

The destination was Blackpool & on arrival in the late afternoon we disembarked and were headed outside with another trainload for elsewhere & formed up in three long ranks. We looked in vain for trucks which might be taking us to H.Q., but no such favours were for us.

Depressed, tired, hungry & undisciplined we marched or droopingly straggled to the Reception H.Q. where we were dispersed to various billets. &c.

I being the most ancient, in the party of six lads, ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> lucky enough to have a bedroom to myself in a typical boarding house <sup>in North Road</sup> "now requisitioned for service personnel, with a typical Lancashire landlady. Her greeting was "take your boots off lads and watch the wall paper & paint with that there bit". We triumphantly divested ourselves of the load & ~~at last~~ washed & tidied ourselves & a good high tea was provided.

Parade was for 8 1/2 next day. Bed was welcome. Up & out early then we paraded & were marched off for an F.F.I or medical & dental inspection where the halt, lame & blind were categorised & the healthy ones so recorded. We were then photographed for Identification Cards ~~was issued~~ & general instructions given.



5.

Then followed three weeks of initial training in square drill, guard duties, rifle drills, assault courses, and all ~~other~~ <sup>various</sup> training culminating in a passing out parade before the district C.O.

We had a very efficient but understated Drill Sergeant Instructor <sup>superior</sup> to whom we, apparently, reacted favourably, as there were many days passed off quite well. The weather was good and sunny on Blackfoot's fine marine parade was enjoyable & we provided a spectacle for holiday makers. The day ending at five gave us ample leisure for the enjoyment of evenings at the Winter Gardens an old place of amusement.

We had in our squad some misfits, one a heavily built chap for whom a uniform had to be specially made, so for the first two weeks he paraded in RAF Cap & boots & belt and a natty sports coat & flannels but when his uniform came through he looked a treat. Another was a nervous boy who blurted scarlet at anybody said directly to him. He could never march on the command & was always half a pace behind & his arms swung with the leg that was moving not left arm with right leg, and he always halted after everyone else was stationary. He was trained in due course I began to wonder at the amount of tea & wash one could consume in a day.



On completion of the square bushing we were paraded & notified of our various "Trades" and to my surprise I found that my future was to be involved with aeroplane engines - quite a novel change from twenty years of clerking!

On I, with others, was marched to Blackpool Central Station and entrained again for destination unknown in an R.A.F. Special which finished its journey mid afternoon at Brindley Heath, a railway halt serving R.A.F. Hednesford on Cannock Chase. to become a Flight Mec (E) which meant Engines as opposed to (A) airframes.

There Service Police awaited us & we were marched up a long hill to the Training Camp which, as well as housing R.A.F. & W.A.A.F. tradesmen in training also had R.N.A.S. tradesmen's schools. We were paraded before the Station Warrant Officer who did not seem to like what he saw, but as he had, no doubt, seen so many similar entries, one could sympathise. We were detailed to Hut Billets & called out on parade to collect <sup>mugs & towels</sup> blankets etc. The Hut housed about 26 men & a senior man was appointed to take nominal charge of affairs although



7. ~~were~~ were in charge of a Sergeant P.T. Instructor who had a bedroom partitioned off at one end of the hut.

The floor was of brown lino which we learned to polish & the windows were opened & were fitted with blackout curtains. Each man was responsible for the tidiness of his bedspace & the hut had to be kept tidy, with beds made up in the regulation manner each day. Once a week there was a full hut inspection when it had to look really spic & span with the floor highly polished & not a footmark to show.

Heating, if such is the term to be applied, was supplied by a round cast iron stove which stood at the foot of my bed. This had to be empty of ash & cleaned for weekly inspection. The fire was not to be lit before 5 P.M. & had to be out before parade at 8 A.M. Dry wood was hard to come by & only a bundle of coal for week was permitted, so only on very cold nights was there anything like a fire when Riggers (airframe tradesmen) were able to bring some waste wood from the carpenter's shop. My bed became the most popular sitting place in the hut!   
with the one unmeted offside

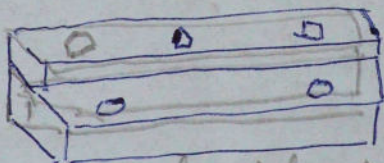


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At this Station my training proceeded from  
Mid Sept 1942 to 17th Feb 1943.

To one who had previously left all engineering problems relating to motorcycles & cars to my brother who excelled in these matters, I found it singularly baffling & then interesting to be taught how to mend airplane engines & to become familiar with the vagaries of different metals, but I am afraid some instructions had their life span shortened in dealing with such ignoramuses as me.

At its outset one had to fashion from a raw bar of  $2" \times \frac{1}{4}"$  mild steel a little test piece which when finished looked so:-



This was made by diligent filing to perfect surfaces on all sides so that no light appeared anywhere when a ~~to~~ precision straight edge was passed over each surface. Then drilled, tapped with a bolt thread of four various sizes the two pieces were polished & bolted together. At the end of this test period my piece was



9. inspected by the Sergeant Instructor.

It was a small thing but mine own, but it let light through everywhere, so much it seemed that in comparison with those of some other Chaps it was an illumination on its own. The bolts, ~~en~~ tightened in a vice could not hide the fact that my filing work was not of the required standard & the instructor gave it a welling glance & threw it from him into a waste bin.

I thought this result would probably have the effect of the costly Flight Mechanics course being terminated for me & I would find myself a clerk S.Y. But no, it appears I got a 60% pass for this phase & <sup>passed</sup> ~~passed~~ on through the course embodying the mechanism of Electrical Theory & the intricacies of Magneto, Starters & their controls. Then on the aeroplane carburettors in their various forms <sup>cooling systems</sup> and other interesting items which began to show how & why engines really worked.

Then came the day when Entry 157 were turned loose on a Rolls Royce "Merlin" engine to see where all the components were attached & their relation to



the engine & its working. This phase was most interesting, but, I wondered, did the heroic pilots of our fighters really know what was under the cowling of their airplanes & what happened when they switched their switches & pushed & pulled their levers. I feel sure they did not, or they would have never flown with such nonchalance & ability into battle. There were various other interesting enquiries on show including American Pratt & Whitney types but we were told to ignore these as they would not concern us. Time proved this statement to be incorrect! Came the day when we were brought into touch with actual aeroplanes & were given conducted tours over a Wellington Bomber, a Fairey Battle, a Hurricane & a Spitfire. There were all clapped out machines, retired from active service for our tuition. This was when the real interest reversed & we could bring the various areas of tuition into perspective.

Cent on the Tarmar I and five other A.C. II's were lead to a battered & torn Gladiator from which we, under the instruction of a Corporal, were told off to remove the propeller & cowling ring. Then we changed the plugs & did a simulated engine D.I. (daily inspection). Having finished the



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peers back on a Pilot Corporal reduced from flying due to defective eyesight climbed into the cockpit & instructed us in starting procedures. This involved inserting a crank handle into a gearing on the starboard side & two men winding like smoke to turn the engine over. With a clatter & a bang the miracle was achieved & the old crate vibrated & rattled while the engine was gingerly run up to moderate revs.

The ~~same~~ next bit of fun was hand starting drills on a D.H. Moth. Here one approached the propeller, with Pilot Corp in the cockpit, cried "switches off" & received the reply "switches off" & with left hand behind ones back out of danger the propeller blade was grasped in right hand near the tip & heaved sharply down. This was done two or three times to prime the engine & then on calling "switches on" the pilot switched on ignition & on repeating the motions the engine wound or should start, & one stood back sharply out of harm's way. As an instructor said - If your cap falls off leave it where it is or your head will follow it".



Meset was taxiing & parking drill for Ground Crews which was carried out with an AVRO Tutor biplane taxiing about on the tarmac in the hands of our Pilot Corporal. This involved calling the aircraft forward by hand signs to the prescribed parking area & signalling the turns required by either left or right hand and when the aircraft was in the right position to raise both hands in a stop signal & wave crossed arms above head to cut engine, ~~for~~ The reward for correctly doing this phase was to have a ride in the second cockpit while the meset went on the course did the drill.

Then there was a Blenheim Bomber to run up & watch the effect of variable pitch propellers. Here one checked the starting of the engines from the front of the aircraft having a fire extinguisher ready in case of a petrol fire. The drill consisted of checking that chocks were under the wheels & that control surface locks were removed then standing to the front & giving the O.K. to the pilot. On receiving the O.K. from him chocks are withdrawn, giving the propellers a wide berth. One WAAF entrant gave us a shock by nearly walking into



13 a revolving propellers orbit + losing her head but the sergeant instructor, watchful for such failings, shoved her quickly to one side. She nor we would forget again.

The next day dry + cold it now being <sup>end of</sup> January 1943, was the occasion for starting + running-up trials with a Mark I Spitfire. The engine being primed with a Ki Gas pump + receiving the O.K. from the crew on the ground it was then "switches on" + press the Coffman starter button. This fired a cartridge, in a magazine of five, which discharged a gas at high pressure to the engine and turned it over enough to start if priming was correct. With the engine running performance checks were made on various throttle settings, then a quick burst on full throttle finished the test when the ~~engine was~~ throttle was closed + on the engine stalling, switches were cut. On this test a WAAF trainee apparently became fascinated by the engine at high revs and jumped the chocks + started to lurch across the tarmac towards the security fence. The Sergeant + other boys jumped on the tail end + the frightened WAAF realising what she had done closed the throttle + stopped, but she got white + trembling but the



14. Sergeant only said "You opened her up too wide low - your nearly took off" & a laugh of relief went up all round.

In the course of this running up two loads lay across the tail plane to stop it flying & it came to my turn. The cold wind of the slipstream seemed to go right through me & when the run was over I couldn't get warm.

At the midday meal (dinner) I downed as much hot soup as I could, and R.A.F. soups everywhere I went were good, but I couldn't get the chill out. That night I gulped hot tea & took some aspirins & went to bed soon after 8 to try & sweat the chill away. I was feeling even worse in the morning & regrettably reported sick at 8 AM on Tuesday 12 Jan.

The M.O. looked at me & sent me to Sick Bay at once where they took my temperature & told me to have a bath & go to ~~bed~~ prepared a bed.

The unbelievable bliss of a hot bath & a bed with sheets, pillows & hot water bottles made me feel a lot better. The nurse gave me some pills & I was soon asleep and came too in the evening when I had some soup & bread. The chill having left me I began to feel better but I was kept in bed until the Friday. I delighted to



15 The Station Band preceded my off to work at 8 each  
morn while I lay in luxury, W.O. on march.

On Sunday afternoon 17 Jan I was discharged &  
returned to my hut. That night there was a terrific  
thunderstorm with hail & lightning struck an air rail  
seven feet behind the hut & fused the lighting in  
the immediate area & sounded off the alarm.  
Pandemonium reigned for ~~ten~~<sup>some</sup> minutes before the  
siren was silenced & the light fuse replaced.

There was a good Camp Cinema on this station  
where a number of good films were shown during the  
3 months of my course. The Methodist Chapel &  
church room a pleasant oasis in which to get away  
from the work for a while. The Chaplain Sq. Ldr the  
Rev. Fearnley Jones was well liked & I was <sup>made</sup> welcome at his  
home, where so often after tea on Sundays silly in a  
comfortable armchair good manners would forsake me  
& I unashamedly dozed for a hour or so.

After my spell in sick bay I was a week behind  
on my course so was transferred to Entry 158 & so lost  
contact with my mates with whom I had worked through



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most of the course.

On ~~Sunday~~ <sup>Monday</sup> ~~3<sup>rd</sup> Feb~~ <sup>1<sup>st</sup> Feb</sup> I was awakened at ~~5.30~~ midnight by a duty clerk a given a telegram which informed me, when I had frised open my eyes, that my first son Michael had been born at 4.50 on the morny before, and all was well.

Bright & early I applied to the <sup>Squadron</sup> ~~Army~~ C.O. for compassionate leave. He was very helpful & suggested as Michael had only just arrived it might be better to wait until the end of the week & have a week end pass when my wife would be more able to cope with visitors & this was arranged. This did not interfere with the final week of the Flight Mechanics course.

Thus I secured my first leave from 5.0<sup>0</sup> on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> Feb to 6.00 on Monday 7<sup>th</sup> Feb. A joyous week-end among home at 10.30 that night & setting to Wednesford at 1.30 a.m. on Monday got the <sup>ent</sup> ~~Course~~ now been on revision ready for the Technical Training Board exam on Thursday 11<sup>th</sup>. I scraped through with pass mark aggregate 53.5% and was then A.C.II F.M.(E).

As was customy at the end of a course, & whilst fortinips were notified & end of course leave arranged, various camp fatigues became our lot. I got on to wood chaffy &



17 clearing & laying Squadron Office fires & lighting them.

On the Monday morning 15.1.44 the entry was put on to trench digging & other unpleasant duties but I was given some documents at Squadron Office to another office on the far side of the Station. With this file in hand

I journeyed over & delivered it & was given an envelope to take back. I called in at the NAAF for tea & odds. As I was an "Elderly Room Clerk" I could do this but my erstwhile colleagues in overalls had not the privilege. So, for the next day or two I shuttled between the area of the

Squadron Office & other Section offices on the Station. Carrying a large envelope of some sheets of paper, in my "best" blue, unchallenged & untroubled - a real scrounge!

During this course we were put on occasional guard duties and butcher fatigues. I found the way to dodge the washing up & cleaning of the mess hall in the evenings was to volunteer for bread cutting for next morning's breakfast. This involved slicing square sandwich loaves on a slicing machine. It took an hour or more but the gain was a spam sandwich & cocoa supper with the Cook-house staff.

Another good "fatigue" I enjoyed was breakfast service <sup>in the Mess Hall</sup> on Sunday mornings. So few chaps turned out to breakfast after a late night on Saturday that this was an easy chore the prime advantage was that Complexes & Arned much



18- followed by eggs & bacon was the item on the menu. As there was always a surplus to requirements the serving staff did very well at breakfast on Sundays!

The Station Band, mentioned earlier, led all parades & the trainees paraded at 7-45 AM. to march to Workshops for the 8<sup>th</sup> start, under the command of the S.W.O. Various march tunes were played. One morning the parade, fallen in by Entrees started off in the dark to the strains of "Colonel Boggy" after the opening chords all forces personnel seem to have developed words to the tune "Ballocks, and the name to you", and on this morning to W.O. cried Halt just as the left feet would be making their stride, with the result that <sup>in a sudden</sup> a hush to muted "Ballocks" was clearly heard. The S.W.O. informed the parade that no verbal accompaniment was required as we were to march at attention. He had had it all before!

On another wintery day snow had fallen & become frozen at dawn. Our route lay down hill from the living site & on the command quick March the Band & the Flights started off well but on the ice the band began to slide away at various speeds - the ranks became disorganised. We were halted & reformed & told to march in an orderly manner!



While at Hednesford I found the Laundry service very poor so I devised a system with my wife that I would post off a small ~~amount~~ sack bag of laundry each week & she would post back the clean lot, the issue of but allowing the change.

On one hut inspection day my sack was ready for posting in the afternoon & I put it into the room at the end of the hut where salvage was collected such as newspapers, lin feed etc, as other than regulation kit was not allowed on show during inspection. Unfortunately the salvage collectors took it with their goodies before I could retrieve it. I reported to the Hut sergeant & he said I must see the Equipment Officer & report the loss & would probably be put on a charge for loss of kit. When I informed Ely's Officer of the circumstances he was very understanding & suggested that I pay for the lost items rather than go on a charge. He found me some surplus items for some of the lost goods & helpfully suggested that while I was paying for the other things it might be as well to have an extra shirt, towel & socks which I did. So I was well up on scale thereafter!

Ent 158 at 82 to hand in my  
- even  
- hand

On Wednesday 17th July 1943 ~~we~~ <sup>we were</sup> paraded and told we were posted to Northern Ireland to a Station at Killadeas. So much for the requests which we put in for suggested Stations of our choice! We then were marched to Rich Bay for a F.F-1. Then to Pay accounts for pay & leave pay, then back to Squadron Office for leave Passes & Travel Warrants. Like schoolboys going on holiday we collected our full kit, passed the eagle eyes of S.P.s at the main gate & tore down to Brimbley Heath for the Bingham train, free



for seven days at home

### First Posting.

On Wednesday 24<sup>th</sup> February I respectfully left home at her and caught the 3.11. PM train to London Bridge thence by tube to Euston where with a dozen or so other Londoners I reported to the R.T.O. We were booked on the 4.50 train for Stranraer.

I secured a corner seat in the coach, back to engine, as the window would not close fully & caused a cool wind to come in.

It was a coach with a central gangway between the seats. One of the lads pitched his hat bag up to the rack, misjudged the distance, and lobbed it through a plate glass coach window on to the platform again. Station Staff & R.T.O. staff told him what he was!

There was time to buy reading matter & consume two cups of tea before the train left on schedule when I divided the time between reading & gazing at countryside which was new to me but at 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  Blackout blinds were drawn so I read till 8.45 when I refreshed myself with a half pound slice of veal & ham pie, bread & butter, cheese & hares, & a <sup>small</sup> <sup>amount</sup> of milk in a can. Then I dozed on & off till midnight when we made our first stop at CARLISLE. The station was dim with restricted lighting and quiet. My coach stopped first opposite the Station Buffet ~~on I was~~ enabling me to enjoy two cups of steaming tea. At 12.15 the train pulled out to



it terminate the journey at Stranraer at 4.15 AM on Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> February.

Here the moon was high in a clear sky & a cold wind was blowing. The party reported to the R.T.O. & our rail warrants were changed to a Party Transit Voucher.

at about 5 AM. we embarked on the M.V. "ROYAL DAFFODIL" and got ourselves stowed away below. after a wash and a snack of cold sausages & milk I slept till 6.45 AM. when the ship buffet opened & dispensed hot tea which was welcome.

at 8.30 AM we cast-off & proceeded on our journey through the Loch Ryan Channel. The dawn light was clear & there were several boats moored in the harbour also about a score of "CATALINA" Flying Boats, the first I had seen. I'll bet I know that this type of aircraft would be my care for many months to come. They had Pratt & Whitney Radial Engines, wing mounted. We were ordered to put on our life jackets & Scollins began to meander as we passed up the channel to the open sea.

The sun rose higher till at last the golden light poured over the hills and at last came above the up & gave a radiance to the white capped seas. we could see farms nestled in the hollows in the hill sides, and the quiet cattle grazing on fields that look like green velvet from the ship. Viewing these hills & the green sea breaking at the foot of the cliffs made me imagine I was once again on holiday along the North Devon coast, of happy peace time memory.



The ~~moving~~ buoys in the channel were passed one by one until finally a bell buoy tolled a mournful note of farewell as I passed by. Gulls flew out from land and fell into line astern of the vessel, as usual, seeking food.

As the channel became wider, the seas became bigger - "Royal Daffodil" began to dig in and a pleasant pitching & rolling motion began conferring my "overseas" feeling.



1661952

PIERCE B.H.

# S.O. BOOK 135.

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FITTER II E. NOTES



SUPPLIED  
FOR THE  
PUBLIC SERVICE.



## "Overseas Posting - East of Suez"

On Sunday afternoon, 7<sup>th</sup> January 1945, at 3<sup>30</sup>, I had just "buttoned up" my minor inspection on starboard outers, (NO. 4) engine, of a LIBERATOR V at my station, "R.A.F. BALLYKELLY" when a corporal ('Romeo') emerged from "Chiefy's" office to say I was wanted at S.S.W. Orderly Room. I was due to go on leave the next day and was, in fact, going to the O.R. for my pass & warrant at 4<sup>30</sup>. Two thoughts immediately flashed to my mind, the first that perhaps there was an alteration to be made in my boat allocation; the second that I was for 'overseas', & this thought filled me with blank despair. However, borrowing a bicycle I fought my way around the perimeter track through icy sleet, (although the sun was shining), to the O.R. Naming myself to the clerk G.D. who referred me to a W.A.A.F. Corporal who was writing at a desk across the room.

She looked up and said "Oh, Pierce, you are posted to NO. 5 P.D.C. Blackpool and you report there on 16<sup>th</sup> January." I queried my leave & was told that if I got cleared from the Station by the next day, I could go home on Tuesday's boat. Could I get cleared!

I felt completely stunned and the bottom seemed to have dropped out of my world. However, I cycled back to the Hangar as fast as I could against the howling sleet wind, & reported the state of affairs to my Flight-Sgt.

A new bloke had started work that day in the Hangar, also a Fitter II (E), so I called him over, told him he was taking over my tool box & between us we carried the wretched box the half mile to Stores for the inevitable check & transfer, which had to be done before I could get any signature on my clearance chit.

The stores wallah found my Loan Card, after the usual difficulties with his filing system, & I turned out my tools for checking against his list.



of the 3 files & file handles which should have been there, only one remained. Likewise a ratchet screw-driver was missing, and a set of feelers. However, I had prepared for such an eventuality by "acquiring" a spare  $3/8 - 7/16$  spanner, & pair of wire cutters, a hide faced hammer, so, in view of there being 3 items short and 3 items surplus, "stones" were satisfied! The new "body" signed the cards for all the items present & had his deficiencies made up to scale. I got my first signature, & we lugged the wretched box back to the Hangar.

Borrowing a cycle I tore up to the living site & broke the news to those who were on "time off". Grabbing my gas kit I proceeded to the Gas Centre for a check up & collected another signature. Back to the Communal Site to obtain signatures from the Catering Officer & from the Service Librarian. Then back to the Hangar to sign up for all work done on the "LIB," in response to "Chiefy's" frantic phone call to Stones, & to obtain his signature on my kit. That was all I could do that day. The evening was spent in packing of kit, after having a "kit inspection", in name only, by the Corporal  $\frac{1}{2}$  living site who, fortunately, was a friend of mine.

