

Interviewer:

So this is Terry Ford on the 6th of November, 2023 at South Shield's Local History Group interviewing Eileen Burnett about her father Fred Clarke.

Eileen:

At the outbreak of war in 1939, Fred Clarke joined the Home Guard. This meant going out each night to the man the searchlights looking for enemy aircraft during the enemy bombing raids over the town. When Fred was called up in 1941, he joined the Royal Air Force first going to the RAF Padgate, near Warrington for training. After completing his basic training, he was moved to Colnbrook in Buckinghamshire, which was the central depository for the kits for airmen lost or missing in action. In June, 1943, while unloading a lorry with another airman Jim Warrington, the lorry moved and both men ended up in hospital where he spent several weeks the hospital passes are in there. In 1944 Fred, now a Lance Corporal went to Blackpool before being sent to an RAF station in Peshawar in Northern India now part of Pakistan. This housed the RAF squadrons number 5, 20, 28 and 31, the station provided close support for the army units in the northwest frontier. His commanding officer being the Air Vice Marshal Carl. While Fred was in India, he was able to send a message to his wife through the British Broadcasting Corporation. The RAF and the IAF, which was the Indian Air Force pilots would train by flying their non-native air wings to gain combat experience and communication proficiency.

Besides operations in Burma Theatre, the IAF pilots participated in the air operations from North Africa, and Europe. The Air Force also played an instrumental role in halting the advance of the Japanese Army in Burma, where the first air strike was executed. The target for the first mission was the Japanese military base Arakan. After which an air strike mission continued against the Japanese air base in Mae Hong Song and Chiang Mai in northern Thailand. While out in India, Fred burnt his back by sitting out in the sun and not thinking he sat back on the chair and burnt his back. Fred served India until 1946.