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THE TRAINING CREW WITH AN AVRO ANSON.

ally had to report again to go for what they called an observer's training school.

Our group, when we finished our training was detailed to go overseas as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme. We were going somewhere, we didn't know where. It turned out to be Edmonton in Alberta, Canada.

The category of observer is a very old one that started in the First World War when there were two people flying in the aeroplane. The split was made, at the wisdom of the Air Force, while we were in the observer school to be either navigators or bomb aimers, which Americans will call bombardiers, but we don't.

By this time I'd just turned 19, this was the first time away from home and I loved it! It was marvellous! Going across the Atlantic in a big ship was fun. It was the Queen Elizabeth, the first one — a big converted luxury cruiser, one of the best ships that's ever been made.

After arriving in England, the air force administration eventually sorted out who should go where, and I, along with quite a lot of the friends that I had that came from Edmonton, went to a place in Scotland called West Freugh, which is on the Mull of Galloway. It's still an airport today. That was our first flying in England; we flew in Avro Ansons for navigation exercises.

West Freugh was interesting because it was about Christmas time, and it's a very high latitude. It was the first experience I'd had where the morning came about 10 am, and it was dark at 4 pm, so there was very little daylight there.

But the flying was lovely. Beautifully clear skies, and the northern hemisphere was something that we'd got used to flying in Canada. I'm speaking about what stars were where and so on, which is a navigator's interest.

Eventually we ended up stationed at a place where we all got together with other categories of fliers like pilots and air gunners and the bomb aimers and so on. In a purely freeform activity, we just built ourselves into a crew, and so at that stage we became what was almost a complete

WITH HIS FELLOW SIX CREW MEMBERS UNDER A HALIFAX.



bomber crew. When that was finished, we went off to do training on the sort of aircraft that we were going to fly, which was the early Halifax.

I can easily remember the time and place because I remember from the history that was taught in Victoria anyway, that it's just south of York, a place called Marston Moor which is a famous battleground between the Roundheads and the Cavaliers.

I remember being on leave in York and seeing in the sky an enormous crowd of aeroplanes because it was just a day or two before D-day, June 6 1944.

Shortly after we'd finished our training we were sent to a squadron in Yorkshire. We were joined by an extra crew member, the flight engineer. The others were all Australians, all RAAF. All the flight engineers were Englishmen, and they were local. So we became a seven-man crew at that time.

All our flying was from that airfield in Yorkshire just north of Hull. It lasted until about the end of November of that year when we'd finished our tour of operations and went on leave.

A typical day for us would be a night, in fact, because the bomber command did almost all of its flying at night unlike the American air force who flew daylight missions. It was very dangerous, daylight flying. They did it remarkably well with their B-17s but we stuck to the night flying.

The preparation for a flight started about lunch time and the briefing itself would be about 6 pm. The time of take-off was anywhere between 9 pm and midnight.

Most of the flights for our squadron on Halifaxes were not very far into Germany, just to the Ruhr valley, making the flight last about six or seven hours return trip. We'd get back about around dawn, eat breakfast, go to bed, and be forgotten for a while.

My memory of squadron life is that it was very easy going. It was all fun, ease and friendliness except for perhaps 20 minutes over the target. But for the rest of the time, it was all, I keep on using the word fun. I mean that, and not in a facetious sense. Remember, I was only 20 when this happened.

The system used in the RAF, which we of course were part of, was that every

IN THE LINE OF DUTY

aircraft had a navigator. Every aircraft, therefore, was an autonomous unit and had its own flight plan. But the overall plan was intended to concentrate the bombers, so that in the famous thousand bomber raids, which probably had 800 aircraft or something like that, the plan would be for all of those aircraft to go through a target in about 10 minutes. This was from about 20,000 feet because the aircraft wouldn't go much higher than that with a bomb load.

Think of the target area as the length of a big box of bursting flak. The aircraft all had to fly through this box of exploding anti-aircraft fire. The German radar was not good enough, no radar

was good enough, to be able to do selective firing against individual aircraft. So it was just a matter of luck really.

It wasn't officially sanctioned but I think everybody adopted a practise that we certainly did, at least after we were told how to do it. That is, if the target was to be bombed from 20,000 feet, we'd struggle up to the maximum height of about 22,000 as we approached the flak 'box', then we'd fly down in a very gradual dive, to come out the other end at about 19,000. But that gave quite a few miles per hour on the speed, and therefore, some quite valuable seconds are reduced from the exposure time. I don't think there's anybody who would deny doing that.



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