First thing next morning I borrowed a bicycle & toured the camp again obtaining various signatures. The S/L - L.D.R. was cheering. He told me two of the lads from his section had recently returned after FOUR years - out east! Only four! He wished me good luck - I sure needed it. I had a tussle with Station Armoury. They wouldn't sign unless the Section Armoury cleared me, fearing I might have a couple of .5" Brownings out on loan, maybe. However, it meant a cycle ride across the gale swept drone again. But I got it alright, and Main Stones, and Barrack Stones. I then got cleared from Sport's Section & went



to Sick Quarters. I was instructed to return at 13.30 hrs for F.O.S. examination. After waiting for a nail-grawing hour and a quarter, I was given a "jab" & signed out-fit. There remained four spaces yet to fill on my chit, three of which were to be signed by the S.S.W. Adjt. I reached his office at 4 but as he was having tea I "would have to wait". This I did for another long, agonising, hour, and then at last I had my chit, my Warrant, Route Form & Pass + Ration Card! Pay & Stores  $\frac{1}{2}$  p were the final signatories. Seizing a bike I tore across the drome, again, through a heavy fall of snow and arrived in Accounts Office sheathed in white down my right-hand side, but dry on my left side. In the warmth of the office the snow fell off me in slabs & a large volume of water accumulated on the floor to the obvious distaste of the inmates. After a bit of juggling to adjust leave pay & ration money against payment to 31st January, I was paid 16/- & my Pay book made up accordingly. My clearance was completed - time 5.20. Just made it, & was I glad. A final orgy of packing was indulged in that night.

On Tuesday 9th January I set forth on stage one of the journey by the 8.15 bus from Ballykelly to Limavady where I connected the 9.5 train for Limavady Junction. After an uneventful journey, about an hour behind schedule I arrived at Belfast, York Street, & changed into the waiting train for Larne. This train was packed with naval ratings, just off two destroyers which had completed a convoy run, proceeding on short leave. On arrival at the port there was a two-hour wait which was filled by consuming Ration Bags full of sandwiches and buns, & chatting to an old flight mate from a previous station who was proceeding on leave. At about 15.00 hrs I was able to embark on the vessel that had carried me several times safely across the Irish Sea, the M.V. "ROYAL DAFFODIL". The crossing was calm and we docked at Stranraer about 17.15 hrs. When at last I got



ashore the London train was already packed, so, with some ratings, I dumped my kit & weary self in a baggage van that offered space, but within a few minutes had been turfed out by a R.A.F. Baggage Officer, who wanted all the space for stores and baggage.

There was apparently no further room & I was about to resign myself to a 'corridor' ride when a train control N.C.O. said that there might be room at front of the train, beyond the end of the platform.

Struggling along the track, stumbling over point & semaphore arm control rods & cables I reached the front car & clambered aboard.

An R.A.F.P. Corporal greeted me with the comment that all the compartments were 1st Class & were reserved for a special party, as to whose composition he was a trifle vague.

There was, however, a guards' compartment in the coach to which some matelots had already laid claim & there I bestowed myself & kit. It wasn't too warm, but it was light and one could sit down on a kitbag.

Before many minutes a guard came along & looked pointedly around & stated that we were not permitted to travel in the compartment. We told him bluntly that there was no other place to go, and, evidently sensing our uncompromising frame of mind he said we could stay, but we were not to interfere with the vacuum brake and other controls! who wanted to, anyway?

Just before seven o'clock, the starting time, the R.A.F.P. Corporal made some of the compartments, previously reserved, available to the "guards van" party. Very quickly we were disposed in nestful attitudes, and with an engine attached to the train and steam coming through the heater pipes, an air of comfort prevailed.

The journey down to St. Pancras was uneventful but the train lost much time and finally arrived at 11.10 AM. on Wednesday 10th January. As I stepped out of the train I was welcomed by a loud "BANG" which indicated the apparent arrival of a "V II" about 1/2 a mile away eastwards judging by the cloud of smoke & dust which ascended into the misty sky.

Checking trains to Newbury, and for the following



Tuesday for P.D.C. at the R.T.O.'s I caught a 'tube train' for Paddington for a shave, wash & light refreshments. From thence the 12.30 train took me to Newbury where I arrived at about 2<sup>1/2</sup>. After a short wait I was able to 'share' a taxi which was going via Speen Lane & thereby arrived at Mary's & Michael's temporary home at 2.30 amid much jubilation.

On the penultimate day of my leave I checked on times of trains to land me in Blackpool in daylight. An enquiry for the Newbury R.T.O., was informed that the office had been removed to the Racecourse. There I went, but after a fruitless half hour of following countless directions, and redirections, I had to withdraw, defeated. I made a chance enquiry at Newbury Station & was told of a train from Euston at 1.30 <sup>A.M.</sup> which would land me in Blackpool before 8. A.M., (this proved to be "duff gen."), and I made my plans accordingly.

I left Newbury by the 9 P.M. train in the evening of 15<sup>th</sup> January for Reading and London. The Reading - Paddington connection is 1<sup>1/4</sup> hrs late, a prime start to what's going to be a cold disappointing night I thought. I slept between Reading & Paddington and at the latter got aboard the last tube train towards Euston which only went as far as Baker St. There, with a bit getting seemingly heavier with each step, I emerged into the darkened open air - completely without a clue as to the direction of Euston. After fruitless attempts to get a taxi I shouldered my bundle & commenced to walk when a cab pulled up alongside, a voice asked where I wanted to go. I said 'Euston' & the voice said 'hop-in'. I did so and when my eyes had got used to the darkness within I discerned a soldier & a female personage. He, apparently, had not fixed on any set destination and was prepared to include Euston in his itinerary. I was soon landed there & under no circumstances would he accept part fare. Wishing me good luck he disappeared in his cab into the night. Making enquiries as to the train for the North I was informed that the 1.30 was a P.M. not A.M. train! The next one out being



the 6.30 A.M. Thus I had five cold and cheerless hours to dispose of in most unlovely surroundings. Countless cups of tea and cakes, sandwiches etc., were consumed in the Station Y.M.C.A. in an endeavour to pass the time quickly. At last, at 6 AM. I boarded the train, secured a corner seat, back to engine & settled down to doze, but as the loco had not been attached the compartment was like a refrigerator. The journey northwards was uneventful & I arrived at my destination & reported my arrival at No. 5. P.D.C. Luna Park at just after 2.30 PM.

The reception clerks gave me information as to Squadron (C) and Wing (4), and a billet slip to 7, Hytham Road. S.S., & I then climbed upon a motor truck which soon delivered me at the billet. Being too late for dinner & too early for tea I dumped my kit & went into town & had a cup of tea & cakes at Woolworths. Then, after a short walk around, during which I met a Corporal on leave from Killadeas, I went back to billet for tea. Later in the evening I went across the road to the N.A.A.F.I for supper and was early to bed.

On Wed 17<sup>th</sup>, the first parade was at 8.30 AM. at Luna Park where the programme was explained & hitting scales detailed, indicating how easily 'wangles' could be arranged in the process of de-hitting & re-hitting, plus "664B". This, with a 'break' at Woolworths Cafeteria filled in the morning. In the afternoon, a dirty looking sky came in from seawards, and we paraded at Luna Park and were marched to Dean Street for an "examination" (which proved only FFI) and a Typhus inoc, which I had in my left arm about on the place where a few days previously I had the TABC.25. As we came out it commenced to rain & this developed into a steady downpour which cheered us considerably as we were next to collect two blankets each from St. Chads & carry with us for the remainder of the day. After getting the blankets we proceeded to Football Ground Car Park where rolls were read placing us in various flights. On dismissal we got away to billets as quickly as possible. In the evening I went to New Opera House to see a pantomime - "MOTHER GOOSE"



The next day brought clothing parade with the handing in of part of the home scale kit & issue of much tropical kit & topees. and another kitbag. One pair of boots were handed in & a new pair of shoes issued with strict instructions "that they were not to be worn". I had the "props" sewn on my new K.D., & both my kitbags marked with requisite details for the posting, at local shops which handled such matters with ease & efficiency for 3/6d (- later to prove a dead loss).

In the afternoon our gas equipment was checked at the "Black Hangar" after which we were free. Was able to phone home with no delay at night. The rest of the time was spent in writing, and early to bed.

On Friday 19th January a parade for baths was organised at 09.00 hrs. The party, about 200 strong duly paraded at Luna Park & moved off to South Shore kids where there were hot showers, soap & towels awaiting us. It was a frosty dry day & the wind blowing in from the sea was bringing clouds of sand in with it from the foreshore. The road & tram tracks being thinly covered. Arriving at the baths

we marched down a ramp to the entrance which was on the right. The M.C.O. & the party gave the Command "Right wheel" but of the party about 75% wheeled left, doubled up the stairs & disappeared across the road into a Y.M.C.A! The remainder of us went in & had a hot, & thoroughly enjoyable shower.

Our next parade being at 11.00 at Black Hangar. We returned to billet ~~thither~~ independantly. Arrived there we had to dress in complete webbing, packed as for marching off, for a check-inspection at the Black Hangar. This passed off without incident. After dinner we paraded at 13.45 for mail. After which I managed to get a haircut. At 15.30 we paraded again for "boat rolls" i.e., formation of parties & the order of proceeding aboard. This covered all except 10 Flight - mine - & finished the day. Spent the evening reading.

On Saturday 20th Jan., paraded at Black Hangar at 08.45 hrs & boat-rolls were completed. Several chaps, including myself were found to be surplus to draft requirements. Frank Mason, (another Fitter II (E) L.A.C. like myself) of Slough, who was also at my



billet was among the "spares" so we kept together from then on.

We were told to "go for a cup of tea" & be at Luna Park at 11.00 hrs for incorporation in Pool Flight, the "reserve" party made up of 'left-overs' from other drafts, C.V.F.'s etc., and after a nominal roll had been made out, we dismissed until 14.00 hrs. Evernight there had been some snow, & we were subjected to slight enemy activity from small boys.

When we paraded in the afternoon at the Car Park, there was a major attack from several boys and they laid down an accurate barrage, scoring many direct hits. One missile dislodged Sgt. Nutter's cap & that was the signal for reprisals. A few snowballs flung by airmen did not break up the enemy's attack, but a concerted movement of about 30 airmen at the double caused a rout of the "enemy" & much excitement among the attendant dogs.

After roll call we were marched to Dean Street for a further F.F.I. & that completed the day's work. In the evening I saw an all-girl Variety at Feldman's Theatre but it was not brilliant. Had supper at Hunter's Cafe & returned to bed at billet.

On Sunday 21st, even though not on boat roll, Frank and I had to continue to parade with 10 Flight, (even up to time of actual departure), at 09.45 on the promenade. It was dry but cold and we hung about there for about 3/4 hour & then went to Woolworth Cafeteria for coffee & cakes. From 11 until 12.00 hrs we waited at Luna Park for issue of arms. When at last we secured rifles & pouches, we had our paybooks endorsed with rifle numbers etc., and we signed voucher sheets for them & joined our Flight outside. Immediately the "surplus members" were recalled to the armoury & the process reversed! At 12.30 we got away for dinner & were free until Monday morning. <sup>Went</sup> to Central Tel. <sup>at night</sup> <sup>about 11.30</sup>

Monday morning 22nd January - embarkation day for 383 Draft. All concerned at 7, Hytham Road were up at 05.00 hrs & Mrs Hodge managed to get up also & made tea & toast for the three warriors. Even though Frank Mason & myself were 'surplus', we had to parade with all parties



proceeding away in case they were short of strength by reason of illness, desertion, death, acts of God or King's enemies!

That demanded our being on Parade at Black hangar with full kit & marching order. We, with other reserves, stood

apart from the flights as they paraded at 06.15 hrs. We did, however, follow them to the M.A.A.F.I. Van & drew 20 cigarettes & chocolate ration, then to the free "tea & wad" issue. The

final boat roll was called, the party's strength proved, & they loaded up on the trucks for entraining. It was a dry, crisp,

frosty morning & they went away in the starlight. Sundry dogs, even at that early hour, taking part in the usual confusion & movement. The "reserves" returned to the

coke braziers in the Hangar to await the 07.15 party.

We carried out a similar routine for this second party, not omitting to draw rations from M.A.A.F.I. or to have a further free cup of tea & a wad. But, here again the

party was up to strength & we saw chaps we had come to know depart <sup>on</sup> their unknown travels, in the translucent light of the early winter dawn, with stars fading as the sun's light brimmed over the rim of the world to eastwards.

The F/Sgt in charge, & the C.O. of C Squadron came to us & said we could leave all our gear, and go back to billet for breakfast - return at 09.15. This we did, and the hot meal & fresh tea ~~was~~ <sup>was</sup> most welcome.

Returning at the appointed time to see the 09.30 flights depart we nearly had a break. Two members were missing on roll call! We gathered our kit together,

prepared to accept rifles, & then the two absentees came in.

In sunlight, with the "assistance" of still more dogs, this party were loaded & taken away. The final outfit was

due out at 10.15 so we stood around smoking, chatting with other reserves, & with P.S. N.C.O.'s who I had been 'out East' & from them got 'gen' & heard their

yawns. The 10.15 party was 'all present' & thus we

'surplus' men found that without doubt we were unwanted. Then the usual conjectures were made



regarding the chances of leave. In view of the fact we had been up early & standing by, we were given a stand down for the remainder of the day. Frank & I lugged our outfits back to billet & sat around reading until dinner time.

In the afternoon we toured around the town, visiting the Aquarium, which is most interesting, and the Zoo, in the Tower Building. It was feeding time for the animals & they were all very restive, walking rapidly about their cages when they smelt the great lumps of raw meat the attendants were bringing in. As soon as their food was placed inside their feeding cages, a slide-panel was opened & they lost no time in entering & getting down to gnawing the "joints". The "laughing Hyena" made his queer "laughter" sound when the attendants rubbed his lump of meat up & down the bars of his cage. We also visited the well stocked stores of Messrs. Woolworth, Marks & Spencer, Hills, Littlewoods & Boots, seeing many things which are quite unobtainable down in Southern England — At that time at any rate.

At night Frank & I went to Palace Theatre & saw the first night of Pantomime "DICK WHITTINGTON". It was not a brilliant show & seemed to fall rather flat. Maybe it needed the presence of children to give it some true environment & support. We went early to bed.

On Tuesday morning at 09.15 we paraded at LUNA PARK & a nominal roll of all the "left overs" was compiled & we were embodied in the lost legion commonly called "POOL" flight. The call then came "any clerks - fall out". As it was a cold miserable day I thought it best to secure a job indoors in the warm so stepped forward & was taken over by T/Sgt Verrall 1/c Drafting.

Having swept an accumulation of litter & dirt



from the little room the rest of the day was spent in smoking and reading. That evening Frank & I went to the Winter Gardens, he to dance & I too look on, listen to the Organ & later the Dance Band, & smoke up on the gallery. When the Gardens closed, at 9.30, we went over to the R.A.F. Welfare Centre Club where there were free refreshments, dancing & table tennis. We returned for bed, at 11<sup>30</sup>, to Rytham Road. During the day I had removed from my room to Frank's so that only one room was occupied making less work for the landlady, we being the only two billetees there.

On parade next-morning I learned there was a chance of obtaining some leave. I put in an application, went before the Wing Adjt. & was awarded 6 days. Did little work all day, but at billet packed complete kit in the two K.B.s., excepting the clothes I was wearing, and my shoes, (which I decided to keep if possible so wore them), for storage at H.Q. next day, while I was away from the P.D.C. That night Frank & I went to Ritz Cinema to see "The Girls he left behind him". A Technicolour - Alice Faye - film.

On Thursday 25<sup>th</sup>, having signed my kit in at Luna Park, & there being no work, I went to Woolworths Cafe for coffee & cakes. Went to S.S. for casual pay parade, receiving £1 to go on with. At 12.15 I was in possession of my pass, warrant & ration card so quickly returned to the billet for dinner. I caught the 2.35 train from Blackpool Central for Euston. The train departed on time from the ice-bound & snowy platform, the driver having been given strict instructions by sundry R.A.F. 'bods' to keep to schedule. In this, however, we were disappointed as icy & thick snow lying about caused much delay & instead of the train arriving at London between 8<sup>pm</sup> 9<sup>pm</sup>, it did not reach its destination until 01.30 hrs on 26<sup>th</sup> Jan'y. Thus it was too late for the tube or Southern to convey me to Nottingham and too late and also too early for a Reading or Newbury train from Paddington. To pass time I went to the somewhat



drab Y.M.C.A. on Euston Station & ate wads & drank tea. Then commenced to walk to Paddington, again to pass the time of waiting. A G.W.R. Van pulled alongside me & the driver asked some chaps just in front if Paddington was on their way. It was, so I hopped on with them. By now it was only 2.30 & it was freezing hard & very cold on the Platforms there. I found that I would get a train to Reading at 05.30 hrs connecting with the 06.30 for Newbury. But there were still 3 long, horrible hours to kill. It was cold, my new service shoes were pinching a little so I could not say I was happy just then. I had more tea at the Forces Canteen & then in sheer desperation walked to Marble Arch and back - but that only disposed of 1 half-hour! I went back to the tawdry Forces Canteen for warmth, then went upstairs to the 'rest' room & secured an arm chair & dozed for an hour or so. At 05.00 hrs I got aboard the train for Reading - leaving at 05.30 but without an engine on, it was like being in a refrigerator. It had just begun to get a trifle warmer when it pulled in at Reading, & I immediately transferred to the stopping train for Newbury, which was even colder than the previous conveyance. Newbury was thickly overlaid with dry, frozen snow, & I plodded up to Speen Lane, arriving there at 07.30 hrs. and had a very enjoyable time again until it was time to go away.

On Wednesday 31<sup>st</sup> January, although it was Michael's 2<sup>nd</sup> birthday, I had to leave on the 10<sup>15</sup> train. The thaw had set in & the walk to the Station was a very wet affair with water underfoot & the gutterings of buildings drenching down. The run to Paddington was up to schedule & I had lunch, & an hour & a quarter with Mum & Dad at the Tea room. The journey northwards slowed a little & I arrived finally at Blackpool about 11<sup>15</sup> P.M. There was a bit of a comb-out at Preston. R.A.F. P's & M.P's wanting to see every one's pass & identity card. Arrived at Blackpool and having reported my arrival from leave at Wing H.Q., I blithely departed to 7, Hytham Road to find on my



going in that Mr Hodge had been ill in my absence and the billet had been closed. I dragged back to H.Q. again and obtained another billet chit - this time at 37, Esbourne Road, by the Pleasure Beach! A new party of arrivals were also on their way to the same address so I had a lift on the transport chit. This proved to be a more modern house. I had a little room on second floor with cold-water wash basin + comfortable <sup>three-quarter</sup> ~~semi~~ double bed. At midnight we sat down (16 airmen) to a belated tea - plenty to eat. I went to bed about 01.15 hrs on Thurs.

On the next day <sup>Thurs</sup> 1st March I returned to F/Sgt Verrall's office. (The bloke who stood-in for me was, apparently, more keen on playing dominoes with the M.C.O's than working, so he went!). I found I was due for Dental Parade at 11.0. After having my Coffee + wash at Woolworths I went to the D.C. + within 15 minutes was out again having had a lower back tooth filled. No trouble at all.

Removed my kit to Esbourne Road, and after an easy afternoon spent the evening indoors + went early to bed.

Friday 2nd March - busy all day at office with details for new draftees. S. Slips, P. Bks. etc. Went to New Opera House in the evening to see Ivor Novello in his record breaking "THE DANCING YEARS". It was having its closing session at Blackpool after 3 years in London!

Saturday 3rd March, had the afternoon off after a busy morning with P. Bks etc. Went to Palace Theatre to see Panto "Cinderella" which was by far the best of the three I saw. The house was packed with children who mightily enjoyed the show. And "Buttons" was their great favourite. In the evening I went to Lytham Road MAAF for rationis + back to billet for a bath + reading.

On Sunday morning's parade various postings were called - applying to POOL. The last two names were MASON - PIERCE. We tore into the C.D.O. to find out what it was all about + were told it was to NO. 238 Squadron at Minster, Somerset. A home station we were told!! This sounded good + we proceeded to get cleared first of all having to hand in all the K.D. + T.K. we had been issued with. I struck a snag immediately. The issue included 2 winter weight wool



vests, which I had taken to wearing, my own civvy ones, worn for the last two winters being beyond repair (and consequently exchanged at the hitting parade for two aertex type vests), and the stores wallahs would not accept two vests other than the woollen ones. I had to dash into a lavatory at Luna Park and make a quick change, putting on two worn summer weight vests, & dress again quickly in view of insistent knockings on the door. It was decidedly cooler with my 'woolly' vest removed!! However, stores were satisfied and we got our vouchers signed up. We took the rest of the day off.

I went out for a walk in the afternoon and to the Central Methodist Church for evening service, & my first Communion for about two years. A good, well filled church & fine choir & organ. Collection voluntary "POEM" (FIBICH), played by a very capable organist.

On Monday, checking up on our posting we found we were assigned to NO 238, Squadron, on Draft 439, at R.A.F. Station, Merryfield, Somerset. This was not nearly so good as <sup>at</sup> first imagined. We got our clearances signed & found we were to leave by the 09.55 train on Tuesday 6th July. Incidentally, we were supposed to be at our new unit on Saturday 3rd - so we were <sup>already</sup> adrift! In the afternoon we went to Sick Quarters for F.F.I. at 2<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> but, owing to a large party of draftees being there, they could not cope with us until 4. So we timed pay accounts for our pay - they also were "busy" & would have a casual pay parade at 3.45! I went back to my billet & had a struggle with my kit but at last succeeded in getting all into my Kitbag, & the bag closed & locked. Frank's D. met again & had our F.F.I. and were paid (£3). Then we tore back to H.Q. for our warrants & route form & discovered that a Sgt <sup>Sandys</sup> (F.Arm) was also posted with us, so he took charge of the documents. Then the L.A.C.W. discovered that Billet Clearance slips were not in & demanded them by 5.30 P.M.! Fortunately she was billeted a few doors from me in Osbourne Road so, collecting Frank's on the way to tea, & mine when I got home, I handed them in at her billet & thus severed our connection with NO. 5 P.D.C. officially.

at 6.45 on Tuesday 6th I was up - the only one, at 37 Osbourne Road, and, after breakfast, loaded myself with my kit



and went on the promenade to catch a train to Central Station where I was due to meet Frank & Sandy at 7.45 for the 8% train. No tram was in sight & I was getting a trifle worried because it was impossible to walk to the Station in time. At last almost on zero one was in sight, way along Clifton Parade. To add to the delay the track was under repair and the car had to back & cross over to the down line. It seemed to stop every hundred or so yards to Central Station I actually arrived there just 3 minutes before the train was due to go. However, we got aboard - plenty of room & at 8.5 it commenced its journey to Crewe, our change station. arriving at Crewe we had some tea & sandwiches at a RAILBAR. I met some Killadeas chaps there & got some more "gruff" about the old dump. after a wait of about 1/2 hour the Taunton, via Bristol, train came in. We piled our kit in a 'non-smoker' with two Land Army girls who we soon got talking to, and sharing cigarettes and 'eats'. They told us about their work & conditions, and the journey to Bristol was soon completed. They left us there. // We got some tea and meat pies at the Station Buffet, and entrained again for Taunton, where we arrived round about 4.30. As our train for Ilminster was not due to leave until 6.40 P.M., we checked in our kits at the Station & went into Taunton to pass the waiting time. We looked for a place to have tea, the first cafe we entered smelt unpleasant so we trooped out again; the second was only serving tea & cakes & we retreated from that one, the third we entered looked like someone's Victorian drawing room, full of armchairs & sofas but no-one about. There was a blank-mange in a bowl on the table. Sandy poked his thumb in it, by design or accident I cannot say, & we departed from thence. Passing further into town we came to Deller's Cafe, and I was in familiar territory, for years ago when Mary & I used to go to North Devon on our holidays, we had meals at this restaurant on the river bridge. We entered, a three man orchestra was dispensing light popular music. The tables were laid with much silver plated ware & were rather awe inspiring after our usual scrubbed tables, china plates & mugs. However, we fondly imagined there would be egg, bacon & chips or something



equally appetizing to offer. However, our hopes were dampened when we were "offered" a choice of Welsh rarebit or fish cake and chips. "Regulations" did not permit of chips with the Welsh Rarebit! Sandy had fish cake & chips & wished he hadn't, & Frank & I had the alternative diet and also wished we had confined our order to bread & butter & a pot of tea.

