.

We had a visit, conducted tour to the Vatican, to Saint Peter's and to various other points of interest and those were really something to see. There are some photographs of these in amongst the album, which I am compiling of my trips and they will be seen for anybody that's interested in looking at.



St. Peters' - Rome

Each flight you made had a routine, first of all there was a meeting time set at which you went along to be briefed as to where your target was, what you were going to be doing, what you're aiming for, heights you would be flying, time you were taking off and then of course after that, you had to be taken down to your aircraft which you had to check over, chat with your engineer and officer and maintenance man and generally satisfy yourself that everything was alright with your aircraft.

Some twenty minutes before the time due to take off, you would all get into your allocated locations, and in my place, sitting on my parachute, the other boys, they all had chest parachutes strapped on, being strapped in and then closing the canopy, calling up the call on the intercom, make sure that that was working and getting an OK from them, checking over the flaps, rudder and everything else operates before started the motors, were working and then starting up your motors, there was a

regular schedule which you had to follow and one first, then the other then synchronising them as much as you could, checking that the wireless operator was making contact, that your gunner was in his turret and satisfactorily so that indicated at this time that it was time you got moving and you would follow that in regular order, depending on your position in the formation to be taken up in the air.

The leading aircraft of course would go first These two wing men on either side of the thing would follow, then number four would be the man follow behind the leader and under him and the deputy flight commander would take over if there was any problem with number one and so on, back twelve aircraft which was the number of each squadron,

After taking off, which was followed fairly quickly to get you out of the place as quick as you could, one behind the other, you rendezvoused at a given height and then climbed up to the point where you were all in formation, tucked in behind one another and then the leading aircraft of course captained by the Flight Commander and the chief bombardier set the course and the we followed them. After the bombing run, you returned again and on approaching the air field was dropped out of formation, coming in fairly close behind one another, again so as not to waste any time.

It should be mentioned here that as these air fields were as close to the front line of fighting as was possible, they were of course the first allied air field that any allied aircraft coming back with problems. So that's why some of that heavy aircraft, the American heavies when they approached back, if they had problems and required emergency landing, our air field was usually the one that was taken and there were some pretty scary moments with this happening because quite often they may come back with having met a bit of trouble and they would be coming back with a motor or two or even three out and with communications out and unable to communicate with the ground and they would just know there was an airfield there, lucky if they got that far, they would have no wireless, not able to tell you, so they would just drop down and land and of course if somebody else was trying to land or taking off in the meantime, there were one or two nasty accidents. However the airfield controller officer always kept an eye open for these approaching aircraft and if he could see one coming, he would signify to the rest of us to get the hell out of the road and let this bloke come in and land or if you were about to take off, wait and let this damaged aircraft come in and make a safe land.

Our own procedure on landing of course was in the case of somebody having problems, if that happened well then they would be given priority to come in and land first and that the rest of us would wait and make quite sure that they had done so. Occasionally a one engine motor had gone and of course we only had two so it was not unusual to find somebody coming back for a variety of reasons, it was a matter of waiting for the rest of us but it was very seldom that single motor failure caused an issue or problems.

In many ways the less eventful were those across the Adriatic seeking out a target on the other side of Yugoslavia, then went up towards Trieste, but because of the weather problems, you did find sometimes even before you were half way there a weather aircraft was sent up ahead of the bombers to see what the weather was like, informing the pilot, and sometimes we would only be half way there and the Tiger Moth would report back that the target was closed in and so you had to come back, perhaps try and find an alternative site or else come back and land.

The personnel of the squadron was changing, practically all the time, from the Wing Commander down. As crews finished their time they left and of course others moved in. Some had injury problems, so that your time there you met quite a lot of people and not all the same ones all the time. But they were in the main Australians, and we got to know a lot of them.

Australians, there were quite a fair proportion of English. In fact the little fitter that I had on my plane was known as Caffey and the fitter, the rigger rather, was an Australian by the name of Snow. They did quite a lot together with me, were with me, we did have each aircraft numbered alphabetically for A for Apple, B for Baker, so on and after I'd been on the squadron for some time, my usual aircraft was G for George which these boys decided to call Gar and knowing that my wife's nick name was "Snitchy", as you will see on some of the photographs, they have drawn on the side of the aircraft, similar to what the Americans put on theirs, a figure of a lady reclining with a telephone speaking to supposedly me in the cockpit.

Since recording the start of this and some of the other parts of it over a period of time, I have been fortunate to receive a copy of a history of 454 squadron from a Col Stinson who was the squadron leader on the squadron when we were in Italy and I was able to make contact with him, he has sent me a copy of this unofficial history but it does quote quite a number of facts about our operations, conditions and so on which had escaped my memory and I think I will now endeavour to read actually various points of interest from this report.