We paid our bill & escaped as soon as possible & continued our jaunt around the town.

Returning & retrieving our baggage as it was getting dark, we took our seats in our branch line train, meeting a fellow from R.A.F. Merryfield who gave us advance 'gen' on our new destination.

On arrival at Ilminster about 25 minutes later, Sandy 'phoned Camp for transport as there were about a dozen or more of us with kit for Merryfield. We went to the small Y.M.C.A. at the foot of the station approach for sandwiches & tea while waiting for the truck to collect us.

At about 8.30 we climbed aboard a Crossley Troop Carrier &, in complete darkness & quite lost as to direction, were transported to H/O 1 Site where we booked in & were allocated Hut No. 39 which fortunately stood just behind the picket post. Behind it stood the water tower, so we had a landmark. We found several other fellows already installed and a fire burning in the stove, which was welcome as the hut was horribly damp from unoccupation. "Biscuits" and new blankets also felt wet & with some temerity we made down our beds according to our own styles, then had & wash & shave & went foraging for the "cooked hot meal" which is the new arrivals' perquisite.

There was the weekly film show on in the Sergeants' Mess which adjoined the Airmen's Dining Hall & we saw a fair amount of "Princess G'Roundie" while the cookhouse staff struggled valiantly for  $3\frac{1}{2}$  hours to produce shepherd's pie & chips & tea! Then back to the "damp hole" to bed & also to discuss the 'gen' we had picked up that all new arrivals were being



given passes & Warrants home until mid night on the following Saturday!

On the following day we had to report our arrival to the S.W.O., about 40 of us, and when we had given all the required particulars we were told we would have passes & warrants issued and that after we had got our arrival chits signed we could have the rest of the time until Saturday midnight on leave. One of the F/Sgts said he would get them all signed for us in a bunch. It was by now round about 10% but it was necessary that we should have an F.F.I.! This was "laid on" for 1.30 P.M. We "dripped" a bit about this as we were raring to go, and bawled for the silly business to be done at once so that we could catch early trains. The F/Sgt got a bit miffed, then and asked "what more we wanted". We soon told him & he threatened to make us take our arrival chits round, individually. He by the way had just come from 14 days leave so didn't feel the same as we did! Anyway nothing could be done to bring the F.F.I. on earlier so we went back to billets to clean up, pack our kit & get ready for the "off". After dinner we proceeded, early, to the M.I. Room and at 1.30 were ready. Three chaps hadn't turned up, and as we were all on one clearance sheet it looked as though there'd be further delay. However, after some minutes they loomed into sight and were told in terms, too violent to be recorded, but of such character that the recipients could not fail to understand, our regard of them. We then proceeded to No. 1. Picquet Post where a welcome "body" came along with a great handful of the green forms which bring joy to the airman's heart. Transport was laid on for us, just after 2% - two troop carriers - and a joyful human freight descended on Taunton Junction for the 3.28 west & north train, & the 4.28 for Paddington. As Sandy was going to London, Frank to Slough via Reading, & I to Newbury, also via Reading, we got together in a compartment. The train was a good



fast one stopping only at Westbury, Reading & London.  
at 6.15 it tore through Newbury & I longed to get out  
there to save just on two precious hours. However,  
arriving at Reading about 6.35 I was able to connect with  
the 7.5 slow to Newbury and was very quickly ringing  
at the door of 1. Speen Lane, again, at 8.10 P.M. I had  
not let them know I was coming. Jane & Bert were at  
the Cinema & only Mary & Muriel were in. after  
ringing & waiting the expected performance took place.  
I heard the lounge door open & footfalls go down the  
hall, a scary voice said "who is there" & I gave  
the usual "whistle", then voices said "oh its Bert"  
and the door opened & I was permitted to enter &  
received a joyous welcome, also from Raggy who  
had been unleashed to deal with me had I  
been an unwelcome visitor.

On Thursday 8<sup>th</sup> February Mary, Michael,  
Muriel & Anne, & I proceeded on our way to the  
Station en route for Horsham, where Mary & Michael  
were going to stay awhile. We caught the 10.2  
train to Reading, changed on to the Southern line  
& caught the 11.5 for Deepdene with a compartment  
to ourselves. The kiddies were delighted at having  
all the windows to themselves. It began to rain  
when we reached Deepdene but John - a very grown  
up - almost unrecognisable John - was there to meet  
us, the short walk to Dorking North was soon  
accomplished & we caught the 1.1 PM for Horsham.  
Michael was delighted to have the rear of a compartment  
again. He & Ann played with everything that  
could be played with therein. They were very good  
considering the length of journey & changes. Michael  
found great fun in putting his hand out of the  
lowered door sash to let the rain patter on his palms.  
Thursday & Friday & Saturday morning were  
spent in happy family fellowship at 26 Purton Road.



all too soon it was time for me to catch the 3.47 for Victoria, Paddington + Taunton. However, Mum + Dad met me at Paddington - after a "standing" journey from Horsham, + I was able to have an hour with them before the 6.30 train bore me away. This proved to be the last farewell from all my much loved family. The train, unfortunately, was not such a good servant as the up train on the previous Wednesday as it went by stages to Bath, Bristol, Bridgwater + Taunton where I arrived at 1.10.AM. At Bristol, incidentally, where I had stepped out on to the platform for an airing I bumped into two RAF blokes who turned out to be Ken + John Fowler of the 105th Coy (London) B.B. I had not seen them for about 5 years + the meeting was a surprise to the three of us - the more so when we found we were on the same draft from Terryfield. On the arrival of our train at Taunton we got together again + found there was a considerable crowd for Terryfield + that transport was being called from the camp to collect us. We retired to the Church Army Canteen for tea + wads. The transport arrived in due course + we arrived at No. 1. Piquet Post at just after 2.30 <sup>AM</sup> very much "adrift" according to our passes, but in this instance it did not count. I found Sandy + Frank fast asleep in Hut-39, but a good fire was going so I was able to air my pyjamas to break the dampness of the bed, which had been made down for me by my pals, and was soon asleep.

At the 8.30 parade on Sunday morning, 11th Feb, over at No. 1. Hangar, we were made up into what were known as transit flights. Frank + I were sorted out into C Flight. Sandy went into 'A' + Stan <sup>Goodwin</sup> into A also. We were given preliminary 'gen' + that disposed of the morning. In the afternoon we had inoculations for yellow fever + typhus 2nd dose. One in each arm. Some



On Friday morning no one awoke until just before 8 but we "made" breakfast safely. Had the usual "gen" parade at 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ c but got no joy. Stood off until next day. I went in to Taunton in the afternoon by the 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ c bus from camp. Wandered around the shops & had tea at Silver Street (Baptist) Canteen. (Cheapest ever & good service) I then went to the ODEON to see "The call of the Wild." & then back to Silver Street for supper & on the 9:30 bus to camp.

On Saturday we paraded at 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ c. 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ c & 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ c and they managed to get "kite crews" sorted out. Stan & I together this time. In the evening I walked to Ilminster to see what it was like. It was very quiet & had a "shut up" atmosphere about it. I was too late for first house of its PLAZA Cinema, and too early for second house, so walked back to the Y.M.C.A. Canteen for tea & sandwiches and a rest in the armchairs to look at magazines etc.

On Sunday 18<sup>th</sup>, after parading at 9:30 & getting no further "gen" the rest of the day was free. I spent the rest of the morning reading & writing. It was a warm spring-like day and great coat was not required. In the afternoon, being undecided what to do, I walked along the lanes & came to the main road for Taunton and a bus came along and I decided to go in. Arriving there about 3 I walked all around the town & round by the river until tea time. I went to Silver Street cafe & then into the adjoining Baptist Chapel where the service was conducted by an American Army Captain - Chaplain in a very broad & homely way. After supper in the canteen I returned to Merryfield on the 9:30 bus.

Monday brought no further movement after the 9 $\frac{1}{2}$ c parade so I did some more writing, reading & dozing. In the evening I walked to Ilminster to see "Tropicana" at the PLAZA. This was a small building about 120 ft long & 40 wide with a steeply sloping floor. The interior was semi decorated and fitted in a style approaching modernity. The surprising element was the efficient heating by means of large radiator units. After the show I walked back to the station then climbed the embankment



and, after proceeding quietly past a house or two on the bank, continued my walk back to camp along the railway track to Ilton thus saving  $2\frac{1}{4}$  miles by road. Before reaching the bridge, at the suggestion of two aircrew officers who were ahead of me, I slipped down into a field and came out on to the road by a field gate to avoid any possibility of meeting lurking S.P.s who might be waiting for users of this unauthorised "short-cut" back to camp.

On Tuesday "D" Flight had orders to emplane at 11%<sub>0</sub>, so accordingly we loaded our kit on a truck, wearing our flying boots & carrying Mae Wests & flying suits. After being weighed with our kit in No. 2 Hanger (I was 18lbs over - Stan 16lbs under, balancing me) we were taken to our aircraft - DAKOTA FL634 - & dumped our belongings. Then we were told to go to dinner and return at 1-30 P.M. This we did & on returning to the hangar were informed that the departure was postponed. That night there was a film show in camp which was quite good - "Follow the Boys" - George Raft & Vera Zorina.

On Wednesday 21<sup>st</sup> Feb we, at last, got moving. At 9.30 we had to parade at the watch office, and, with our flying kit were taken by transport to our aircraft, a C.47 (DAKOTA) FL634. It was a lovely, sunny morning and we were inside the 'cabin' of the plane by 10%. Soon the engines were started & we taxied smoothly round the perimeter to the head of the runway. Receiving the 'all clear', the pilot gave both engines the "gun" & we commenced to belt down the runway at what seemed a frightening speed, then there was just a sense of lifting & we were airborne on stage one of our long journey. The beautiful English meadows, ploughland & woods passed by below us. The peaceful villages, with smoking chimneys, tiny animals in farm yards & fields all looked tiny like. In valleys, mist-like carded wool hid the terrain but sometimes a tree clad hillcock would stand above the mist like an island in a white sea.



We flew on at about 3,000 to 4,000 feet - & were soon into Cornwall. Before long the blue-green Atlantic became visible. It looked clear & cold in the early sun. Before long we were flying close to the coast - & the sands & rocky coves looked very inviting of somnolent repose and were reminiscent of summer holidays in happier years now <sup>seemingly</sup> long ago & far away. At 10.55 we circled over Newquay and made a landing circuit of St. Mawgan Transit 1 dome prior to losing height & turning on to the runway. We touched down, like a feather at 11 1/2 & taxied to the receiving centre for aircraft, where we disembarked & were quickly taken away in a 'bus to the Customs Dept.; where we were questioned as to whether or not we were carrying "contraband" & as to the amount of English Sterling we were taking out of the country. We then climbed aboard the 'bus & were driven to the Reception Centre where we stayed until we left on Stage 2.

This reception centre was an eyepener for us common airmen, used to the minimum of comfort in the way of billets. We entered a reception hall where two W.A.A.F. reception clerks took particulars of our rank, number and name & then hooks for our clothing were indicated & we were shepherded into the lounge to await our mid-day meal. Here, were comfortable lounge chairs set around roaring stoves. A good radio set was dispensing music. Tables were loaded with reading matter comprising Service publications, "The Sketch", "The Illustrated London News" & "Punch". At noon a bar was opened & soft & intoxicating liquors were on sale. We were able to buy cigarettes, chewing gum & chocolate too. There was no recognition of rank here & officers, NCO's & O.R.'s all fared alike. There were board games & cards available, also a full sized billiard table. Various games were soon in progress.



As there was a "Course" on for Officers we were unable to dine in the Transit Centre Mess so went along the road to the Airman's Mess where we found excellent food & very clean conditions obtaining. As we were to stay overnight, transport was "laid on" for our party & at 2.30 three buses took us in to Newquay. The sun was warm & the sky cloudless. Stan & I walked out of town & up on to the "cliffs" & were thrilled to be overlooking the green Atlantic breaking white on the rocks girding the shore, the scene being very much like the bay ending in Morte Point as seen from Baggy Point, on the much loved North Devon Coast. We then descended to the peaceful little harbour, where, sitting in the sun against the "sea wall" were many towns-people enjoying the springlike day. While we lazed there two small motor-fishing-boats came putt putt in & moored up. Once again we seemed to be on holiday, gazing at familiar scenes. But there was an absence of sturdy, young boatmen. Dogs were disporting on the sands wet & smoothed by the receding tide. Children too came down to play & we both longed to have our wives & our boys with us there. We hunted the town for picture postcards to send home but as it was early closing day we were quite unlucky. However, we came across a very nice Y.M.C.A. where we soon got down to sandwiches, wads & tea, & there to our delight we found some picture cards & were soon busy writing brief gen' home. As we had until 7½ free - it was only 5% we continued our exploration of Newquay & quite enjoyed our "day out". On returning to the Transit Centre we wandered across to the Airman's Mess for supper. The remainder of the evening until 9.30 was spent in the lounge & in "cleaning" up in the well equipped ablutions where hot & cold water was on tap & even mirrors were provided.



at 9.30 the bus collected us and carried us across the camp to our sleeping quarters in corrugated fiberite NISSEN type huts. Here another surprise awaited us. Beds, with sheets were already made down and a fire was alight in the stove. (9516). after a good night's sleep we were awakened at 6.45. after a wash, & having made up our beds, our bus collected us and took us to the airmen's mess for breakfast. (Here again radio was provided). afterwards we went to the Reception Centre lounge to await orders. It had dawned misty & damp and as the day grew older it clamped down more heavily & flying was cancelled for the day. accordingly, we spent the whole day lounging & reading in the comfortable chairs. Stan & I had an amateurish game of Snooker - both being "learners" faults were many & it lasted an unconscionable time. at 19.30 our bus picked us up & delivered us to our sleeping quarters again. The next morning appeared to show no betterment in the weather conditions. However, after dinner while sitting in the lounge the call came to get ready and at 2.30 we were airborne again, and with our 'Maie Wests' on headed out to sea.

The cloud conditions persisted until we crossed the coast across the channel at about 3.30. We continued flying more or less southwards in sunshine over mainly agricultural land. The terrain was almost free of trees and the characteristic "English" hedgerows were missed. The fields, of all sizes of oblongs, parallelograms, angles, were in pastel shades of green & brown and suggested to our view a vast inlaid cork linoleum of modern pattern. From time to time we could see areas marked by craters and were able to identify what had probably been advance air fields during the conquest of France by the Nazis. As time went on the country changed & there were more trees to be seen, and the long, straight tree lined roads looked like



strips of white tape laid across a map. Then we flew over an area of thickly wooded slopes, and in consequence the aircraft 'bounced' a bit due to changes in air density. There were rivers and as we passed over towns built on the rivers we could see bridges & viaducts, obviously suffering bomb damage or demolition, reaching only part-way across, or with the centre span crumbled into mid stream. Later snow clad peaks came into view & we climbed several thousand feet to cross them. At first, below, we could see only drifted snow lying in ditches and against hedgerows, then, as the hills rose higher it became an unbroken carpet of glistening white. On the beyond side the snow thinned out again & gave place to the brown of leafless trees & the purple misted valleys duskling, as the sun had descended below the crests. At last we saw below us a wide

plain & runways, pock marked with hundreds of filled-in bomb craters. As we descended incredible damage was visible and wrecked & burnt-out Nazi 'planes' were scattered around. We touched down on the wide, flat expanse & taxied across to the air-pank beside the wreckage of the control tower. This had obviously been demolished by the retreating enemy as the upper stories were telescoped and slid down sideways over the base. A bus was alongside as soon as we stopped & took us to the Transit Café. We had been handed a meal-chit as we alighted from the 'plane'. This was our introduction to ISTRES airport near Marseilles, between the Rhone & Durance, (FRANCE), where we had landed at 6.40 PM.

Here, as we were served with a very well cooked meal, we heard the first 'foreign' speech, that of the French waitresses & the boys were soon essaying a few 'school' phrases appertaining to the occasion. The Café - bearing a shattered sign - was 'The Blity Café', and it was situated in the rebuilt parts of a ruined block. The ground underfoot all around was very rough as the surface merely comprised shattered tiles & broken masonry & the characteristic smell of bomb demolished buildings seemed present here. The plumbing, & lighting installations had been knocked out but temporary lighting was effected by means



of miles of "flex" from portable generating plants operated by U.S. Negro labour Corps men.

Having had our meal, we were taken to draw our bedding. Stumbling about in the dark we floundered around ruined billet blocks we came to a room stacked with blankets where a R.A.F. cove with a lantern doled out 5 per man. Then we groped our way to an undamaged block in which were cracked & splintered doors & windows fitted with "Windolite" in place of blasted glass. Here were iron spring bedsteads. No biscuits or mattresses or pillows! Rather a 'come-down' after the comfort of St. Mawgan.

However, Stan & I made beds of a sort and, as it was a brilliant moonlit night, decided to see what little of France we could. We changed 5/- English into 50 francs at the N.A.A.F.I. Bar & proceeded to walk to Istres.

The buildings we passed were essentially different to English houses & suggested Spanish designs in the white moonlight. The town seemed to be very "shut up" due no doubt to the fact that all windows were shuttered. There were few people about. We went into a wine bar to sample local colour. There were some American soldiers there, one having had more than was good for him was a bit merry & likely to turn ugly, so we withdrew & strolled around. There was not much to see. Beret clad men murmured "bon soir" & chats about all.

We went into another estaminet where a much made up, pink-ash-blonde presided over the bar. She was a typical "bar-maid" but very polite. She, her sister, & later maman, greeted us with a "Bon Soir, Messieurs". Stan had beers, & I had a

soft-drink & later black coffee & listened to the chatter of the customers, all of whom gave us a courteous 'Bon Soir' as they left.

At about 10.30 we made tracks for camp again, calling en route at a dance hall where a local-forces dance was on. It was overful & we could



not get in so continued on our road back to the  
chrome, where, with great-coats for pillows, - as many  
thicknesses of blanket beneath us to defeat the harsh  
edges of the spring laths, we had a good night's  
sleep, being awakened by "knockens up" at about  
6.30 next day.

The ablutions were primitive. Tin bowls  
stood on a wooden trestle & rather brown & misty super-  
cold water had to be dipped from oil drums. The  
sun was now up but a morning frost made the  
air decidedly nippy. However, a shave was skimmingly  
accomplished. Then, bearing "irons", plate, tin,  
and mug, enamel; we went in search of the  
cookhouse. After searching among mountains of  
rubble we sighted a plank bearing the legend  
"Armenian Dining Hall" & found a rather foul  
looking joint where porridge, bacon & beans & tea  
were served. There was a basket of blackish  
bread & on the trestle tables, half tins of tropical  
issue butter. This is designed not to melt in  
hot climates. It certainly hadn't melted here,  
By dint of chipping with the knife sufficient flakes  
could be prized loose to powder a piece of bread  
with. This was then cemented with tinned preserve  
of figs or other fruit, canned in Palestine. Outside  
there were some half oil barrels over wood fires containing hot  
greasy water, with a fair scum of bacon rinds floating thereon  
and in this we washed our plates. It was full daylight  
now, a perfect clear blue sky overhead and 10/10th  
visibility. On searching for the sanitary department  
we found it at the back of the ablutions, wooden plank  
seats, with hinged covers, in "batteries" of three so that  
one could pass the time of day with one's neighbours  
during the functional session. All windows had  
been blasted completely away & accordingly, it was  
more than a trifle nippy.



We had a look around the almost completely wrecked barrack blocks formerly occupied by ~~German~~ <sup>German</sup> airmen and had a laugh or two over some very humorous decorations on the roughcast walls of the various aspects of service life, & found their sense of humour in such illustration much on a par with ours.

Wending our way to the airfield we dumped our kits in <sup>Fl 634</sup> & stood around awaiting our flying rations while mechanics finished their D.I.s. Various types of kites were running up or taking off & landing. There were several burnt-out Nazi planes lying around. All the hangars had been blown up, and rail sidings & store sheds also demolished, but repair & construction gangs were clearing wreckage & erecting scaffoldings for rebuilding.

We were airborne at 10.00 hrs and, after circling the airfield, from which other DAKOTAS were rising, we headed southwards & were soon flying over Marseilles & had our first glimpse of the Mediterranean Sea, unruffled blue, stretching away as far as the eye could see. We turned a few points to the east & flew down the Cote d'Azur & saw some of the resorts which, in happier days, were the playgrounds of millionaires. We ran into a layer of fleecy clouds through the interstices of which we had new glimpses of the unbelievable blue of the water below. Occasionally we had glimpses of convoys of steamships with white "wakes" streaming from their sterns. Gradually the lovely coast-line, with its sandy bays & rocky coves receded & we headed for Sardinia. We saw also the islands of Corsica and

Turning more to the south we flew down the length of Sardinia but no interesting features revealed themselves to our gaze. We saw a town or two, roads desolate of traffic, bomb cratered areas, and considerable rocky terrain the strata of which seemed from above to be stepped up <sup>tiny terraces</sup> and with very little in the way of vegetation. There were some tiny bays sheltering small





# THIS IS R.A.F. CASTEL BENITO TRIPOLI.

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THESE ARE YOUR INSTRUCTIONS DURING  
YOUR BRIEF STAY HERE. FOLLOW THEM AND ALL WILL BE  
WELL.

1. Officers and Sergeants will be fed in the Airfield  
Buffet and then transported to their transit  
quarters.
2. O.Rs. will be put in charge of 1 Senior N.C.O.  
of each aircraft and conducted to O.Rs. transit  
quarters for meal and quarters - BRING YOUR  
OWN KNIFE, FORK, SPOON, MUGS AND PLATES (OR MESS  
TINS)!
3. Quarters are as comfortable as we can make them  
for you: you will not need a lot of kit - just  
small kit.
4. When you are called to prepare for departure  
DO NOT DELAY. Minutes are precious to a  
scheduled departure.
5. Whilst you are here make full use of the amenities  
provided but PLEASE don't abuse them.
6. NO ONE will be permitted to leave the station  
except on urgent business.
7. LEAVE US WITH THE DEPRESSION THAT "OVERS AS IS  
NOT SO BAD AFTER ALL".



fishing craft. From our elevation the water on the sandy beach was a light green but so clear was it that we could trace "bottom", as it deepened, through bottle green to the ultramarine of the deep sea. There were rocky cliffs, too, some of which fell sheer to the water without, seemingly, so much as a ledge on which even a mountain goat could find a hold.

Away in the misty distance, to eastwards & slightly north a great range of snow-capped peaks gleamed white in the sun & there we deemed to be the ~~Papagones~~ <sup>Apennines</sup>. Then, land went from sight for a while & <sup>only</sup> there was only the blue sky above & the slight layer of white, wispy cloud between our plane & the blue sea 5,000 feet below. A while later on our

starboard beam we saw our first glimpse of the coast of North Africa - Cape Bonn jutting deeply northwards into the Mediterranean. Flying into the bay formed by the ~~front~~ <sup>tip</sup> of Tripoli we reached the coast at Tripoli about 3.10 in the afternoon.

We flew in fairly low over the harbour & town. There were many sunken ships in the harbour, some lying below the water, others with their upperworks above water. One ship was lying partially submerged in the harbour mouth effectively blocking the entrance for all but small boats. As we flew over the town much bomb & shell damage was obvious in roofless blocks, areas cleared completely of buildings, & many craters. We proceeded, losing height, over the suburbs of Tripoli and circled the airfield about 14 Km. from the town. As we came in to land we could see the wrecked German & Italian planes lying scattered around. There were two huge "graveyards" full of the wreckage of planes & trucks. We landed & taxied to the receiving bay, stepping out of the plane at Castel Benito at 3.20. A truck collected us and ran us to the transit camp.

Here we found tents for our reception, on very sandy ground. I had to sign for an issue of blankets & in tent C5 found an iron bedstead with flat spring lathes. Again there were no biscuits, mattresses or pillows. However, as at Istres we soon made down a comfortable sleeping effort & then Stan & I went in search of food. We approached a pink



plaster walled building which stank of fuel (crude) oil, and was belching large flakes of soot from various metal chimneys. Here we found wooden trestle tables & forms in the dining hall. The tables bore half-litres of the now familiar flint-hard butter & Palestinian preserves. We had a meal of stew, beans, potatoes, prune tart & sauce, and tea was served to us from a half oil drum. Having anchored this with bread, butter & jam we went in search of a shower to wash off the stain of travel.

On enquiry we were directed to another pink walled barrack block in which we found pillared "cloisters" on the four sides of an oblong "garden" containing palm trees & shrubs. There were all apparently built by the Italians as the plumbing & furnishings bore Italian names. We found a body already in there complaining bitterly that he could get no hot water while across from him a fellow was enwrapped in steam! It was pointed out that C was 'hot' in "Itzy" and H was 'cold' - he had the H going full bore. We had a most refreshing warm shower and then, donning our mosquito boots as a rest from flying boots, we went for an exploratory walk around the camp. Just a few yards from our tents was a "plane graveyard". Here we saw many smashed & semi stripped Nazi, Iti, planes and many burnt & broken Daimler-Benz engines and also several Hercules & American radial engines. There were damaged & burnt out German & Italian trucks & cars in the heap.

after going to the dining hall for supper & tea, we collected our hurricane lamp for the tent and then, as it was by now dark except for the  $\frac{3}{4}$  moon, we took a blanket apiece and went to the free open air cinema, run by the U.S. Army, which was situated just to the rear of the transit tents. Here, with the dark forms of palm trees waving in the slight breeze to give the scene its 'tropic' character, we celebrated



our landing in North Africa (Tripolitania) by seeing an American film (which was showing in Londonderry the day I left) "When the Angels sang" - a musical-comedy. When the show ended, at about 10.30, we retired to our tent and, in spite of the unusual conditions, enjoyed a good night's sleep.

In the morning after a breakfast of bacon & beans, prefaced by porridge, Stan & I decided that a shave would be advisable. This was accomplished at the billet block which housed the showers. When half way through this delicate operation we learned that the airfield transport had arrived & our party was loading up. We hurriedly finished our shaving & galloped back to our tent and packed our kit & then found that others of our party were still around & that the bus was coming back the second time.

at 7.30 we got aboard our aircraft and the 18 Vacuum Flasks and sandwich boxes were stowed safely, and away we taxied to the runway, joining the procession of other Dakotas. In the course of this perimeter journey we passed another huge pile of broken enemy aircraft. We also saw the **D'AK** of 'A' Flight which had had a mis-hap when taking off, some days earlier. We were airborne at 7.40 & headed for a B.O.A.C. Transit Stage way out in the Kibfarn desert, where we were due for a refuelling and lunch stop within four hours.

As we flew onwards we could see many craters, wrecked "ammovs" & the tracks in the desert as reminders of the grim battles fought in this area against the Nazi Rommel & his Afrika Korps. There were many tiny tent encampments of desert dwellers, miles from any town or village, with a few domestic animals around grazing on the sparse vegetation. The air was clear & with blue sky above & unbroken desert below, unbroken except



for a black, straight line cutting across the desert, the transport road from Tripoli to "Stages East"; on which, occasionally, trucks could be discerned, just small dots in the vast immensity. at about 11.10 we could see an airfield in the distance - we began to lose height and eventually devastated buildings & craters could be observed below, then we flew over the runways & saw the name EL ADEM in big white block letters in the runway. We made a preliminary circuit and then landed at 11.20. A transit bus picked us up & we were soon whisked over desert tracks to the B.O.A.C. lounge & Restaurant. We were able to have a quick wash before being served with a very good lunch. <sup>waited on by Italian Prisoners of War.</sup> Within the hour we were back in the plane, and airborne at 12.20. This airfield was really way out in the "blue" & rough desert stretched to a horizon unbroken by hills trees or buildings on either quarter. We climbed high again to avoid slight cloud & continued eastwards over uninteresting stony desert. At 3.10 we flew over the Suez Canal & I could see ships passing thro'. Later we turned a trifle north, crossed the sea & crossed the Palestinian shore, flying over the new city of Tel Aviv, and landing at the RAF Station LYDDA. Here it had been raining & there was reddish-brown mud, many puddles & full ditches & the local scenery was no different to the English countryside on a wet day! It did, in fact, to me suggest the scene near New Romney, in Kent. Our plane taxied to the B.O.A.C. transit Centre & R.A.F. truck took us away to our billet. We had to report in at the guard room where we were allotted our rooms. Here, there were signs of "blat" as the guards had been paraded & the C.O. was inspecting them "in full". There were loud cries, from lads in our party, of a derisive nature, as we drove away. Here a surprise awaited me. I had a bed in a four-bed (S.N.C.O.s) room. The beds were ready made down



with four blankets + two clean sheets, and a white pillow. The cookhouse was a considerable distance from the billet but it was discovered at last. A very poor meal awaited us, more or less scraped up. The mess tables and forms were of concrete with terrazine casing. The RAF symbol was inset in each table centre in brown - (RAF).

There was a film show on at the camp Cinema "IN WHICH WE SERVE" + as admission was 40 Mils some English money had to be exchanged at the M.A.A.F.I.

Went to bed in the luxurious quarters at about 11 p.m. During the night the cries or rather squealing of the pi-dogs was hideous, for all the world like girls squealing with fear. This goes on from dark till dawn, but apart from awakening twice, I slept very well.

In the morning it was still raining ~~hard~~, intermittently. The ablutions were poorly equipped, there being only two bowls and, I believe five faucets. But I was lucky enough to get a bowl + got myself shaved + washed before all the mob came in.

For breakfast there was the inevitable porridge, bacon + beans, bread, hard butter + marmalade.

at about 9.30 trucks collected us and conveyed us to the airfield. Here, when we were ready to embark, it was found that our flying rationis were not in the hills. I was detailed, with others, to go to the B.O.A.C. Restaurant + find out what had happened. After some difficulty with Eurasian attendants we secured our 18 ration boxes but only 14 flasks - 4 being missing. The pilot registered a complaint + we got aboard, taxied to the runway and, during a heavy shower, were airborne at 10.55.

As soon as we were clear of LYDDA our pilot sent through a message to us not to move around too much as he was going high to get above the bad weather. Soon we were flying at 12,500 ft in sunshine above the dense sea



of white clouds below. The cabin windows iced up & it got cool inside & we were glad to put on greatcoats & gloves. Later we descended to a lower altitude & as the clouds had thinned & we were in an area of better weather we could see the land - only arid desert - below. We crossed the Euphrates and later the Tigris and went in Iraq. After flying over Basrah we later perceived a very extensive airfield out in the desert & soon we were circling the R.A.F. Station of SHAIBAH & landed at 3.45. We reported our arrival at the Transit Guard Room & received a meal chit & went immediately to the Transit canteen where an excellent meal was served. We were then taken by motor truck over hard & dusty tracks to our sleeping place for the night. The atmosphere was perfectly clear & as the sun went rapidly down the purple grey of night stole up in the east and then a wonderful "umbered" moon loomed large above the horizon. Our Room, No. 13, incidentally, was equipped with good beds and soft camel hair blankets. There were some very tasteful and artistic drawings decorating the walls. Electric lights & fans completed the furnishings. This is said to be a very hot dry place in summer, and the fellows stationed there had nothing very good to say of it. It is miles from anywhere & planted in most hard, arid land. It is a posting given to R.A.F. delinquents! This is known in the Service as a sort of last out-post & is featured in the dance tune "Shaibah Blues". We were called at 4 A.M. & had breakfast, at 4.30 in an underground dining hall, of porridge, soya bean sausages & fried bread with bread of a coarse grey/white colour, tinned butter & marmalade, then out into the moonlit night to connect with the trucks which were to take us to our aircraft. In the airfield we identified our DAKOTA by the light of the transport's lamps & soon after we were aboard & settled in the well lighted "cabin", the crew came aboard & we were soon



taxying towards the runway. In the darkness of the early morning we took off along the flare path & soon were airborne - at 5.35 - and heading south east. Within a little while a pinkish tinge came into the eastern skies & we left land behind and struck out across the Persian Gulf. The light of the dawn came brimming over the rim of the world & soon the sky was charged with bars of light in "copperish", bronze & golden light - thro patches of mauve & amber cloud. The water below, reflected the now lightening blue of the sky, then, as the bars of light flamed in brighter colour, the red burning circle, the sun, appeared above the dark line of the horizon & climbed into the sky. Thus another day of our strange journey had dawned.

Way below, as daylight became stronger we could discern fishing boats out on the water and later, as we got further down the Gulf there were steamers to be seen. In the sky, away ahead - on the front side of us and below, flew another of our DAKOTAS. We continued, uneventfully, our journey, at about 5,000 ft, the conditions being calm & visibility perfect. Soon after nine the land came in sight & we flew over desert land with occasional patches of palms & some waterholes where the trees were thicker. On the whole it was wild & desolate country. At length an airfield came into view & we rapidly lost height & flew over a village on the coast. The water was clear & a perfect blue, breaking in the merest of waves on the gleaming white sand. There was a small fort-like building & a pillared terrace which looked rather more Grecian than Byzantine in style from above. We landed on the sandy runway at our Persian stopping place, SHARJAH, at 9.35 & were taken by truck to a rather horrible, fly infested O.R.s. mess for breakfast - the usual R.A.F. "cowboy" effort. Here, we could see the village we had surveyed from the air, about a mile & a half away.



The forthlike building had castellated walls & a sort of keep within also castellated on top. The pillars, from ground level, of the terrace were more square looking & lost the Grecian appearance they afforded from above.

Many palm trees lined the shore & presented a typical oriental scene.

We saw our first camel, with a rider perched on its back, passing across the outer fringe of the airfield towards the village.

At the aircraft dispersal, mechanics were refuelling & little darkies proudly wearing old RAF caps were assisting generally. We gave one some chocolate & he came smartly to attention, saluted, & turned about & marched off as smartly as a "brat". This had invaded the aircraft, and, when we took off again at 10.35, became annoying at the windows. We took the "stoppers" out of the window panels & poked as many as possible out into the slipstream.

We flew on eastwards & after crossing more desert land were over the sea again, this time the ~~PERSIAN GULF~~ <sup>Arabian Sea</sup>. There was nothing to see from the windows except sky & sea, except an occasional ship, so we indulged in reading or dozing until we came to the shores of India, flying over Karachi at 2.15 and landing at the airport of Mauripore at 2.25.

As soon as we had landed & taxied to the transit dispersal, the aircraft doors were opened & we were sprayed with special insecticide.

Then we disembarked & proceeded to the Reception Centre, where we waited in an ante-room before the various formalities appertaining to arrival in India were instituted. First of all we handed in our Yellow Fever inoculation certificates to an Indian doctor before whom we were ushered one at a time by a uniformed ~~person~~ <sup>servant</sup> who, on hearing the desk bell. In the doctor's room ring, called "nase pleez" & ~~waved~~

Waved



the meset in. From this sanctum we passed on to the Intelligence Officer to answer routine questions as to papers, contraband, films etc. Then our arrival was checked & recorded by RAF NCO's at the Traffic Control desks.

Then we waited in the restaurant lounge for our transport. There was a well stocked bookstall here.

Soon the trucks arrived & we were taken along a hard, dusty, bumpy road to the transit wing about a mile or so away. In the distance we could see the docks & town of Karachi.

Stan & I were detailed for aircraft guards for the night, thus missing a night in a hot, unpleasant tent.

We had to go to stores & there were issued with 4 new blankets and a mosquito net for use overnight. Then we were able to change our Sterling & IRAK money into Rupees & Annas at the adjacent Accounts Office. Here we

felt the first of the heat we were to know for a long time. Our "blue" & flying boots were not ideal for this hot dry place. We were glad when the sun began to go down, & we went to the Sergeant's Mess for a good dinner, being waited on by uniformed <sup>Goonere</sup> ~~native~~ Mess Waiters.

At 7.30 Stan & I were conveyed by transport to the Transit dispersal where we lobbed our blankets & kit in the plane & then went across to the Reception Block for a wash. We had expected something a little up to date at an airport but our hopes in this respect were quickly dampened. Entering a door marked "Gentlemen's Toilet" we found an ordinary wash stand with an aluminium basin on it & an aluminium ewer half full of water underneath. On a bench against the wall was a bench with four common enamelled chamber pots on it three of which had been used!

Hoping for at least an Elsan closet we opened the door of the inner sanctum - here an ordinary, old fashioned teak commode was in site & it was found in practice



that the lid would not even open fully but <sup>would</sup> ~~rest~~ uncomfortably on the spine of he who sat. Outside the rear door lurked a diminutive native lad clad in a far from clean, once white, ~~shorts~~ <sup>shorts</sup> I called him in, gave him a cigarette & told him to empty all the "containers". This he did, into yet another pail under the bench holding the "pots". So the position was not really improved. Having shaved & washed we were glad to remove ourselves to the aircraft where we made a comfortable bed of piled kaphok flying overalls & our blankets, niggling one of the nets over this. In the brilliant moonlight we went over to the restaurant for a cold drink before turning in. As we stepped out of the plane we almost became impaled, in the seat, on the bayonet of the native patrol <sup>who viewed us with suspicion</sup>. We turned in at about 10<sup>30</sup>, heads towards the nose of the kite so that our feet were on the downward slope of the floor, the bed being laid about halfway up the cabin. We slept fitfully, as visiting aircraft arrived & departed, the engines of one, two & four engined craft being belted to take-off revs not being conducive to slumber. We finally awoke at dawn & found our bed had slipped down the slope in the night & we were lying near the door. The door suddenly opened & a body murmured something unintelligible & departed. Finding it was past 6 & that a truck was coming for us at 6.30 we dressed & packed our blankets & tidied up the plane for our journey. We were conveyed to the airman's mess for the usual breakfast. Having handed in blankets & nets to a villainous looking old 'storewallah' who, incidentally, made out two more "issue" chits instead of "receipts" - thus laying on our charge two sets of both, we went on our way, contacting an English stonebasher & requesting him to rectify the wog's error in papers. By this time the sun was up in a brazen sky, the



full moon paling to Westwards. Kitehawks were diving for scraps from the Cookhouse swill bins. We were again conveyed to the aircraft & found ration boxes had been placed on board but flashs were missing. after a bit of chasing around they arrived, on a truck. Some were filled with lemonade & some with tea. The ration boxes were full of good things including hard boiled eggs & two bananas. The first I had seen for about five years! \* We were airborne at 10.35 on the last leg of our journey. We were glad to be moving upwards as it was too hot on the ground for our comfort being so recently out of the English winters.

We flew on south eastwards but over no interesting country. The terrain appeared to be hard dry land, all rather desolate, carved with dried up watercourses of varying depth. As on we went and conditions in the air became very bumpy causing the plane to lurch & surge and fall alarmingly. Later we came into the Central Provinces & the nature of the country changed. The soil looked red in colour similar to that in North Devon. There were small native compounds in among the trees & we could see cattle grazing on sparse vegetation & people working on the land.

At 4 1/2 we landed on the runway at RAIPUR & disembarked from F-L 634 for the last time. It was blazing hot and we were sweating within a few minutes at the least exertion.

We loaded our kit, (2 Kitbags, small kit, greatcoat, "Mac West" & flying suit each), on a truck & were taken to the domestic site & dropped at Basha 314, a brick & plaster building with a thatched roof supported on rough tree poles & bamboo rods, and with a verandah or stoop on the southern side. The windows were of the hinged casement type with gelatine net instead of glass for anti-mosquito protection at night. At 5 1/2 we went to the cookhouse for high tea of sausages, corned beef fritters, beans, oranges & milk, bread & butter and tea. Then back to billet to fix our mosquito nets with bamboo poles, which, however, were deficient in supply & we had to go out & 'recouge' some more. However, we



managed to make all secure & went across to the ablutions for a cool shower which was most welcome. (The sun is so hot that the water coming from pipes affixed to the exterior of the southern wall was sometimes unbearably hot.) Water was pumped from deep 'wells', by motor pump units attended by native workers, or by hand-pumps operated by native boys, into storage tanks on brick towers thus affording a pressure in the pipe lines.

The sun went down about 7 PM & in a very short while it was dark. As is usual on these "outpost" stations 'something' had happened to the electric light circuit to our part of the camp so we had to depend on torches & candle ends for light. At 7 1/2 we had dinner & went across to the canteen for a cool drink, and then to bed. Once inside it is necessary to tuck the net well under the bottom blanket to keep the "mosquitos" out & to have a hunt around inside for the invaders before settling down. And then, to sleep.

Thurs. March 1st. Awakened at 7 AM. by the call of the char wallah, who, carrying his urn of tea kept hot by red wood-ash in a small fire tray attached beneath the urn. A mug-ful was served for two annas. By the time we went across for breakfast (at Eshota hazri), the sun was up and very hot. At 8.30 we were paraded & taken to stores where we received a large mosquito net each in place of the small one issued at Nany field. We handed in one blue suit & shirt & received 4 K.D. Bush Shirts, 3 pairs Khaki slacks, 3 pairs white socks, 3 summer vests, 3 pairs summer pants. This business took up an hour or so and afterwards we were free until 1.30, when we paraded to be sorted out into sections for work. We were then taken by ~~truck~~ to the airfield. As other kites of the squadron were arriving we went out to their dispersal



point to unload the kit and freight which, each carried besides squadron bodies. The heat made us thirsty and the flasks in each kite received first attention. Whether it was hot tea or cool lemonade it served us.

We were informed that transport would be laid on for a swim at a reservoir some miles away from the station - but after climbing aboard and being driven around to various places on the camp, in search of a body who was supposed to know the route, we returned an hour later to our starting point & were informed that the swim was "scrubbed".

After dinner, being still without lights, we decided to check the installation in & around the basha & found that the external switch box was at fault & after some bashing with a chunk of wood we managed to get the switch plungers home & the lights came on.

The new nets were soon rigged on the beds & unwanted kit sorted & put away in kitbag.

We had received sheets & a blanket on our arrival, so bed was ~~soon~~ prepared again, and I was soon into it to read & get cool.

First thing next day we were relieved of our flying kit & then conveyed by gharrys to the airfield. There were one or two D.I.s to do and a kite to re-fuel.

The Servicing Flights were established in tents, for offices & crew rooms.

A water brazier was there and fruit wallahs & char wallahs made visits to the section.

Some natives were commencing trenching for the construction of a latrine. An old man with a measuring rod marked out the area to be dug & some men and boys commenced to pickaxe the surface earth. This was scraped into shallow baskets with a shovel & spade tool which was shaped more like an adze only broader & not so thick. Women carried the baskets on their heads some yards away & dumped it.



In spite of their unrestricting garments & rather unlovely figures, they walked with a graceful carriage, the loads on their heads remaining perfectly steady & untouched by hand. It was observed that the women seemed to do all of the carrying. When the "gang" packed up in the late afternoon. They would pour water from a big brass chattie over their faces & shoulders & rinse their arms, then loading the pots, food bags, tools etc into a basket, the loads would be placed on their heads & away across the scorched grass & paddy fields they would go, to a distant village, the men, carrying nothing at all!! We packed up early in the afternoon & soon were back at the living site for a shower & dinner. The lights failed again this night, at the generating plant.

Went to work at 8.30 next day but had a stand-down so returned to basha & rested until tiffin. To airfield in the afternoon but there was nothing to do so time was spent smoking in the section tent. Packed up at 4 p.m. at 1/4 to six transport was laid on for the swimming pool. This was about 8 or 9 miles north of Raipur and was, in fact, a large reservoir with a fairly high embankment of large rocks topped with earth. Whether natural or artificial it would be difficult to say. There was a sluice gate which would allow of irrigation of nice fields below the embankment, and this was controlled from a small pier jutting out about 10 ft into the water, and about 10 ft above the surface, ideal for diving. Very rosy figures, mostly naked, were diving into the clear green water. It was amazingly warm yet very refreshing & a refreshing swim. I was amazingly warm for one thoroughly enjoying it. We returned to camp



at about 7.15 & went over to the mess for dinner. The lights had failed again & I had the unique, if unpleasant, experience of eating a dinner without being able to see what the fork was delivering to my mouth! Later in the evening the lights came on again & I was able to write before turning in.