A Summary of the History of 454 Squadron RAAF

On the morning of April the 2nd 1942, a parade was held in Blackpool, England. It was no means the first parade to be held in this city and probably excited little or no comment from civilians who may have witnessed it. These same civilians could not know that they were looking at the crisis of the squadron which was one day to emerge as a darting, biting wasp harassing, following and smashing the Germans on land and sea in faraway lands.

It is unlikely too that the men parading and the flight Sergeant Pollard realised the name that the 454 squadron was to make for itself, around the shores of the Mediterranean. They were British personnel who were going overseas and had no doubt heard rumours of the final disembarkation in the Middle East of which they had heard many conflicting reports. Not knowing just what to expect, they sailed from Britain and in the same frame of mind did actually disembark in Egypt during the last week of June 1942.

Still, as ground personnel of 454 squadron, they were sent to Akhir? in Palestine, to service the Halifaxes of 76 squadron which later became 462RAAF squadron. After moving to Suez and back to Akhir? they were joined by twenty air crew the first twenty to arrive on the squadron.

By November 1942 twenty air crew together with four hundred ground crew, under the command of Wing Commander Campbell. We were working at last on that aircraft which at this time were four Bisleys at El Kaara? fifty miles from Mosel? in Iraq.

Later as the complete squadron, they moved again but not towards operations as they had also keenly hoped. At Gianacquis near Alexandria, they converted to Baltimores an aircraft with at that time a most dubious reputation. But, this same type

of aircraft however they were to fly three totally different types of offensive operations both successfully and with remarkably few casualties.

In the morning of March the 4th 1943 flying Officer Bailey and crew began the squadron's competitive life when they went out on an anti-sub patrol. Leaflet raids were a most unsatisfactory job for crews keen for action. Being particularly brassed off, one flying officer Parkin an identity on the squadron, leading a box of four Baltimores on a leaflet raid on Crete dropped some beer bottles, quite empty, with his leaflets. This received a mention on the Berlin radio at the time.

On July the 1st the squadron suffered its first loss on operations. Sergeant King and crew failed to return from a mission. Two weeks later a formation of six Baltimores led by Squadron Leader Fulchard of the RAAF attacked Crete at five hundred feet in daylight. Meeting intense flack, five aircraft were shot down over the target. A sixth badly shot up remained in the air only long enough to ditch off the coast near Durna. The pilot, Flight Sergeant Akhurst was badly injured, was later awarded the first distinguished flying medal on the squadron. Only two aircraft landed on the home drome but with numerous bullet holes. This catastrophe left the squadron practically without aircraft and they had to return to LG 91 where new aircraft were obtained and reconnaissance strips extended to long range.

The next move of this ever mobile squadron, was to Benghazi where the work of long range reccies was resumed. It was here that another dark period settled over the squadron when three aircraft were lost in ten days. These, being the first losses on reconnaissance work. There was an air of mystery surrounding these losses at the time. Since no reports of sightings on enemy shipping was out of range of enemy fighters. The probable answer was provided however when Flying Officer Railton returns with his aircraft badly shot up and his gunner wounded. He had been intercepted by four ME 109's carrying long-range fuel tanks. The circumstance, hitherto unknown in this theatre. Flying Officer Railton was later awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross.

June the 1st 1944, stands out as one of the big days in the history of 454 squadron because on that day a Wellington made a sighting of a large German convoy steaming towards Crete. The 454 squadron shadowed this convoy until it neared Crete. Then they joined with South African and RAF squadrons in an attack, which resulted in the sinking of every ship sighted. Flying Officer Scott, a navigator, was awarded a Distinguished Flying Cross for his part in this act. Shortly afterwards 454 squadron was withdrawn from coastal command and transferred to the desert air force.

Squadron moved to Italy and on July the 25th the first aircraft landed at Pescara. Here they began a totally different type of work being engaged in light bomber formation attacks in support of the eighth army. Targets were at first close to the bomb line sometimes aircraft bombing from twelve thousand feet bomb targets only eight hundred yards ahead of our own troops. Shortly after arriving at Pescara, another move was made. This time, Falconara near Alcona.

Operations were flown from here to targets as far as Yugoslavia and Pola? . The latter, being one of the most heavily defended targets in Italy. The most part however attacks were made in close support of the army's drive on Rimini.

Life at Falconara was particularly grim. Those that have never worked in it the mud was unbelievable. Tents would serve as, living quarters, sick quarters, stores and operations rooms were surrounded by it. Not just ordinary mud but often semi liquid ooze, eighteen inches deep.