On Sunday 4th March, reported for duty on airfield, but was told to go to M.T. Section as they wanted fitters to assist in maintenance of bowser & trucks. M.T. Section said "NO", but Fitters wanted on airfield to service bowser engines. Returned to airfield & told the tale. Airfield said that was being taken care of, so I carried on doing nothing until tiffin time.

There was some surveying going on across the airfield. Two natives carried the elevation poles, another carried the theodolite, the surveyor gazed thro' it while his clerk stood by to record the details & another native held a large umbrella as a sunshade over them. Quite a large concern!

At tiffin time, the cookhouse staff were preparing chicken for dinner in the evening. There were several baskets of live fowls, and a native boy took them one at a time, squawking & flapping, and held them while a villainous looking rascal stretched their necks & cut them half-thro with a knife. Then, bleeding, flapping, and squawking throatily, they were put under a wire mesh cover to struggle & bleed & die. In spite of all this - roast chicken was very tasty at 7.15 P.M. I had the afternoon off duty - nothing to do.

Was able to lie abed & read & smoke. Too hot to do anything else and anyway <sup>there was no where to go.</sup> Monday 5th March - there was a cool breeze early in the day but later the sun heated it & it became hot wind. Refuelled one kite during the morning and then packed up for the day. Spent the afternoon and evening in billet, reading & writing.

Wed 7th March, unloading stores during the morning from kites which had arrived on Tuesday afternoon.



Frank Mason arrived with this flight - "C". At the afternoon parade we were drafted to work sections - Frank & I were together in No 4 Gang - Repair Inspection. We packed up at 3:30. Went for another delightful bathe in the evening, before dinner, out at the reservoir.

Thursday 8th March. During the morning we received some tools, and lazed around smoking, drinking tea & watching anything that was going on. At noon live kites came breezing down from the airstrip enveloped in clouds of red dust - the first two "minors" for 238 Squadron. Our gang were allotted one & we got busy on it after tiffin. By 4:30, when I had to report at sick quarters for a further vaccination, the greater part of the work was finished. Writing in the evening.

Friday 9th March finished the inspection & signed up. Pay parade at 5<sup>1/2</sup> which lasted quite a while as the pay people had forgotten to bring some of the ledgers. To camp Cinema to see "Fanny - by gaslight" evening.

Saturday 10th March early-going morning. Another inspection commenced in afternoon. Finished the inspection during Sunday morning & refuelled a couple of kites. Went to stores for issue of balance of kit and bush hat, and second blanket. Went to sick quarters at 3:30 for cholera inoculation. In the evening went to Cinema for a recorded music concert which was a pleasant & cultural relief.

On Monday 12th the gang were busy on all sorts of odd jobs & refuelling. Worked through tiffin hour and had afternoon off.

Tuesday was spent in loading stores in to aeroplanes during the morning, and at the hangar in afternoon making up freight to specified weights. The sun was blazing hot & it was not easy work. We were glad when day was done and we could have a shower & dress in clean clothes.

Wednesday was also spent in loading aircraft with freight for the move



to the south-east of India, to Bengal.

On Thursday 15th March we had early breakfast 6.30 and took our two kitbags & blanket rolls to the cookhouse. From there, by aircraft panties, we were conveyed to the airfield by ghanies & we climbed aboard DAKOTA KM 257, with a char-wallah, who wished to join his brother at Comilla, as an additional passenger. We were airborne at 7.50 AM. and were soon headed ~~South~~ North-east. During the early stages of our four hour trip the country was bare & very sparsely populated, but after flying over a low range of hills, the terrain became more fertile & there were rivers and lakes abounding. Some of the rivers were wide & deep & there were lots of boats either sailing, or moored, along their length. Villages, small estates, and towns became more frequent beneath us. A "Hurricane" and "Flying Fortress" passed below us going back the way we had come. There was nothing of outstanding interest to see during the trip. The char-wallah was quite comfortable & appeared to enjoy it all. We landed at Comilla airstrip at 11.50 and taxied, what seemed to be miles, around the perimeter tracks to a distant dispersal point, where we and our kit off-loaded.

Here we found the sun hot, but tempered by a breeze which the trees had cooled. The soil was a greyish yellow & was much pitted with dug water holes and embanked rice or paddy fields. While we were awaiting transport for our removal to quarters our char wallah showed a little initiative by going into a native cookhouse and obtaining - after what sounded like wordy warfare, but was probably friendly appeal - two cans of hot & sweet char. This was very welcome. We waited an hour & a half way out on dispersal before anyone came for us. Later a light, open truck came to the dispersal & we loaded our kit



## AIRSTRIPE GUESTS' SUPPLEMENT THIS BUSINESS OF EXISTENCE.

So many plaintive outcries about your Messing conditions have reached this office, that we think it necessary to publish an "extra" giving an explanation of the causes of the many inconveniences.

With the willing co-operation of the 'Adj' and the Bar and Welfare Officers we have prepared a classified list of items for your enlightenment, and publish it hereunder.

### COOKHOUSE.

Unskilled local labour has had to be temporarily employed and the conversion to European standards of hygiene is proceeding apace. Washing-up water is now changed frequently and fly-proof covers for the food will be supplied as soon as they can be constructed.

### FOOD.

With the aid of the Armament Section and a member of "AIRSTRIPE", staff of learned clerks, a great improvement has been made in the servery. A Messing Committee meets tonight, and AIRSTRIPE will be represented to give a full report on the findings.

### WATER.

The recent shortage of drinking water was a result of a break down in the town's supply that necessitated the bowser having to queue up for hours on end. Two drop tanks have been supplied to your site, but as we have at present no bowser of our own they cannot always be kept full. In reply to an Urgency Signal, a bowser is being despatched by rail tomorrow.

### BEER.

Indent was made in good time for this month's quota of the blushful hypocrene, and a 'bind' has been put in to 224 Group Welfare. F/Lt. Senn is a beer-lover himself, if we recall our O.T.U. days correctly, and will do everything possible to speed delivery -- but for ourselves we cannot see that it matters, whether the beer arrives on the 3rd or the 30th of the month, for, surely, the anticipation is sweeter than the nostalgic memory. Some forward strips, by the way, have had no issue since Christmas.

### CIGARETTES.

By courtesy of the Overseas Tobacco League you have received already 120 over quota, and an official issue should appear today.

### CANTEEN.

A price list is posted in the Squadron Canteen, and you are a sucker if you allow yourself to be gypped.

### MAIL.

This has arrived today, but Base Post Office have neither clues nor explanation of the cause of the hold-up.

At the risk of reading like S.R.O.'s we must stress that you can help yourselves far better than anyone else can. Don't bind each other, bind the folks in charge of facilities -- and bind them rigid. --- What are their names? Here they are:-- Canteen, F/O. Wildig; Messing, F/Lt. Chouffot (Pronounce Shoe-Foe) P.S.I., the 'Adj'; General Welfare, F/Lt. Currie.

Bear up, you types, dark skies never stay for long and you must appreciate that we did take over in one MOM of a hurry. Endure for a week and then count the improvements. They should be considerable.

"AIRSTRIPE" has spoken.



and ourselves on board & it was some load. We were taken around the tasey-tracks, past small mosques & ceremonial pools to the main road & then, crossing a small bridge proceeded in a westerly direction past several native compounds about 2 miles. After crossing a railway level the route consisted of a narrow built-up road bordered on each side by rice fields which stretched flat and wide on each side. The road was tree lined, a menace to incautious riders & open trucks. At intervals there were bays made to allow passing of vehicles, but most of the passing seemed to be done between these bays with a matter of inches of space betwixt each vehicle & but little more between the wheels & the embankment. We were not sorry when the journey was ended but little did we know then that it would be our lot to achieve the same journey at least twice, there and back, each day of our stay here.

When the truck pulled up beside a rather dilapidated bamboo & lath building & we were told to unload we were a trifle amazed. We were then told these were our 'quarters'. Having recovered from the shock, we individually dashed inside to obtain a "bedspace". The usual esprit de corps of the RAF prevailed & eventually after argument & recrimination everyone was in possession of a charpoy & some space. Within a short space of time mats were erected on a complicated arrangement of strings, and blankets and sheets laid out for sleeping. Washing facilities consisted of a pump in the corner of a field about 100 yards or so from the main road & in full view thereof where we had refreshing 'baths' caring nought for passers by. Later in the afternoon the S.W.O. & M.O. came around to see if we were comfortably installed. ("Comfortably installed" in a bamboo basha which had cobwebs, festooned with thick dust from the adjacent <sup>main</sup> road, hanging from walls & roof, and with an uneven brick floor covered



with a layer of dust about 1" thick and no floor coverings or coverings for the openings cut in the walls for windows). The S.W.O. said "You arrived this morning, didn't you? Well, you'd better go to the airstrip as they'll want you to unload the aircraft." We remained mute until he was out of earshot & then such comments as "— you" and "— the aircraft" likewise "— the work without transport," <sup>we were offered,</sup> so we stayed where we were like good airmen.

The dining hall was a rickety looking bamboo structure with wobbly tables & benches on a concrete floor. The food was fairly good tho! That night we discovered that there were different conditions applying to those at Raipur. The noise of endless trucks and ambulances on the road, croaking frogs, piping birds & insects, ~~For~~ <sup>Crick</sup> lizards, howling fri-dogs, barking domestic dogs, bleating goats & the hooting of sirens & shrieking of whistles of the trains on the railway a mile away over the fields. However, as time went on we got used to it all.

The country around, although as flat as a table presented a different aspect to the red earthed Raipur scrub land. More trees, artificial ponds, and grass presented a deceptive appearance of coolness. But between the ponds the hard baked, cracked, & dry paddy fields, that were greyish yellow in colour and from which the hot wind whipped up dust devils which spiralled away on the breeze, stretched away on either side of the roads, to illimitable distance forming the vast Bengali Plain. This vast expanse of flat land, without a hillock to break its monotony is dotted with small native villages comprising from three or ~~four~~ four, to 40 & fifty bamboo bashas of varying sizes. Here & there are scattered small temples domed & minaretted



of mud or bricks, colourwashed gleaming white or  
dun coloured, some picked out in vivid  
reds & blues of chequered decoration. Some  
conical shrines wrecked & pulled apart by  
encroaching ivy stand forlorn in some  
villages.

On April 1st we had to remove ourselves  
from NO. 1. Transit Camp & take up Squadron  
Billets at NO. 2. Camp. I was off this day so  
went over during the morning to secure a  
place for our particular "gang". The bashes  
all looked pretty rough & comfortless but I  
selected NO. 15 as a suitable home, it being  
one of the largest, lofty, light & airy with and  
open on <sup>one</sup> side to the nice fields. During the  
afternoon we moved some of the kit in &  
proceeded to get settled in during the evening.  
With charpoys in, nets fixed, effects  
disposed as required & "pin ups" & family  
photos displayed, the basha took on a  
more comfortable (?) air. It had one advantage  
in a plaited bamboo floor over the hard mud  
which kept dust from rising, & when swept  
presented a reasonably tidy appearance.

The setting was quite pleasant with trees around  
a pond beside the basha & another to the  
left-front. A patch of grass between ours  
& the next, about 25 ft wide - later to become  
our drying ground. The dining hall  
was a fairly lofty basha furnished with  
forms & mickety wooden tables & an earth floor.  
At nights a cluster of electric bulbs lit the  
room, provided that the "woog" operated generator  
plant was working! The cookhouse was  
adjacent - about 25 yds away - with a bamboo  
& thatch covered walk-way between. Kitchens



congregated in the surrounding trees to take snacks from the swill bin. Some more adventurous spirits would dive down & under the canopy & whip sausage, rasher, or meat from an unsuspecting airman's plate. Some of whom in their startled amazement would drop the rest of the food & then swear like the clappers whilst other & more fortunate people uttered derisive comments, not exactly sympathetic. Tea was obtained from urns on a form just outside the dining basha, where flies would hum & fly in clouds at times. As the urns emptied raucous cries of "Char-nup", "what-abahit some — chav" etc, etc., would be heard, & out would come two native boys staggering with a full & scalding hot urn, urged by cries of "jildi" "Cahmon" etc. At tiffin and dinner a fruit wallah was always present, crying the perfection of his wares. When the rainy season came ravens took the place of kitchawks which all seemed to go away. The ravens were not so bold as the hawks but far more noisy, their raucous cries tearing the air from about 6 AM till dusk.

We developed the ablutions at the bashing to a high standard. There was a 50 gall oil drum which was filled each day by the leaves. We had two fire buckets & a small half-drum. The stirrup pump was rigged over a convenient tree bough with nozzle end fixed in a perforated tin so to form an effective shower. One day, after Anson's had been grounded as obsolete, several of these planes were brought to the R.S.V. dump for dismantling, we found an astro dome in square wooden hatch complete, which, inverted, suggested a good wash bowl. Bringing it away on a day when transport was scarce we thumbed an approaching jeep which, when it



stopped for us, was found to be driven by a Wing Commander. He looked interestedly at our bundles but said nothing. Soon it was established at the basha on four substantial legs, & had a waste pipe fitted very technically by Eddie Winterbottom who had, in fact, been the foreman procured in the whole affair.

As, when we first arrived, darkness came early in the evening, & no lamps were available, the only light we had was from candles which we bought ourselves. So as there were several servicable, but unused 'chove horses' lying around these gradually disappeared from the <sup>Electric</sup> Section & as mysteriously appeared on the Domestic site, hidden in slit trenches, behind ruined walls &c. Wires were fixed & 24 Volt bulbs appeared from nowhere and at sunset the purr of the <sup>small</sup> <sup>alternating</sup> motors would be heard & lights would come on in the bashas!

Later, when rumours that we might be moving began to circulate, they were all collected and returned to the section. Came a period of candle light, then hurricane lanterns were issued at the rate of three per Basha & I got one.

After a while a portable generator was operated from M.T. Section and the Bashas furnished with wires to feed 3 bulbs, which supplemented the oil lamps gave us reasonable light.



## Comilla Highspots.

- The Parachute Inn.
- The Great Fancy Park Variety.
- The Town.
- The Yankee Camp Cinema.
- The Power house fire.
- The Sergeant's Site fire.
- The "Phoenix" Cinema
- The Picture Palace. Camp.
- Native Festivals & childrens collection day.
- Town buses, cycle gharnies, Coolies.
- The five week rest!

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FAMILY PASSA**

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Comilla Highways.

The Parachute Inn.



JUST AN INDIAN TRAIN, but it means a tremendous lot to the boys you see aboard. It's the "Repat Special" from Comilla. Those happy passengers are on their way home now.



## Burmese Interlude

On 24<sup>th</sup> May one of our Dakotas had landed at MAGWE airstrip but, unable to start the engines again, signalled for a fitter to come down & fix the motors. I was detailed on Friday afternoon to fly down & see what the trouble was, taking with me another fitter & an Electrician, the trip to commence early in the morning of Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> May.

I was called at 03.30 hrs on 26<sup>th</sup> & proceeded to the Base of the second fitter &, after waking the wrong bloke, got him up. Taking my small kit of tools, & with my mug, I went to Cookhouse where two sleeping I.O.Rs were getting things organised for B.O.Rs breakfast later. All I got to start the day on was a mug of tea. In the dark of a wet morning I went to the Guard Room, where the three of us were to meet, to connect with the 04.30 gham for the airstrip.

The truck was late in getting away & we arrived at the Flight Office at 05.10 but no-one there seemed to know which plane was to go to MAGWE. In the meantime the Electrician went to his Section & secured a fresh generator & two aircraft batteries in case we should need them. It was then discovered that DAKOTA 207 was to be our ferry & the crew came along & we got aboard to find about 30 B.O.R re-inforcements inside, bound for Meiktila. We loaded our kit aboard & soon the engines were started & run-up & we taxied off around the track to the northern end of the airstrip.

We were airborne in the dawnlight, rather grey, at 06.45 hrs & were soon headed S.S.E. towards the Chin Hills. Starting off at about 2,000 feet flying over the endless rice fields & scattered villages



the Bengali Plain, we climbed finally to 4,000  
ft on approaching the jungle territory & the tree  
covered slopes of the Chin range. As we  
crossed the hill range conditions became very  
bumpy & the aircraft lurched & fell, with the  
heavy load, alarmingly & often my stomach  
seemed to be in my throat. Over to Burma.

On the far side of the hills weather  
conditions improved and it became sunny in  
patches, the sky getting clearer each mile we  
flew on. Below we could see scattered villages,  
and cattle turned out to graze. The land was  
seen to be more under cultivation. Evidences  
of the battles fought on this terrain became  
apparent in bomb cratered ground half &  
fully burnt out villages, burnt & semi-  
demolished temples and pagodas. Various  
types of crashed & burnt out aircraft could  
also be seen.

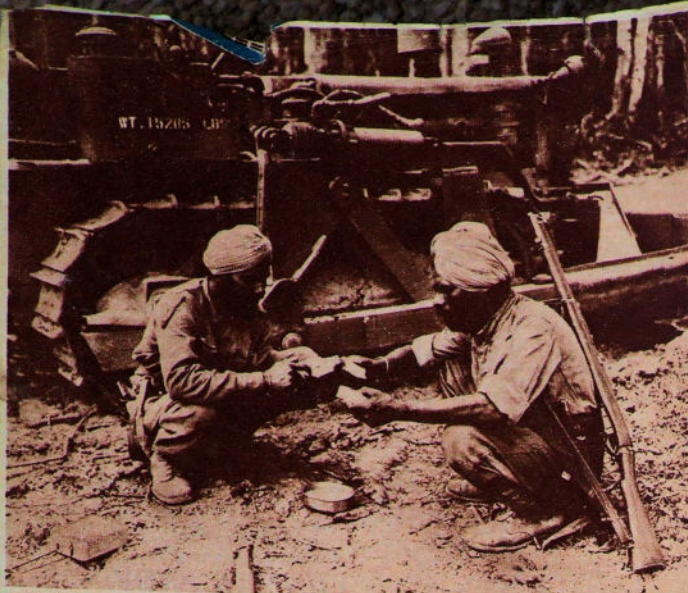
Soon the scattered buildings of MEIK TILIA  
came into view below and we made two circuits,  
giving height before the flaps were lowered & props  
reversed for the landing on the airstrip.  
We stayed for ten minutes to unload the  
refers, then at 07.50 we took off again for MAGWE,  
a little to the south & west. We flew on,  
smoothly, in the sun, for half an hour, over  
country similar to the approach to Meiktila, and  
touched down at MAGWE at 08.35 hrs.  
On disembarking we looked around for our  
patient but only two Douglas C46 "Commandos,"  
loading stores, and a silver U.S. Mitchell  
belly-landed & pranged beside the airstrip, were to  
be seen. The Flying Controller came over &  
told our crew that 263, or 'case', had got airborne  
10 minutes earlier, having had its batteries





NG AMPHIBIOUS RESOURCES, needed in other theatres, batten had to abandon plan of assault by sea on Rangoon and his forces by air and foot into northern Burma from India and China, then down the river valleys. This pressure made it possible for Indian 15th Corps troops to land at Akyab and on Ramree Island. Rangoon, Burma's biggest city and harbor, is ultimate goal.





**SIKHS** of the Indian Engineers have lunch by their bulldozer. In the north Burma fighting the Allies often built their roads as they went.



**HILL TRIBESMEN** have been a valuable part of the polyglot Allied forces. These are Kachins under British command, first-rate fighters.

American, West African, East African, Nagas, Kachin, and Chin troops.

Primarily it was and is a British operation. An estimated two-thirds of the forces in Burma are drawn from the Indian Army. But many of the Indian divisions contain in turn a large proportion of United Kingdom troops and all have some British element. The Chinese 1st Army which is commanded by Lt.-Gen. Dan Sultan, an American, is predominantly Chinese but also has American, Indian and British units.

The difficulties before Mountbatten were immense. The Japanese were standing across the India border in the Manipur Hills. They had good communications by road and rail up the Irrawaddy Valley from Rangoon. The decision was to strike at the heart of the enemy in north Burma by attempting to take the towns of Mogaung and Myitkyina and then pushing southward. The campaign was necessarily complex since the mountains in the north split the field of battle into three. It meant terrible marches and extensive use of air supplies but it was carried through. During the long months of 1944 the Allied forces battered their way into the key objectives. As they were taken the strain eased. Captured airfields widened the use of air power for attack and for transport. Allied planes, British, American and Canadian, made the Mandalay rail line almost unusable for the enemy by destroying the majority of the Japanese locomotives.

As the Allies advanced, work on the Ledo Road under the direction of U.S. Army engineers went forward, keeping close behind the troops. Mogaung and Myitkyina fell. Finally Mountbatten was able to report that the first part of the task allotted him at the Quebec conference was complete. A land supply route to China was open—the combined Ledo-Burma road which was renamed the Stilwell Road. Mountbatten's troops, spearheaded by Lt.-Gen. Sir William Slim's 14th Army hammered on towards Mandalay and the ultimate goal of Rangoon.

The achievement in Burma is a classic example of effective Allied teamwork. Part of the success is attributable to fighting by the Chinese on the Upper Salween river. Not directly a part of the Burma campaign, this operation in southwest China has been a big drain on the Japanese forces.

As a whole the Burma campaign has been a striking defeat for Tokio. Mountbatten's strategy left thousands of enemy troops to wither in the jungles and mountains, cut off from their supplies. Other thousands have been killed in battle. At the last estimated it was believed that only 160,000 Japanese were left in Burma, not more than 90,000 of them combat troops. For these future prospects are glum. A few might retreat through the mountain passes into Thailand. The majority will be pushed south with the choice of fighting until overwhelmed or attempting a doubtful sea evacuation through waters

where Allied naval strength is growing steadily greater. Those who flee may reach Malaya but they will have to leave their heavy equipment behind as the Allies did when they retreated into India.

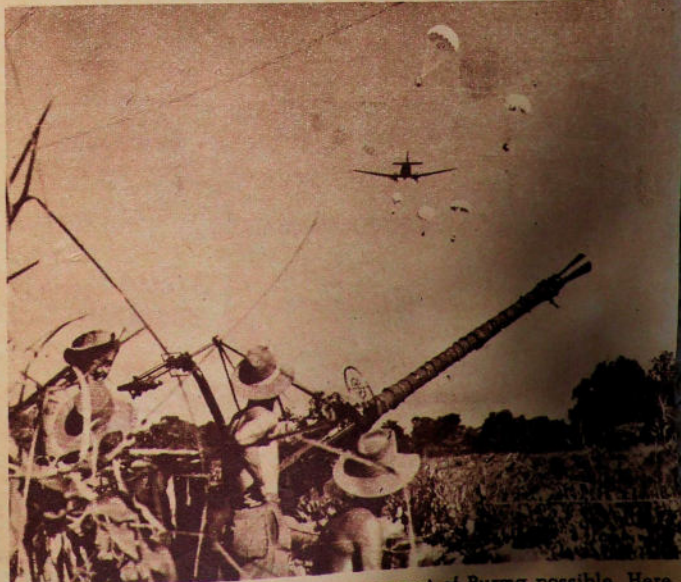
Burma itself is a prize plum for the Japanese to lose for it was the greatest rice-exporting nation of the world. It has, though not in great quantities.

Most important is its loss as a theatre of military operations but rivaling this is the blow to prestige for the Japanese. In Burma they have tried their hardest to show themselves as benevolent liberators. They have worked cleverly with the strong nationalist group in Burma which wishes ardently to be completely free of Britain and they have left home affairs to the Burmese as much as possible—as long as that administration did not encroach on Japanese needs. The Burmese have been allowed their legislature and their government machinery.

Full effects of this political campaign will not be known until all Burma is freed of the Japanese. But there are indications that it has been far from a full success. As they advanced the Allies have received increasing aid from Burmese guerrillas. Throughout the three years of warfare the hill tribes have stayed loyal to the British and fought well for them. And the Burmese themselves are closer in race and in spirit to the Chinese than to the Japanese.



**WITH** little publicity, RCAF took part in campaign. WO Bob Owen, Calgary, and F/O Mal Beverly, Toronto, watch work on air strip.



**SUPPLIES** by air have made the re-conquest of Burma possible. Here an RAF plane parachutes material to East Africans of the 1st East African Army.



charged on the unit generator. Flat batteries having, apparently been the cause of the trouble. (? why did they not use hand-starters?)

However, we strolled over to the Canten in charge of two blonde bombshells of W.V.S. for a snack, but they were busy rationing up aircraft & could get nothing ready for us inside half-an-hour. So we climbed back into our kite, with an American bod & a R.A.F. M.O. both of whom wanted a lift to Comilla, & we were airborne again ten minutes after landing &, with a following wind, had an uneventful trip back to Comilla, except for a bumpy session over the Chin Hills. We circled Comilla town & touched down on the airstrip at 11.00 hrs. Having reported results at the Section Office, we had the rest of the day off.



Forward to South Australia — ADELAIDE

Work finished officially at Comilla at 15.00hrs on Friday 6th July, from then until the morning of 9th August was a holiday, (with pay + 3 meals a day) spent in the main in sunbathing on the charpoys outside baskas, or in such minor pursuits as fishing, flying kites, country walks, or sleeping! Then at last the gear came through — on Wednesday 8th Aug. we were paraded in the Cinema at 09.00hrs to receive final movement instructions. Returning to billet we made adjustments in kit packing + then carried all our kit ~~except~~ hand luggage to Recreation Hut from whence Baggage Party collected it at 13.30hrs + it was taken to Comilla Station, placed in Baggage Car + sealed.

On Thursday 9th we were roused between 4 + 5am (raining, of course) + went to NO.1. Camp by gharry with hand luggage, for breakfast 6.30. (900 Wing Cooks failed to rise to the occasion + our own boys tucked in to the job.) It was pouring in earnest when, by Parties, we embarked on gharries to Comilla Station, arriving at 7.15. We stood about on the open trackside until all parties were present, then were told to get aboard a train standing across the tracks. Coolies swarmed about cajoling to be allowed to carry our baggage. We were on board at 07.55. all pals happily together — plenty of room. Having got nicely settled, the SWO appeared yelling "All out, which your kit"! Amid howls + groans of "Stead's booted again" we fell in in Parties on the track side, + were then re-entrained NO.1 Party first + so on. Fortunately, I + NO.4 + Eddy + Terry + NO.5 were in the same coach, as previously, so we were quite satisfied. We got settled again + were besieged by chikhs clamouring "Canteen Char. sahib" wanting to get tea from the canteen or to fill our water bottles at the D.W. containers — "Pahni, sahib" at 09.20 the train pulled out, with cheers, from Comilla, that



"jewel" in Bengal Plain. As we went through never ending paddy fields & wooded flat land. We stopped at Kalmatai for a few moments for an up train to clear the single-line track, then on to Haksam. Here we stopped for about 1/2 hour. Chikhs, beggar men, old hags all clamoured for "bushshees" the palm extended in intreaty. On the platform a woman & some chikhs squatted with bundles of their worldly goods & chattels. Suddenly she opened a basket, shaped like a drum, & pulled out two cobras, each about 5' in length, & proceeded "charming" & teasing them. They reared up & swayed rhythmically to movements of her hands, then struck at her arms, or head, as she moved. She picked them up & brought them near for us to see, for a few annas. Vendors of pea nuts, chaw, cakes, & "bananis, sahib" patrolled the train. From thence we went on to Chandpur, the terminus on the wide Ganges. All the way along the route, children ran out from villages, or were already stationed, on the embankment calling for bushshees, & many a tin of cheese & package of biscuits, sweets, cigarettes etc, found a pleased possessor. As we got nearer to the Ganges there seemed to be more water in the rice fields & natives worked from shallow canoe-like boats or hollowed logs, standing waist deep to cut the rice. Flax grew plentifully here.

At Chandpur we were besieged by coolies long before the train had stopped, & when we had disembarked women peddled hawked walloos & sheath knives etc., at profiteering prices. By dint of much haggling some tinus goods were bought at lower prices. We were served a free meal of bacon, beans, potatoes, roti, fruit salad & cream, tea, a good meal. We also had 10 Woodbines & 1 box matches issued. We then picked up our kit



by parties - went over to the landing stage & embarked on the flat bottomed, two decked, paddle steam ferry BELUCHI for our up-river trip to the rail head at Chotaland Ghat. We found a good position at the stern on starboard side & on the upper deck & dug-in for the journey, and watched the activity on the water. Countless sampans were tied up along the riverside - natives were cooking khana on small wood & coal stoves, or dhobi-ing, & washing themselves. Sampans & sailing junks were proceeding hither & thither with various cargoes - steam ferries went by on the main stream. Small boys were swimming in the fast flowing water & climbed up on the ferry. Calling for 'buckskins' before diving or jumping from the upper deck or the canopy 20 feet odd down into the river. After a while we were sent ashore to carry bits & stores aboard from the railway trucks. This was soon accomplished with the number of men available, plus coolies, & we steamed away at 15.10 hrs. heading upstream against a strong stream. The river was miles wide all the way up - we hugged the right hand shore. Passing innumerable villages & compounds, the natives coming out to see us passing, never ending rice fields stretching away to the horizon with never a hill in sight! We passed all sorts of native craft on the way up, some fishing, some carrying loads of live bullocks. At length it got dark & the sun set & we composed ourselves on monsoon cafes on the hard deck to get what sleep we could. At last, after 14 hours of steamer travel we pulled in & docked at Chotaland Ghat - almost before we had tied up the ferry was besieged by coolies, from tiny chikhs to grey beards.



10.8.45 at 04.30<sup>AM</sup> we disembarked & found our train waiting alongside the stage. Dumping our belongings in a coach we proceeded to free breakfast at the staging canteen. Stewed minced mutton & boiled potatoes at 05.15 hrs did not appeal though! On returning to the train we were sent to the ferry to unload the kit & stores & place them aboard the train. The train pulled out at 7.7c & slowly drew out to the commencement of the single line towards Calcutta. Chikhis & bibis ran alongside the slow moving train begging, showing amazing powers of endurance, yet stopping to salute & give "salaam sahib" when receiving "buckshies".

The train went on through nice & flat country, with never a hill to be seen, until as we got further towards Calcutta denser wooded tracts of land appeared, then the double & treble tracks started & larger stations & towns were passed. Every where we stopped children clamoured for buckshies. At last, tired & dirty we arrived at Calcutta at 13.45 hrs & were whisked away in ghanis to NO.5-PDC situated in a College whose vast buildings were given over as quarters to units in transit. Here we had an excellent dinner & then were conveyed to a newly built & very comfortable camp - NO.35 PDC New Camp in <sup>Stave Road.</sup> Here, after the discomforts of Comilla we found, concrete floored, brick bungalows with electric light & fans fixed to ceiling, working day & night. Showers, full washing facilities with water on tap.

after a shower, shave, & tea we went into Calcutta, dazzled by lights, made giddy by fast motor traffic, dazzled by the sight of so many well dressed women, white & half-caste



and the sight of brilliantly lit shops full of all the merchandises one could want, besides the markets & bazaars offering many tempting articles which could be obtained, after chaffering at prices far below first quote.

The white electric trams - one leading & coupled to a driver with trolley arm on top, trailing - were a new sight. To walk on paved streets & smell the tree scented air was a fine relief from Comilla's stench. The open & closed taxis - all high powered American cars - tore about at what seemed to be incredible speeds. Horse drawn & ancient gharrys, & rickshas, plied for hire. Highly decorative native omnibuses, too, toured various routes. Double deckers looked positively dangerous with innumerable natives packed inside, standing on stairs, on rear platform & even clambering & hanging on to the two steps to the rear platform. The Indian native seems to have an illimitable capacity for over loading any sort of public conveyance or train. We walked back to camp - about  $3\frac{1}{2}$  miles of strange ground - but my navigation was true. On the way we had a real iced drink.

11.8.45

Rumours of Japanese surrender  
Parade 09.00hrs but immediately dismissed for 24 hours. Papers gave notice of Japanese Peace moves - no sign of celebration anywhere. Huddled around reading all morning. It rained all afternoon & kept us confined to charpoys. After tea by tram to Chowringhee & Esplanade. Did some shop crawling, booked seats at ELITE cinema for second house 7% & wandered around bookshops & stalls. Had first ice cream for 5 years at MAGNOLIA Soda Bar. After the film 11.40 PM. we found trams had ceased to run so had a long walk back to camp arriving at 12.30 PM.



Sunday 12.8.45. We were awakened at 07.00 hrs by the Chav wallah calling 'Chav' through the basha. Parade at 09.00 hrs set us free for another 24 hours. The morning was spent dozing & reading in the coolness of the basha. In the afternoon we went to Victoria Swimming Pool - behind the Victoria Memorial. This open air bath was large, the water clean & soft, and very warm. The depths were from 2' to 12' & coconut matted pontoons or diving stages were placed at intervals along the sides. A floating platform, huge water ball, & a water-polo ball provided great fun. We spent nearly three hours in the water & thoroughly enjoyed every minute there. Refreshments were obtainable at very reasonable prices at a canteen within the enclosure - including iced fancy cakes, chocolate eclairs etc, things not seen these many years. We regretfully came out about 5½c & came back to camp by ricksha - a new experience. Tired, we spent the evening in writing.

Monday 13th Aug. Parade 09.00 hrs - some duty details & restriction on those not engaged, namely that no one could leave camp till 13.00 hrs. The morning was spent reading & writing. After tiffin we booked out of camp and thumbed a ride on a Bagal Police tender towards Chowringhee. We walked then along lower Arinlar Road & Victoria Gardens to Victoria Pool. Spent the afternoon swimming & plunging and sunbathing. Then, after refreshments at the canteen, went by tram to Esplanade & to the luxurious LIGHTHOUSE Cinema to see Laurence Olivier's "King Henry V<sup>th</sup>". Afterwards to shops & stalls for presents and had a good time beating down the prices before purchasing. Tram to Park Circus & walked the rest back to billet. At night hundreds of natives produce mats, pieces of canvas, blankets etc, & stretch out to sleep



the night in shop porches, on the pavements under the covered shop approaches or on shelves of masonry on fronts of buildings. Thus it costs them only the price of food to live. They wash under street pumps & apparently earn their living by begging, coolie work & so on. In the lesser main & fly streets, horses & foals, bullocks & water buffaloes & calves walk placidly about on the pavements & sleep anywhere.

Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> Aug. On guard at B.H.Q. from noon until noon on Wednesday 15<sup>th</sup>. Spent Wednesday afternoon at the Victoria Pool. Early to bed.

Thursday 16<sup>th</sup> Aug. Rainy day. To Alipore Zoological Gardens in the afternoon.

Friday 17<sup>th</sup> Aug. Rainy day. To town late afternoon to go to Cinema but all full. Reading in Wesleyan Rest Room & then early to bed.

Saturday 18<sup>th</sup> Aug. Rainy day.

Up to Monday 10<sup>th</sup> Sept. days were uneventful & were passed in swimming, sunbathing, reading & shopping. On one afternoon we visited the Kalighat Temple. Walking to Ballygunge we travelled by wog bus to Kalighat & were directed to the temple which was situated up a side street. Thousands of Indians of all states of prosperity were going to and from the temple. Many shops were in the area and coloured images of the goddess KALI were on show. Two or three Indians approached us claiming to be temple priests, although they seemed to be serving at the stalls on our arrival. However, we followed one and he showed us the temple entrance. Europeans are forbidden to enter. Then he showed us a small opening or tunnel under the temple from which trickled some reddish, dirty looking



water, which Indians dabbled their hands in & touched their faces. He said this was sacred Ganges water which bubbled up under the feet of the Goddess & was drained off through the outer opening. As we went on we passed a small ornamental shrine in which offerings of flowers were placed. This was to the quality of knowledge. Further on we came to an open court & in a railed in plot of ground was a stunted tree, on the branches of which hundreds of stones & pieces of broken earthenware were tied with human hair. This was explained as follows - when a woman hopes for a child when married, she receives a mark in pigment in the parting of her hair to show she is married, then when she has a child she comes & gives thanks buying flowers - red if she has a red mark on forehead & parting, (meat eater), (yellow - (if non-meat-eater), accordingly, and places them before the goddess then she goes to the tree & with strands of her hair ties a "remembrance offering" on the tree.

Set in the court are many flower stalls selling garlands & bunches of flowers of different colours for different sects & for various purposes.

Many marble memorials are set into the tiled floor of the court to various noted Indians. Further round we saw the stand on which the goats are sacrificed. One had recently been killed as blood & much were all around the stand & the carcass, cut into small sections was nearby. Hopeful looking dogs wandered in for out among the chattering throng of people. Then we saw the rest house which is open for pilgrims who travel



from outlying places. They are housed in this hostel for three days. That was the end of the tour - we each handed the "priest" some annas, but he was not grateful & pointed out that "American gentlemen give five, six & seven rupees for temple funds", we told him it was too bad we were only English airmen, and got away into the crowd again. There were all sorts of mendicants about, singing for alms, blind, crippled, horribly deformed creatures, fakirs, all begging. Large bathing tanks were nearby the temple.

On Monday 10<sup>th</sup> September we were instructed to pack our deep sea kitbags for despatch to ship & we heard we were to leave on Wednesday. However our departure was delayed & we had the bags back on 16<sup>th</sup>, eventually they went away on Monday 24<sup>th</sup>, to the No 1. Verandah and on Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> they were loaded on the S.S. SONTAY at the dock.

Thurs. 27-Sept. We paraded at 8.30 & were told to be ready with hand baggage for roll call & move off at 10.30. Between then & noon we were conveyed by trucks to No. 16 Wharf Shed, Prinsep Dock and the roll was called again & Berthing Cards issued - No 2 Mess Deck - Table 31. We then proceeded to negotiate the gang-plank to board the "SONTAY", an oil burning steamer of about 9,000 tons, once German, since French & now "owned" by the R.A.F. for this trip. The "gang" managed to get together again. Conditions below were indescribably crowded, there being no room for laying out one's personal kit as in a billet. The mess deck constituted our dwelling & hammocks were swung over the tables, baggage going upon



racks or on the floor. Fortunately, cool fresh air was introduced under pressure through big ducts throughout the troop decks which prevented them from becoming fetid or close. The portholes were unmasked - I am added blessing now no need for black out exists. Having sorted ourselves out we heard food was being served, taking our plates & "irons" we sought the galley & were served with a good dinner. A little later we learned that dinner had not been laid on for us, so we had that meal under false pretences. After sticking around on deck watching the various traffic of the Hooghly & imbibing cold drinks from the ship's canteen, put up hammocks & went to bed at 9:30 - sleeping very well in spite of being closely packed.

Frid. 28/Sept. Up at 5:30. Had cold shower then a good breakfast. We moved away from the docks at 7 AM. & slowly drifted stern first downstream passing many factories, shipyards, docks, & basins on the way. Several incoming English & American ships passed us. I saw the Ellerman - City Line's "City of Barcelona" moored to a dock. There was the hull of another vessel, at a dock, lying semi-submerged and on its side but lifting gaintrees had been built on the hull so that it could be pulled right side up preparatory to pumping, lifting & moving it away. Dredgers were at work clearing the silting from dock fronts at 10 A.M. We were given preliminary lifeboat drill, which consisted of assembling on No 2 (forehold) hatch covers wearing life jackets. At 5 P.M. after having proceeded down the river about 12 miles - the right way round now - past green lined banks



with factories, wharves, clusters of huts & so on on the low banks, we moved up at a Burma-Shell Fuel Oil Depot, & stayed there refuelling, until 5.30 A.M. on Saturday 29th. We steamed on downstream the river widening as we went - the navigable channel bringing us at times close in to the banks - one side or the other. Gummy mills & other factories were situated at wide intervals. Fishermen in small canoe-like boats were catching quite large fish in nets set across the muddy river. At about 10.4 A.M. we dropped anchor again as we had arrived in the estuary & apparently the ship required to wait for high tide in the afternoon to clear the sandbar at the river mouth. We sailed on about 5.30 & were really at sea in the proper sense at about 6 P.M. We saw a steamer which had, apparently, become fast on the sand bar & learnt it had been there several months. At sea there was a slight swell which increased with a light wind during the night, consequently in the morning there was appreciable motion in the ship & many beds did not require breakfast (eggs & bacon, too) & were confined to the latrines or looking woe-begone at the leeward rail! Later in the day the wind fell away & the sea calmed a little. There were sudden showers of rain but sunny periods between.

Sun 30th Sept.

Sunny, with rainy squalls. No land or ship in sight all day. Saw some dolphins playing a hundred yards or so away from port-side.

Monday 1st October.

Fine & warm all day. Saw some flying fish. Sunbathing on deck all day. Stars clear at night, the masts, funnel & rigging black



against the purplegray of the night-sky, and the stars. Only the masthead & navigation lights were visible from the fo'ble. No land

seen, but occasional vessels passed us, until 4 P.M. on Wednesday when a lighthouse was sighted on the starboard side & later, at 5-15 we could see land again.

Passing southwards and around the foot of Ceylon during the night we approached Colombo about 7 AM on 4th October.

The sun shone brightly on the blue water & we could see a beach with trees, with bungalows & other low buildings reaching close to the water's edge. Further along towards the harbour were tall, many windowed buildings which suggested commercial or government offices. A big sea wall protected the harbour

moorings & from where we approached we could see the waves breaking over it. Later in the morning we anchored, with other boats, in the roadstead & waited for the Port authorities to come aboard. Later the Pilot launch came out

but the swell was too heavy to allow the Port Officer to come aboard. We anchored near

a wreck, the masts of which showed above water to mark its position. After dinner we moved

in & passing the arm of the sea wall were in sheltered water amid a miscellany of craft.

The Colombo Harbour Tug "HERCULES" came alongside to manoeuvre us into position to pass other craft without damage. The basin was very

full with several cargo vessels, a troop ship "DUCHESS OF RICHMOND" which later moved out

for Singapore with 3000 R.A.F. personnel on board, two Blue Funnel liners - one the "THEMISTOCLES",

a motor ship or so, two flat-tops (escort carriers - one with SEAFIRES on board), some corvettes, sloops, destroyers, light cruisers



etc., as well as innumerable motor & steam launches, tugs etc. With the aid of boostings from "HERCULES" we were manoeuvred into the refuelling dock. Ahead of us was a dry dock with a light cruiser in it undergoing repairs. Hard by were sunken wrecks, one, a cargo steamer was on an even keel & sunk almost flush with the main deck, the other was an oil tanker sunk with a heavy list to port with main deck fully under water. There was much building activity going on all around & dredgers, stone crushers, pneumatic drills, & cranes were all adding to the din of sirens, whistles & klaxons as well as exhausts of motor boats. Towards 4 P.M. the C.W. Co's tug "LADY INCHCAPE" came alongside drawing three fresh water tankers to replenish our tanks. During the afternoon people with time off came sailing around the harbour basins in small sailing dinghys. Out at sea, beyond the harbour wall were square railed fishing boats with outriggers. At night all the electric lights on the boats & harbour works, along the dry-dockside, & the navigation lights on small craft moving about within the harbour made the scene delightful. In the morning light, a small English church on a grassy knoll, surrounded by trees, made an almost English scene - the effect being broken by a nearly fringe of palm trees. At 3 P.M. on Friday 5<sup>th</sup> October we cast off from the quay and, aided again by "HERCULES" made our way out to sea again. As we drew away from Colombo harbour a french cruiser approached & entered. Then out in the roadstead & the blue water we sailed on for Fremantle.



We crossed the equator early on Sunday 7<sup>th</sup> October, but there was no event on board to mark the occasion. It was sunny with a fresh wind. A simple O.D. service was held in the 1<sup>st</sup> saloon by an Australian F/O & the address was given by an Australian W/O.

8<sup>th</sup> - 10<sup>th</sup> October. Cloudy & cool, with sunny periods. No sight of land or ship or other life except some flying fish. Slight swell on sea.

11<sup>th</sup> October - speed reduced owing to some trouble with the ship - said to be prop shaft bearing giving out! Sunny & warm. Saw some gulls due to the fact that we were passing the vicinity of Cocos Islands. The moon & stars were brilliant at night.

FRI. 12<sup>th</sup> October. Sunny. Slight swell. Warm in day but cold at night. In the morning the deck hands built a boxing ring & in the afternoon various Squadron personnel gave short exhibition bouts & some Australians put the gloves on for a while. Then an exhibition of all-in wrestling was given by two husky Australians, which was made very amusing by their imitation fouls & pretences of fear of each other.

Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> similar day.

Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> Oct. Stiff head wind had whipped the sea into foaming crests & there was some appreciable pitching. Service was held again - as for the previous Sunday & well attended. The high sea & wind continued overnight & most of the next day.

Wed. 17<sup>th</sup> Oct. Sunny & warm, sea smooth.

Sighted two ships, one in morning & one in afternoon. At 6.30 P.M. saw the flash of a lighthouse dead ahead - welcoming us to Western Australia.



Later in the evening the glimmering of shore lights made a faery scene & we drew in to the roadsides outside Fremantle & dropped anchor for the night. The Australian personnel on board were up on deck & perched on any point of vantage to view their homeland, foreccastle head, gun turrets, lifeboats, in fact all 'verboten' places had their happy occupants, and they stayed on deck talking & singing in the moonlight till 10 & near 11.

Thursday 18th October. At just after 8 AM the anchors were drawn up and the Fremantle Harbour Tug 'IVANHOE' came out and assisted our vessel into the Swan River & we berthed on North Quay at 9.30. As we approached our mooring we could see the dockside was already crowded with waving, shouting, people - awaiting some W.A. Air Force Aircrew w/o. As we approached our berth the hands on boats we passed assembled on decks & rigging & waved & shouted. We were ensconced in lifeboats, on winches, life-rafts, rigging, cargo derricks, booms & in fact on any coign of vantage to see the goings on below. I was on a derrick support about a quarter of the way up the foremast, with Edolie. The people below were waving & cheering & the women were literally dancing for joy. We thought some at the edge of the quay would fall in, especially one, with a child in her arms, danced up and down & it seemed that at any moment the unfortunate infant would be precipitated into the water. A Royal A.A.F. Band was playing well known tunes, including 'Home, sweet home'. As we tied up the National Anthem was played. Then the cheering started again - one man was exhibiting a placard with 'Joe' on it, & on the ship an Australian hung out a flag with Joe on it so that in their case identification was easy.



H. M. T. "SONTAY",

THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT 1661952. LAC. PIERCE,

No. 238, Squadron, R.A.F. crossed the Equator at Longitude

85° 35' East, on the 7th October, 1945, at 14.00 hrs.

P. J. J. MASTER.

Later in the evening the glimmering of shore lights made a fairy scene & we drew him to the roadster

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bonlight

the anchors  
Tug "IVANHOE"  
Swan River

we approached  
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W.A.

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that in their case identification was easy.



I climbed down from my elevated position & went aft to the deck where the gang-plank was laid & watched the happy re-unions among the families & friends of the Western Australians - truly a very touching sight.

After watching this scene a whisper ran around the ship of "shore liberty". The rumour began to gain strength so I quickly washed & shaved & got my "blue" out. While I was finishing my toilet the word began to spread that we were allowed ashore until midnight. Never have I seen the squadron rank & file move so quickly. Within a very few minutes there was a crocodile of blue clad figures streaming from the ship along the North Quay Road, & at 10 minutes to 11 on 18th October Eddie & I set foot on Australian soil. Our collars & ties felt like halters around our necks & "blue" seemed hot & heavy, after having lived in loose clothing & with open necks for so long. We walked part way, then thumbed a truck to the Perth-Fremantle Road & got a lift on another truck, already loaded with erks & officers, to Perth. We had a good time there looking around the shops & gardens & sightseeing generally. The Y.M.C.A. had free sandwiches & tea for us & the R.A.F. Rendez vous had arranged a party-dance & free refreshments in the evening. Thinking to see something of Fremantle in the short time available we went by bus from Perth to there but it was dark when we arrived & the town had closed down for the night. We went to a cinema & went back by train to the dock - the rail Co refusing to charge our fare. We arrived back on board at about 11.45, after a good sight of Perth, a leg-stretch, & also had changed



some of our Indian Money at the Commonwealth Bank.  
Friday 19th October. at 7.30 A.M. the tug

assisted us away from our mooring - we proceeded down the Swan River & out to sea again. As we moved out the swell increased and it grew colder and land fell away out of sight. To bed early as I was tired.

Saturday 20th Oct.

During the night we had veered to eastwards & the swell was catching us abeam - the ship did some hearty rolling from side to side as a change from the bow to stern pitching we had enjoyed previously. A cold and rainy day, spent mostly below decks. Huge albatrosses were circling the ship & gliding on wide spread wings above the surface of the heavy water. Away about a mile on the port bow early on in the morning we saw quite a big water-sport.

Sunday 21st October.

A sunny & warm day but with a heavy swell rolling the vessel. A well attended service was held in the saloon in the morning. Sunbathing & reading in the afternoon. In the morning a school whales surfaced & blew sprouts of water into the air. The albatross fly with the ship continually now, alighting on the water behind to eat from the scraps thrown overboard & through the scuttles.

Monday 22nd October.

Sunny but cool. No event or occurrence to note.

Tuesday 23rd October.

Cool, gray day. Received disembarkation instructions for the morrow. Packed away odds & ends. Handed in life jackets & generally prepared for disembarkation. Lighthouses began to come in sight at night.

Wednesday 24th.

at 7 A.M. we were well in towards the Outer Harbour at Port Adelaide & the I.C.I. Works & Gas



Electricity Buildings were belching exhaust steam in the morning sunlight by 8<sup>30</sup> we had been pushed & pulled to the Outer Harbour Jetty. While we were approaching the mooring, one of our DAKOTAS, with camouflage removed, gleaming silver in the sunlight proceeded to "shoot up" the ship, and very nearly knocked one of the tugs out of the sea, so low did the pilot bring his plane. On the wharf there was a crowd of people to welcome the returned Australians. A brass band of Australian Army played martial music & a running commentary of the whole disembarkation was made from a dockside microphone, over an Adelaide local wavelength. We got ashore at 10, several of the <sup>guys</sup> lads having come in on a truck to see us arrive, & after a roll call in the shed, were put on a special train which took us from Port Adelaide to Parafield -  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile from the R.A.A.F. Station, our new home. News of the arrival of the "pommies" had been broadcast earlier by press & radio and, accordingly all along the rail route people had turned out to welcome us. At every halt & station between Port Adelaide & Parafield there were cheering crowds, waving Allied flags & "Welcome" banners, & children from nearby schools lined the track & waved flags & yelled to us. At the door of every dwelling bordering the railway people were waiting to wave us a welcome. It really was a most moving reception & an introduction to the kindness & hospitality that was offered so widely to us during our stay.

The period of our sojourn terminated on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1946 when disbandment of 238(T) Squadron began in earnest with personnel flying away to various destinations some to England, others to Borneo, Burma, & other places in Australia. Loath to leave the good friends the comfortable homes that had been made open to me, the tennis, glorious sea bathing, the scenic beauties of the Mount Lofty Range, I had at last to emplane,



on Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> January, in silver DAKOTA KM 547, at 08.00 hrs for Marellan Personnel + M.T. Pool. It was a clear, sunny morning + Frank, just in from Adelaide on the 06.28 train, came to see me away. We took off at 08.20 hrs + headed into the sun, over the foothills of Mount Lofty, regretfully leaving the awakening city of Adelaide to starboard + rear.

We flew at 5-6,000 ft over dry + arid looking plain land, with plentifully treed areas of gum + eucalyptus. Later we saw the River below but apart from water holes at intervals, there was little water. Scattered + widely separated homesteads of the universally-used corrugated iron dotted the vast territory which we were covering at over 100 M.P.H. Just before mid-day our hitherto flat smooth flying was broken + bumpy conditions ensued for a period while we crossed the Mountains.

Great ridges of bare + scrubbed covered rock, with huge chasms and precipices between, loomed black in a haze of blue mist. Far down in the chasms water gleamed + betrayed the presence of some falls but the water was low + the falls a mere trickle. Beyond the mountains the land was less arid, + trees + home steads were more numerous.

Soon the Camden camp, airfield + town came into view + we made our circuit + a rather bumpy landing. After unloading our bits we were conveyed by truck to control + our manifest roll was called, then we went on by truck to the P + M.T. Pool camp at Marellan for lunch + to get settled into our tents.

Marellan camp was small + mostly a tent camp although "permanents" were housed in huts. Situated in undulating grazing land, well treed with gums + wattles, the view suggested English country side. After a few days here



spent in the main in doing small "camp fatigues",  
"dhobi"-ing, reading & writing, we were moved  
to tents at Camden R.A.F. Station & I went to work  
on a major inspection on a DAK. The Camp  
was dry & dusty & not very comfortable but I  
survived until, within 3 weeks, the news of my  
release came thro. The nearby town of Camden  
was pleasant with a comfortable Y.M.C.A. Canteen, and  
a "Paramount" Cinema. Nice shops & the nearby  
Nepean River, good for swimming, offered interest  
Friday Feb. 8th. On my way.

### "On the Boat"

8th Feb. 12.05 train Camden - change Campbelltown - change  
Liverpool, then with 2 kit bags, a suitcase & holdall.  
Fortunately the mail van conveyed me from Camden camp  
to Station. At Liverpool I had to change platforms for  
Sydney train. Arrived Sydney 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  on a different level  
to the main station, so, again had to make two journeys  
with my baggage, to left-luggage office. I had to go to  
Melbourne for accounts clearance. 6.30 P.M. Sleeper -  
but did not get a sleeper. The day had been fine but  
by 6.30 it was raining. Dark soon after leaving Sydney &  
I dozed uncomfortably. Arrived at Albury about 6.30 Sat 9th.  
Breakfast of sausages & mashed was laid on trestle tables at  
which we stood. About 7 $\frac{1}{2}$  the Melbourne train - different  
gauge, left. The day was bright & sunny & we reached Spencer  
Street Station at 12.10. Called at Head Office & got  
fixed up to stay with M<sup>r</sup> & M<sup>rs</sup> Felton for week-end. Cleared &  
paid at B.A.O. Tivoli Place on Monday 11th. Back to  
Sydney Tuesday/Wednesday 13th. Picked up kit &  
by train & taxi, arrived at Bradfield Park P.D. at  
Lindfield. It was raining & my hut was at the far  
end of the huge camp. Hut 113. Having notified O.R.  
my arrival I was given indefinite leave and 14 days ration



coupons & was able to spend time from 13<sup>th</sup> to 25<sup>th</sup> Feb in social engagements, visiting places of interest, surfing & swimming, with occasional Speedway visits. Then, on Monday 25<sup>th</sup> February, deep sea kit was dumped on the square for transit and we & our small baggage paraded & were conveyed to Woolloomoolloo Dock to embark on the "ORION" for England. We were on board before noon, had dinner on board & then were given leave until 07.30 on 26<sup>th</sup>. I went shopping & visiting & then slept at British Centre. Returned to the "ORION" at 06.45 & washed & changed before ship's breakfast. During the day various parties came aboard. Marines, Navy, W.R.N.S etc. In the afternoon people began to assemble on the dock to say goodbye to friends, the crowd increased until at 4.30 when gangways began to be lowered, there was a huge crowd of chattering, shouting & waving people. Streamers were constantly being thrown from shore to ship & from people on the vessel to friends below. In the high wind many miscarries & fell into the water but the side of the vessel was festooned with coloured streamers & even toilet rolls had been utilized. At 5<sup>1/2</sup> the tugs "HINDFIELD" & "HEROINE" took lines aboard and to strains of the bagpipes, cheers of the people & the National Anthem on ship's broadcast we broke away from our mooring & left many friends behind. A cry by one the streamers broke & handkerchiefs were produced, not always for waving as quivering chins & moist eyes betrayed the feelings of many on the dock side. Out into the sunlit harbour we were tugged & then we were under way towards the heads. On passing Fernies, on shore, people cheered & waved us farewell, and at last Sydney with all its lovely homes, its harbours, bridge & beaches was left behind as at 6.30 we passed between the famous Heads & were in the open sea. Too soon the twinkling lights of the



homes faded out of sight. At 7.30 all that remained to see was a glow in the sky - the cloud reflected lights of Sydney.

Wed. 27th Feb. Cold. High wind. Most of day below deck. hand in sight to starboard most of day. Put on deck sweeping. B. Deck. 5 P.M. each day. The wind did the job efficiently.

Thurs: 28th Warmer. Less wind. Calm. Nothing in sight all day.

Frid: 1st March. Warm. Sunbathing on C Deck. - Choir formed & practice held in Officers Ward Room lounge. 5.30

Sat. 2nd March. Warm - fresh later. Passed on Escort. Carrier proceeding to Sydney, & three submarines returning to England. Choir Practice Evg.

Sun. 3rd March. Ship rolling in heavy swell. C of E. room in A class lounge. Choir quite efficient. hand in sight in afternoon.

Monday 4th March. Docked at Fremantle at 8 A.M. Fine & sunny day. Told we could wear khaki or blue. Then blue to be worn. Amid much swearing the change was made. Then told khaki could be worn!! Slow business of getting off. Explored Fremantle & bought oddments. Had lunch in town & returned early to ship to watch the re-embarking. Marines & sailors very much under the weather staggered & stumbled aboard, some wearing great sunflowers. Some "out cold" carried aboard. In spite of it being emphasized that leave expired at 3 P.M. some people managed to get left behind when we sailed at 4.15 but a launch came alongside out in the river & they came up the "ladder" at ship's side. Three marines with 4 plants were very amusing. also one sailor trying to climb the steel houses. Into heavy swell at 4 P.M.

Tues. 5th. Fine & warm. Sunbathing & reading on open deck to see Concert Party Variety in Evening.

Wed 6th. Fine & sunny. Deck Sports Commenced.

Thursday 7th. Fine, hot. Calm sea. Sunbathing. Played Deck hockey in afternoon. Took part in Quiz Competition in evening & won 10/- portion of Team Prize. Winners.



Friday 8th March. Hot & humid. Choir Practice morning. Races in afternoon & other sports.

Sat. 9th. Hot & showery. To Cinema Evg. to see "Crazy House".

Sun. 10th. Hot. Bright sunlight. To Church Service in morning. Wrote letters evg. During night we crossed the equator.

Mon. 11th. Hot. Gen F.10. Mess Deck Fatigues. 2 steamers passed us during day.

Tuesday 12th March. About 9% land (Ceylon) came into sight and by 10 we could see Colombo. Native fishy vessels dotted the sea. An Ellerman Line Cargo vessel left the harbour as we entered. An American & a Canadian tanker lie outside. We entered the breakwater at noon & anchored to a buoy & at 1% the "ORION" was moored bow & stern to strong buoys in the basin not far from where we anchored with the "SONTAY" in Catoches last. The Ellerman "CITY OF LYONS" was moored about 200 yds to starboard & two hospital ships - "ATLANTIS" & "VASNA" to port. During the afternoon the various Port Authorities came aboard, Police, Health, Admiralty & the Colombo Water Coy's Official. The Tug "SINHABANDU" which had pushed us into mooring position went off about other business. The "hady Inchcape" crept out bringing tanker barges full of fresh water to replenish our tanks & refuellers also came alongside. Native fruit sellers rowed out but business was poor as ships radio warned us against purchasing their wares. Giving to "smallpox & shortage of food" we were not allowed ashore. Just before sunset the two tankers came in & anchored hard by.

Wed. 13th March. Although staying 48 hours here we were not allowed ashore the reason being given out over ship's broadcast system as due to smallpox and scarcity of food. Native watermen plying for hire to



the few whose business took them ashore seemed glad to eat bread & butter thrown out of the portholes to them. a slice of corned beef seemed to intrigue one native who poked & pushed it about like a monkey but his "colleague" jabbered angrily at him, probably telling him it was "unclean" so it went into the water. Another elderly native dived for silver thrown into the water, & surfacing popped all his winnings into his mouth, trusting not his own kind. Another row-boat came along to sell coconuts. Someone on board threw down a shilling for one but it fell short of the native's fingers. He shrugged with a characteristic gesture of resignation and dismissed the matter in spite of a lurid string of oaths from his customer. The customer hastily drew a bucket of water & slung it over the ship's rail to drench the "robbers" in the boat.

at 8 A.M. there was a loud report which echoed around the harbour. I thought it was a signal of shots fired from H.M.S. LONDON which was anchored astern of ORION but on looking over our rail I saw, about  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile away, debris flying in the air and flames & smoke enveloping a motor boat which was being towed by another. The petrol tank of the towed craft had obviously burst & flames & dense smoke rose from it as it sank. The towing craft unhitched & sheered off smartly. Soon nearby ships were squirting water from hoses at the fire & in a short while the two harbour tugs converged on the wreck & played foam hoses on the flames quenching the fire. When the wreckage sank the spot was marked with a buoy. "ATLANTIS" was hull down on the horizon by sun-up. "VASNA" moved to a berth ahead of us.

Thursday 14th. Hot & sunny. The cruiser H.M.S. LONDON sailed at 9 A.M. & the hospital ship VASNA



sailed soon afterwards. ORION sailed for Bombay at 4 P.M.  
Friday 15. Saturday 16. Sunday 17. Very hot & humid. Sea calm.

at 6.30 A.M. on Sunday I went on C Deck aft to an unnumbered moon was going down into the sea. Just as I saw it a native fishing cft crossed the "copper path" of moonlight reflected on the calm sea - made a perfect picture. Arrived off Bombay roadstead about 7 A.M. At 10 A.M. we anchored near the "Gateway of India" until at about 11 tugs began to manoeuvre us towards the Ballard Dock & eventually took us into Alexandra Dock, with "CITY OF KHIOS" "SAM FLORA" & "SOUTHERN PRINCE" as neighbours. We tied up at about 1 P.M. Shore leave was instituted as from 3 P.M. & arrangements were made for changing sterling into rupees at 21/6 for Rs 14. Went ashore & saw various interesting buildings. The city was much quieter and cleaner than Calcutta. The same wallets, cigarettes cases, clasp knives, local snaps and table runners were on sale from shops, stalls, and itinerant vendors. The buildings were far more ornate in the Indian style than those seen at other places, but the new office and flats were very modern & on severe lines.

At 5.25 P.M. I created personal history in walking through the Gateway of India. Wandered around looking for a Canteen. Found a YMCA, opposite the R.C. Pro-Cathedral & archbishop's Palace. Here it was necessary to buy coupons for the value of tea & cakes which were required. No big eats were laid on. Later I had a good meal at a Cafe. Walked up to Church Street & then along Marine Drive, the modern sea-front of flats.

Monday 18th } Ashore each day. Very hot, sunny days. Indians  
Tuesday 19th } Women - men fruit wallahs at dockside with  
Wednesday 20th } cans on string for money & transfer of fruit to  
Customers. Bread issue! Ring sellers. Watch sellers.  
Shoe blacks. Beggars. The "BRITANNIC" "CITY OF KHARTOUM"  
& "STRATHNAVER" came in & tied up ahead & beside us.  
Saw snake charmers. Mongoose & snake fights.



Thursday 21<sup>st</sup> March. Another hot & sunny day. About 11 A.M. the small tugs "HARDY" "HAPPY" "Ready" & "CHEERFUL" took our lines - two ahead & two astern & at 11.15 we began to ease away from dockside. The wogs & chikkos shouted & waved, as did the fruit vendors before picking up their impedimenta & transferring to pitches by the other ships. The tugs took us into Ballford hook at 12.15 & we stayed there until the water level was adjusted to tide then we proceeded under our own power at 12.50 to the open roadstead & the open sea. We dropped the Harbour Pilot at 1.30 & forged on in a calm sea.

22/24<sup>th</sup> Sunny, hot. Very calm sea. No ships or land to be seen. Occasional flying fish, & some larger fish breaking the surface some distance from the ship. Sunday morning 24<sup>th</sup> Church Service, well attended, was held on board. I began my five day tour as table & mess orderly. In the evening schools of whales surfaced & blew great sprays, fairly close to the ship. In the Arabian Sea.

Monday. 25<sup>th</sup>. In Gulf of Aden? Hot, sunny day. Several ships passed. at noon land came into sight on starboard - Yemen. In the evening the east african coast was seen to port & humps of arabia to starboard. Between 7 & 8 P.M. we passed the Island of Perim. lighthouse with brilliant beam. Lines passed us within  $\frac{1}{4}$  mile starboard. Southern cross still visible.

Tuesday. 26<sup>th</sup>. Cooler & cloudy. In Red Sea. at 10 A.M. the C.P. liner "Empress of Scotland" passed en route for Australia. In the afternoon the carrier "VICTORIOUS" also bound for Australia, passed us.

Wednesday 27<sup>th</sup>. Cooler, cloudy. In Red Sea, but would know no difference. No land in sight until evening.

Thursday 28<sup>th</sup>. Bright & sunny, but cooler. Entered Gulf of Suez and saw land on either side. Mysterious, arid land of sand & bare & wind riven mountains. The Island of Shadbach was passed, within about a mile. Bare & rocky. We could see Mount Sinai on the starboard side & were reminded of



the wanderings of the children of Israel & the Commandments. As night fell we drew into Port Suez - canal basin - and moored up for the night. Refuelling & watering took place during darkness. Traders in leather goods came out to sell their wares & were out again at dawn. <sup>29th</sup> Money before goods! Mast tied to ship's rail!! At 9 A.M. we got under way again and at 9.15 entered the canal itself, passing Tenzik on port beam. On the starboard side there was nothing much to see except deserted buildings & camps, and a rail track. On port side there were areas of cultivation & we saw several dromedaries, asses, & domestic animals in compounds. Fellaheen working on the land. There were numerous small breaches in the canal wall & these were having the attention of native masons. As we passed, at times one or another would claw his shirt above his waste to show his private parts of which they seemed inordinately proud, & then make obscene gestures with the same, or with arms, or even poles & sticks. At times piles of rusty shards - the remains of boats which have come to grief in the canal & been blown apart & dredged out - are piled on the side. Bollards are inset about every 100 yards to which ships tie up while priority craft, such as ours, go thro'. Several vessels tied up for us, including the "Docteur Broux", "Caterlake", "Bullaren". In the bitter lake a French trooper "Marechal Toffree" passed us. At intervals we passed Gare's sectional control stations. Swing bridges for rail traffic, pontoons taking road traffic. Occasional army camps, where troops came out to watch our passing & pass on comments & advice. <sup>- 2 Italian Warships in Bitter Lake</sup> It was very cold & sweaters, coats, "blue" & khaki came into use. Overnight we emerged from the canal into the Mediterranean. Saturday 30th Cold, gray & heavy swell. Sharp walking around deck. At 10.30 a party of seven of us were conducted down into the engine room & along the propeller shafts by the Engineer - found it all most interesting & complicated. Viewing oil fuel sprigging inside the fire & burning - seen thro' blue glass screen - was very interesting. Over the ship's broadcast



system, at 1.15 P.M. I was pleasantly surprised to hear a running commentary on the boat race. It came through with superlative clarity, about the huge crowd, the start, a close commentary throughout the whole race until OXFORD passed the post to win by 3 lengths in 19<sup>m</sup> 54<sup>s</sup>. We were in the Mediterranean Sea, probably southward of Crete, yet we heard every word, even the background of cheering & the exhaust noise of motor boats following the crew.