On the drome the only comparatively mudless area was the metal landing strip. Aircraft were parked in thick, clinging mud which covered ground crews as they crawled around their mud bespattered Baltimores, trying in a world of mud to keep the oily grime and the vital parts of their beloved and accursed planes. But they did it.

The armourers worked like muddy beavers bombing up twelve aircraft twice a day. Bombs of two hundred and fifty pounds had to be rolled for distances up to a hundred and fifty yards through this oozing soil and then take the slippery stuff had to be man handled onto the aircraft. In spite of all this, never once was an aircraft late on a raid because of late arming by ground crews.

By December the army had advanced almost to Rivena. In two weeks before Christmas 1944 the squadron moved North again to Chesamatico, between Rimini and Rivena. At this time 253 wing comprising 454 RAAF 15 South African Air Force and 500 RAF squadrons was the most forward bomber wing in the Italian theatre of war.

Fifteen miles North gunfire was heard, barrages fell through the trembling ground and at night the sky was lit as the Huns tried vainly to retake Rivena with his heavy guns and Panza divisions. Operations here, in addition to close support work extended to long range targets Servanamo, Castellano and Casta Franco Venito all receiving unwelcome attention.

After the mud of Falconaro, Chesanatico was paradise. The first layer of sandy, grass-covered soil was frozen so there was not even dust to worry the men. Light snow fell occasionally and though the weather was undoubtedly cold, each tent had a heater and at least clothing could be kept dry. Flying at high altitudes at this time, extremely cold temperatures were experienced. The coldest being forty degrees below freezing. Aircraft heaters were petrol driven and considered dangerous when operating in the same area as flack, so was very seldom used. Operations ceased in January while a conversion was made to night intruder work.

For six weeks crews have been flying formation in daylight at twelve thousand feet or more and change over to flying singularly at night at all heights from deck level to six thousand feet and this type of work and a great deal of scope was given to crews. They could choose their own targets within limits with the heights they favoured and staffed and bombed as they wished. On the night of the 6th of March 1945 six aircraft at the squadron took off on VHF bombing leaflet and reccie raids. This was the beginning of the last operational phase, of 454 squadron.

From then up to the collapse of the German army in Italy, the night intruder swept the skies over the Po Valley, searching the ground for any movement of barges or motor transport, night photographs were taken, VHF bombing carried out and the Hun generally harassed and morale shaken by the tracer and illuminating pyrotechnics spewed from the black skies.

That concludes the excerpts from the official history, which I have and so now we'll go back to talk about what I thought of night flying and I can assure you it wasn't much.

Even the birds don't fly at night. As our report in the semi official history of the squadron which I have recorded fairly recently, says we operated in three activities of areas, one, coastal command work for which we had been extensively trained, two, close support bombing for which we had had very little training and now night flying for which we had had exactly no training.

My own experience and I think this would be fairly correct to most of us was that at our elementary flying school at Narromine, we actually did one round 'circuits and bumps' at night time with our instructor. So that would have taken us at least six minutes that was the extent of our night flying for our elementary school.

Subsequently at Claresholme and the advanced training course in Canada, we did have one cross-country course with an instructor and then we did perhaps two on our own, each of some hour and a half's duration. However you knew where you were going. There were lights everywhere towns spread out more or less at your feet from A to B to C and it was damn nearly impossible to get lost. But that was the extent of the night flying which I had done and most of the pilots also. It was early in January 1945 when the powers that be decided that we should convert to night intruder work, which virtually meant you went off with a varied assortment and types of bombs, hoping to find something to drop them on. You were given a designated area in which to wander around. If late reports had indicated something of interest there that could be attended to, then of course that was included. But most times it was purely, simply a case of flying over a given area attacking and dropping bombs and shooting up anything you happened to come across and generally to make the Hun keep his neck down twenty four hours of day instead of just in daylight. It was of course in the middle of winter. It was of course very, very cold and we were flying from a point almost at the Northern most end of the Adriatic Sea in what was known as the Po Valley. The Po Valley was famous for its bad weather as we had already found out in daytime flying and the Met. Officers were very, very careful to impress on us that sudden changes of weather at night time could be most unpleasant should they occur to us whilst we were flying. It will also be apparent of course that flying at night time was something which those on the ground could see you coming with their radar equipment, they could very easily track you and if they so felt inclined, as they often did, let some of that fairly accurate flack shoot at you and that was successful from their point of view in quite a number of cases.

Converting to night flying was not only something that was a change as far as the air crew are concerned, but it was also a complete change for the ground staff because obviously with operations going on all night, crews getting ready to go, having to be fed before they left, having something when they came back, having to give reports, transport, kitchens, doctors, everybody had to suddenly find themselves doing some work at night time. But that's the way it had to be and so it was. We had of course all had experienced in our training blind flying it was called, where a sheet was put up around you so that you couldn't see anything except the instruments and you had to learn to fly by these as to height, air speed, course and every other facet of flying except landing, naturally and when we came to fly at night time, the Baltimore was something that none of us had ever flown in at night time. You had to get used to the idea of not having everything sprayed around in front of you, know where they were,

we all had to make various training trips without crews and eventually got stuck into the actual real night intruder work.

In your training and in your actual flying, it was always stressed how important it was that the pilot should be able to fly on a steady course at the correct height, at the correct rate of ascent, or descent and also in the correct direction. Now those very important points were a lot easier to accommodate in day time when you could pick a point somewhere ahead of you and make sure every now and then that you were still aiming at that point but at night time you had nothing at all to rely on except your instruments and of course with night time flying, your navigator virtually took over the role of running the aircraft once you were off the ground, because he knew where you were supposed to be heading, how long it should take you on that particular section of your trip, what if anything you might be passing over, that could be a problem or should be attacked and then tell you when you were due to turn and perhaps do another leg of a search course, advising you of your height, if you were straying up or down and generally keeping tracks to see that you, the pilot, were taking you and your crew where the navigator wanted you to go.

And, of course another very important thing with night flying and in fact all flying and that is the wind. The wind on the ground could be nil, it could be twenty miles an hour from a certain direction. By the time you get up one thousand feet that could change dramatically. It could change from nil to fifty from a certain direction. Instead of coming into your face, it could be coming from behind you. It could be blowing up the side and therefore when you had no means visually of checking where you were going, it's obvious that it wasn't too difficult to find that somehow or other, perhaps due to winds, you had strayed from your course and you were not going where you had thought you were.

Now the Po Valley, if you care to look at a map some time, is surrounded by some nasty looking hills and unfortunately some of our crew as I fear did get off course and found those hills in their way and didn't come back.

I had one experience myself, which was on one evening when the weather was pretty foul, but we did take off, we did fly for about an hour and a half to two hours as designated. We were going, we thought we knew where, but after this time, my navigator Mike called me up and he said Gar I think we're lost.

Now that was not a very nice place to be lost for him anymore than for me, or the rest of the crew. But this was provided for in your training and in your aircraft and in the general set up. On the ground there were radar stations, who could by radar track each, every aircraft. On those aircraft you had a little button known as IFF, which was meant to read and mean Identify Friend or Foe. That report came back to the radar screen if you had pressed the button. If you hadn't well of course they wouldn't know whether you were friend or foe. But in an occasion like this and an emergency, our instructions were to press the button and to call up with a mayday signal and it was most reassuring in a very short time, after switching on to a special broadcast channel which you had to do, to have a voice came back and announce who they were, their call sign, and to tell you in my case to change course, to change height, to change speed, the directions given to me over the next three quarters of an hour eventually brought me back to a point where this voice said you can now descend to five hundred feet and descend at the rate of fifty feet a minute. You had of course, to keep a flying speed otherwise you would have gone into the deck. We all knew that and just below five hundred feet, you should break out into the open,

we were flying in fog at this stage, and see your runway lights and that is exactly what happened. So these boys in the radar I have to thank for my life and the life of the crews and everybody else. They did a wonderful job and mine wasn't the only experience in the squadron, where we were brought safely back by these radar boys.

After about fifteen of these trips, we were given about a week's stand down leave to go and kick our heels up somewhere or sit around and do nothing but in general to relax because this night flying was really very stressful and a lot more difficult to take than daytime flying. However the boys in the heavy bombers had been doing it for a long, long while and I guess it was a case of getting used to it, it did get easier as time went on. This went on for some time until about the middle of April when finally the end of a trip I was called into the Doctor's office and sat down and had a bit of a chat and he said "alright Webby, you've had it, you're finished".

Webby as he liked to call me, was of course generally known as Gar and after I'd left him, I went down to the mess to tell all our crew and that was really an occasion for a celebration and Graham Kingston with whom we were still associated and who, he and his crew were still on the squadron at the same time as us, they were tour-exed as it's known the following night so we had quite a big celebration.

We'd been flying more or less continuously for about twelve months. We'd both done something over sixty three sixty four trips which unfortunately I can't record because that blasted log book of mine is missing. But at any rate, the war was nearly finished and there were a lot of young crews waiting to have a crack and we were not at all disappointed to be told that we'd finished our tour, in fact very damn glad."