Sunday 31st March. Sunny - warmer. Well attended service on board. The choir rendered "God so loved the World" as an anthem. Between 9-10 A.M. the Orient Lines "ORONTES" passed us to port, en route for Australia. "ORION" ran signals to her Masthead & dipped the red ensign in salute & "ORONTES" acknowledged. Had Fellowship hour in Ship's Officers Ward Room 4.30 - 5.30.

Monday 1st April. Cool & cloudy. Between 7-8 A.M. the mountains of Sicily were visible about 60 miles away on Starboard - to port the Island of Bozo, of Maltese group & other Islands were passed. At 12.45 we passed Pantellaria on port beam, about 2-3 miles off. Houses, a little bay with some tall buildings on sea front - clearly discerned. As dusk came, H.M.S.

LIVERPOOL passed us to port - en route for Malta. We passed Cape Boorn at 5 P.M.

Tuesday 2nd Apr. Cool, cloudy. Sea mist limiting visibility. Passed close to Algiers at 4 P.M. but misty conditions prevented our seeing any sign of land.

The Deck Entertainers "LET'S RELAX" gave a very good hour of fun on F.10 Messdeck. Played Choir Wrens at Deck Hockey & got licked.

Wednesday 3rd April. Cool & cloudy. Visibility very poor & cloud down to a few hundred feet above sea level. Only the foot of Gibraltar visible as we passed about 2 miles distant at 3.20 to 3.45 P.M. As we rounded the rock & left it about a mile or two astern, the sun shone through a clear sky & we could clearly see the town of Gibraltar lying below the hills. It was



disappointing not to see the Rock after having perfect visibility all through the voyage.

8.10. Quarantined for smallpox. Great perturbation through ship as to delay in landing at final port. Late afternoon the Spanish coast was visible through showers of rain.

Thursday 4th April. Warmer & sunny. The Portuguese coastline in sight most of day. Saw at mouth of Tagus, and Point.

During the night we entered Bay of Biscay.

Friday 5th April. Breeze & gale rising. Fairly heavy sea, the swell increasing as evening drew on. Few slept on deck this night. Some sick.

Saturday 6th April. Sunny & bright. Calm sea. Into Irish Sea by noon & Irish Coast plain about 3 miles to port. At 5.55 had first exciting glimpse of an English highland. A lovely ruddy sunset over Ireland, the mountains dusky in misty light. Quarter moon bright, night cold & clear.

Sunday 7th April. Awoke to find "ORION" moored to buoys in midstream in the Mersey off Liverpool Docks. Across from us to port was the burnt out hulk of the vessel which caught fire on mouth of the river. Away upstream we could see the Liver Building & other Liverpool landmarks all very welcome after so long a time away. As we moved

in to Dock a veritable stream of unwanted (shabby) trunks, trunks, underwear etc went bobbing away in the ship's wake

undoubtedly last minute throw outs by bods unable to pack all their property in trunks & suitcases. As we pulled in to dock so

many bodies crowded the port rails that ORION was heeling over & a panic call came from the bridge to equalise the balance of men to mid ship or starboard.



## BURMESE INTERLUDE

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During the afternoon of Friday 24th May, 1945, while with 238 Squadron, Transport Command, R.A.F., and stationed at Comilla in the eastern Bengali Plain, I was quietly going about my business of restoring to flying conditions the starboard engine of one of our Dakotas, when the Flight Sergeant in charge of the Maintenance Section emerged from the ruined building which served as the Section Headquarters and yelled - politely - "Pierce, you b----y criminal, I want you.." (This, because a few days earlier I had been "crimed" by the R.A.F. Police in Comilla Town, where I was apprehended wearing shorts (instead of slacks) "east of the Brahmaputra", and had perforce to be charged). He informed me that one of our kites was grounded at Magwe strip in Burma, unable to get engines started, and a signal had come through for a Fitter to be flown over to fix the motors. I was told to detail another Fitter and an Electrician and take what I thought fit to get the aeroplane going, and to be ready to fly on a 'plane from Comilla Airfield early next morning. I collected a suitable set of tools and arranged for a fresh generator and two 'plane starter batteries to be ready, to serve in case of need, although I already suspected that the main cause of the bother was finger trouble in the crew.

Our living site was some three miles from the airstrip and I arranged with the Guard Room for all three of my party to be called in time to go down on the first gharry (truck) on Saturday morning. I was called at 03.30 hrs. on the 26th and proceeded in the darkness to the basha of the other Fitter, and there, after awakening the wrong fellow and quietening him, found my man and prised him loose from his charpoy, and likewise aroused the "sparks-fiend".

We proceeded to the Cookhouse where two woe-begone and sleepy I.O.R.'s were groping around by the light of a hurricane lantern and trying to get organised on breakfast for the B.O.R.'s at 07.00 hrs. All that was available to us was a mug of tea which was grudgingly submitted by the lazy so and so's. Then in the darkness and the rain we groped and slid to the Guardroom to await the gharry, due to leave at 04.30 hrs. for the strip. As customary, the gharry was available but the driver did not arrive until 05.00 hrs. and as our kite was "laid on" for 05.00 hrs, I was beginning to wonder if and when. However, we arrived intact at the Flight Office at 05.10 hrs. where, as was customary nobody knew anything about an aircraft scheduled for Magwe. While this was being sorted out, the Electrician took the truck to his Section and collected the generator and the accs, and then we sat and smoked and waited. Eventually, about 06.30 hrs. the crew arrived and it was decided that an aircraft was to go to Magwe, via Meiktila, and No. 207 was the aircraft. We were driven by truck out to one of the dispersal bays on the



perimeter of the strip, and found 207 loaded up with about thirty B.O.R. reinforcements who, from their dejected mien and the amount of litter under and around the aircraft, had been aboard for some time, ready for take-off at 05.00 hrs. for Meiktila. We all got aboard and locked up the doors as the engines were started and run-up to the accompaniment of the inevitable buffeting and clattering intensified within the all-metal shell of the fuselage, and we then taxied round the perimeter to the northern end of the runway and waited for permission to take-off from Control.

After a minute or so we were given the go signal and the engines roared to take-off revs and we bumped away along the runway and were soon airborne in the dawnlight, grey and heavy-looking, at 06.45 hrs. and headed S.S.E. towards the Chin hills. Flying at about 2,000 ft, all that could be seen below were the endless green paddy fields and scattered villages of the Bengali Plain, in all directions. We climbed to 4/5,000 ft. on approaching the jungle territory and the densely wooded slopes of the Chin range.

As we crossed the hills flying conditions worsened and the heavily laden aircraft lurched and dropped alarmingly and often my stomach seemed to be in my mouth. The noise and racket inside a DAK carrying 30 odd men and full kit must be experienced to be believed. At the bottom of a drop in an air pocket the kite appears to have hit a rock, such a bump and shudder is felt, and on looking out of the cabin windows one can see the wings juddering and "flapping" under the strain and with the vibration of the engine in each wing root.

We were soon over into Burmese territory, and beyond the hills the weather improved and it became brighter. In consequence smoother flying was experienced and soon we were flying under sunny skies. Coming down again to about 3,000 ft. we could see clearly the scattered villages and cattle turned out to graze. The land appeared to be under more varied cultivation but there were evidences of the battles recently fought over this terrain in bomb and shell cratered ground, half burnt and fully destroyed villages, burnt and partly demolished temples and shrines. Various types of crashed and burnt out aircraft were lying around too.

Soon the scattered buildings of Meiktila came into view and we made two circuits, losing height, before flaps were lowered and propellers put in fine pitch for landing on the airstrip. We stayed only ten minutes while the 'refors' were unloaded and by 07.50 we were airborne and heading a little to the south and west. Flying smoothly in the sun for about half an hour over country very similar to that approaching Meiktila we arrived over Magwe, and, losing height in one circuit touched down at 08.35 hrs.



The 'repair party' scrambled out and we looked around for our casualty having spotted nothing from 'upstairs', but the only aircraft in view were two Douglas C46 "Commandos" loading stores and a silver U.S. Mitchell which had belly-landed and pranged beside the strip.

The Magwe Controller came over and informed our crew that No. 263, our 'case', had been airborne ten minutes earlier, having had its batteries re-charged on the unit generator, flat batteries having been the cause of the non-starting trouble.

We strolled over to the Magwe Canteen which was in charge of two blonde bombshells of the W.V.S. hoping for our "elevenses" at 08.30 a.m., but they were "too busy rationing aircraft to get anything ready", so we crept away unsatisfied wondering if the Crew of 263 had enjoyed a better reception the day before necessitating an overnight stay, because a hand-starting unit which even aircrew can operate is standard equipment on our Dakotas!

Climbing back into our kite with an American G.I. and a R.A.F. M.O. as additional ballast, both of whom wanted a hitch to Comilla, we were airborne at 08.40 hrs. and, with a following wind, had an uneventful trip back to Comilla except for a further bumping over the Chin Hills. We touched down on the strip at 11.00 hrs. Having reported results to "Chiefy" Smith at Maintenance Section I was awarded the rest of the day "off duty". I gave No. 263 a check-over before hitching back to the living site and found that the hand-starting handle had never been removed from its straps since 238 Squadron had received it. Fingers? It makes you think!



usual, behind the vessel. As the channel widened, the seas became bigger and the ship began to "dig-in" and a pleasant pitching and rolling began. A "CATALINA" Flying Boat took off, followed us up and flew across the ship. As the land fell back and Stranraer disappeared from view, we could see the hills of Ireland's North East coastline, hazy in the distance ahead. In about 2 hours we were running into the Channel leading up to Larne where we were to land. The engines slowed & stopped and then reversed and we closed-in to the jetty stern first. The quaint conical topped, grey stone tower on the stone quay slid by & we drew in to the landing stage. \*

The sun was brilliant & warm

! The Devenish Tower.



6/.

and we waited on deck enjoying it while the different parties disembarked - leave people first. A sudden shower blew off the land and a complete rainbow, very plain, with its "shadow" was created by the bright sun.

We put on all our kit, having removed and dumped our life saving jackets, & lugging our kitbags went ashore, across the narrow gauge rail tracks to Larne Railway Station L.M.S.C.C. Several men of an infantry regiment were also entraining & there was a big tray of bag-rations & tea for them. We looked hungrily at them but nothing came our way. We got settled in the train and, with great relief, parked our kit. The



7/

coach was an open one with the seats placed facing and back-to engine on either side of a central corridor.

We had just got settled when an army sergeant and two girls came along offering bag rations to us & with a pail of tea. The bags contained 3 SPAM sandwiches, with real butter, an apple tart and two cakes and were most acceptable.

Then began one of the most extraordinary railway journeys I have ever made. The train started about 11 1/2 am. & proceeded along the side of Larne Lough & Belfast Lough to Belfast, Portadown, Ennagh, finally landing at Enniskillen about 5.45 having zig-zagged our way and made three changes of train on the



journey. We passed through agricultural land - peat bogs mostly, seeing few towns on the route. Stacks of peat abounded & in some places it was being dug and carted. The soil, mainly, was richly dark in colour, the peat bogs were black. There was no great scenic beauty on the route. at Portladow we transferred to the Great Northern Ry from the L.N.S.

At Cemaigh a host of schoolgirls got aboard the train & then we began to hear some Irish chatter. at Fintona, a station below

Cemaigh, there was a quaint horse tram on lines adjoining the platform.

We were amused to see the bottom deck divided into 1st & 2nd classes and the upper deck 3rd class!



9/

at Enniskillen we reported our arrival to the R.T.O. who informed us that a transport van would come from camp for us - told us to get a cup of tea at the Buffet. While we were drinking, the R.A.F. 'bus arrived so we had to gulp the scalding hot drink & load our kit & pile in.

We drove out of town & northwards for mile after mile it seemed, eight to be correct, passing through the new R.A.F. station, St. Angelo, in course of construction. Arriving at Milladeas, we had to disembark and report our arrival at the Guard Room (Corderly Room) & were then driven to the station proper. There to our surprise we found the huts amid



10/.

the trees fringing the shore of Lough Erne.

More to our amangement we saw about ten CATALINA Flying Boats moored to buoys off shore, & were told that we were now on a Coastal Command O.T.V., & that they would be our charges!

We were directed to a hut for the night, until our quarters had been arranged & I was in one night on the fringe of the lough, 20 or 30 ft above the water's edge. As the camp had been built by the Americans for their own use, it was of all American material. The huts were of Messers pattern, with a door and two gauze-screened windows at each end, with walls lined with fibre board & with wooden floors, lit by electric lamps.



11/.

The huts held 14 men & were equipped with spring iron-bedsheads 3 good soft "biscuits" and 5 fine woollen blankets per man. Shelves over each bed held odd kit.

Heating was supplied by QUAKER Paraffin Stoves of convector type, which gave off a comforting heat, were fumeless and good for drying wet things.

After a much wanted wash and shave we went to supper and I soon turned in after that.

26. 2. 43.

Breakfast at 8 and parade at Station Warrant Officer's Office at 8.30. We had particulars taken & then a 'bus took us to St. Angelo where the Pay accounts took details of our allotments etc. The 'bus then took us



12/.

back to Killadeas where we drew plates from the store. We were then taken to the M.I. Room for F.F.I. After tea at the N.A.A.F.I., we were marched to the Engineer Officer and he came out and explained what was required of us, and answered our various questions. The F/M (E)s of us were then directed to "Servicing" Flight Office, where we signed on. The Flight Sergeant then dismissed us and told us to go along the "beach" & look out for ourselves at what there was about. After dinner we moved to our own quarters in what was known as the "American" Camp about a mile from the beach, alongside the Killadeas - Ennistullen main road. Having set our kit to rights and made



our beds we went up for tea 4.30-5.0 and back again at 7.0 for supper. An Ensa show "Just MARRIED" was on at the new Camp Theatre, and to this I went, greatly enjoying it, and so to bed.

27.2.43.

Paraded at 8.30 & were detailed to accompany a Fitter to D.I. a CATALINA. We first went to "J" which, being an amphibian, was up on the beach. Our main job is to open up the cowlings around the engines and look for oil & fuel leaks, loose couplings, loose plug leads and plugs, rust and corrosion on any engine part, fractures, cracks etc., and clean any filth out. Then go into pilot's cockpit & switch on the de-icer control for the propeller which causes a motor-driven pump to squirt de-icing fluid



14/

along the root of the blade, the function of this can be checked from pilot's seat as it discharges from pipes readily seen therefrom.

Throttle + pitch controls are then checked for progressive movement. The deicing fluid level is then checked and the container topped up as may be necessary. Then the oil tanks in the A.P.U. is checked and if low, refilled. The A.P.U. is then checked for running. A two-stroke engine, rope started, is coupled directly to a generator and bilge pump. The A.P.U. supplies starting-motor current to the engines.

Then, climbing up into the F/E's cockpit, the fuel cocks are checked for free movement, + filters drained of any water or condensation, and gauges



15/

checked for leakage, hot & cold air shutters for movement and also the cowling gills.

The main idea being to seek out any fault or damage.

At mid-day we were dismissed until 8.30 the following morning - Sunday.

All days are the same here. Servicing Flight was working one "short" day, ending 5.30., one "long" day ending 7 p.m., & one half-day, ending 12.30 p.m. We got our kit & beds etc., organised. In the evg. saw "Convoy" at the Cinema, free.

28. 2. 43.

After Flight parade went along beach to look over "J" which was an amphibian drawn up on shore for a major inspn. Then we called a motor boat & went out across the lough to "G" for a check-over. In workshop waiting for work all the afternoon.



16/.

knocking off, finally, at 6.45 p.m. An uneventful day.

1.3.43.

After Flight parade at 8.30 we waited in Workshop till 9.30 when we went on clothing parade to receive 2nd caps & I got my extra socks. Then to N.A.A.F.I. for morning break - tea & cakes, 10 to 10.30. Then standing by till 12.30 & to dinner. This was my afternoon off, a bright, fine day but no sun. Got a lift on a lorry to Enniskillen & explored the town and did some shopping. Had a good tea at Central Cafe - all one could eat for 1/8d. Known as a fry it consisted of two sausage meat fritters, a piece of fried bread, mashed potatoes, two pieces fried batter, a fried egg, as much bread as required, a plate of balls of butter, and two scones, and tea cup refilled as often as wanted! Was



17/.

the butter good!! Commenced to walk back the 8 miles to camp, but got a lift in a private car to St. Angelo. - got back into camp about 9.30. (when the Americans came the "fry" went up to 3/6d & extra tea was charged for).  
2.3.43

CATALINA "P" having arrived the previous day from Pembroke Dock, went out in a dinghy to her to commence cleaning and over-haul. While on board the engines were started and, after circling to warm up engines, she was taxied in close to shore. Spent the rest of the day cleaning off corrosion & greasing engines. Short day. Writing and shower in evening. Bright & mild all day.  
3.3.43

Cold and a drizzle of rain. The lough very choppy all day. Issued with black oilskin coat & sou' wester 10.30.

To M.A.A.F.I. for break 10.30 AM. Rest of the day cleaning up "P". I put in an application



18/

for Equipment Section. - Commission.

4. 3. 43.

Calm day - mild, brightened as the sun got higher. Working on "P" fixing bondings on engines. To Enniskillen by lorry in afternoon. Walked up to the Pleasure Ground with its Monumental Tower to Sir Galbraith Henry Cole, (General, the Honable.) and Memorial Bandstand to Thomas Plunkett a former Town Comm<sup>tee</sup>. The crocuses, blue & white were lovely, growing up through the grass. Many lovely trees there & good views all over the Town & lough. Then had a "fry" at Central Cafe, followed by a visit to the "REGAL" to see "Doctors don't Tell" & "Sunset in Wyoming". Walked all the way back to camp. 9 P.M. to 11.20. Tired and to bed.

5. 3. 43.

Mild & calm. The lough looked



19/.

lovely. Still working on "P" (an awful kite).  
Had several motor-boat trips as I had to  
get things from store & often other crews  
were going to out-lying CATALINA'S.  
We had pay parade in the Cinema  
at 10.30 - 11.00. Called in off the  
flying boat at 11.15 and interviewed  
by F/O Plumber, the Equipment Officer,  
regarding my Commission application.  
He was most cordial & chatted freely  
with me. Suggested I might find a  
good job as Embarkation Officer. The  
sun was brilliant & warm in the afternoon  
and, as riggers were working in the starboard  
wing & on the float, I had to lie out on  
the end of the main plane to keep it on  
the water, which just suited me. In  
the evening, went to Cinema to see George  
Formby in "Spare a Copper" - a good laugh.



20/

6. 3. 43. a ground frost & chilly dawn - misty. Went alone to "P". Uncovered engines & stowed covers & opened up for work. Fitted the platforms out on engines. The sun came through warm & bright and everything looked very beautiful. Worked all day on P's engines, renewing bondings, cleaning corrosion & plastering Lanoline over the clean places. Late shift - but only stood by 6-7. Received first letter - from M. & replied at night. Told to report to Station Adj. at St. Angelo  
10. AM. Sunday.

7. 3. 43.

Can Flight Parade 2 minutes late. Told off by Flt. Sgt. & deprived of half day. By transport to St. Angelo, interviewed by Station adjutant regarding Commission. He told me to complete app. form in dup & get a medical exam & report from M.O. Forms not printed so back by transport.



21/

to Killadeas for dinner. Back to St. Angelo by transport at 1.30 for forms. Walked nearly all the way back to camp, and finished the trip by transport. Filled up forms & arranged medical examination for Monday 8th March. Then reported to Flt. Sgts. Office for duty at 4.30. He was not in so Sgt. told me to "buzz off", which I did, promptly & had a good tea. Supper & writing finished another strange Sunday.

8-3-43.

This day dawned cold & showery & the wind was high. The Lough was covered with white horses & the CATALINAS (15 of them) were riding nose to wind, and tossing at their buoys. It was a thrilling trip out to them in the motor boats. The oilskins proved their worth & were warm against the



21/

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22/.

cold wind. Later in the day the sun broke through. The flying boats looked graceful in their varied colours. On many days I have had the feeling, when back on shore, of the motion of the aircraft. This feeling persisted but suddenly I did not become aware of it, having, apparently got accustomed to the "water-life". It was an adventure working out on the hull, as the craft was tossing about, and the wash from the motor boats threw it about wildly. Tools had to be held firmly in cold hands, and not laid down in case they disappeared in the "drinks". I had occasion to go ashore at 9.30 for my medical exam in connection with the application for my Commission. The spray came over me in sheets. As the M.O. was not available I returned to "P".



23/

but as a crew were going out to a far  
outlying craft I had a most enjoyable  
trip around the Lough. It was a risky  
business climbing into the "blisters"  
(cupolas) as the motor boat tossed about  
alarmingly. It became sunny in the  
afternoon, and the country side looked  
beautiful. At 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  in the afternoon I  
had my medical examination and was  
found to be 100% fit. I had a colour-  
blindness test this time & was O.K. on this.  
It was early turn so I got back to the  
hut fairly early & shaved & washed  
prior to seeing the "R.A.F. Gang Show"  
a most enjoyable 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  hours of sparkling  
entertainment by the R.A.F. travelling  
company of players. The party included  
Murray Brown, late of Troise, & his Mandoliers,  
and Will Hay Junior - a perfect copy of  
his famous sire.



24/.

9.3.43.

This day damned cold & grey & I went out to CATALINA 'P' with my "mate" & uncovered the two radial engines & erected the working platforms for the final check-over by the Sergeant. The covers are tricky in windy weather as, when the tie-ropes are unfastened they balloon out and blow back & over the cowling & main plane, & unless tied at the back, will blow over into the "driveline," taking the luckless 7/O's with them. We managed to stomp the wind out of them and roll & stow them in the gunner's bay. The stands, which fold up, are clipped into slots on the main plane, tested by a kick for holding them lowered, drawbridge fashion until the supporting wires are straight, then, standing on the lowest-rung, the support which hooks into

transferrant & went out to my aircraft by



28.

a slot in the front of the engine cowling, has to be slipped into position with the toe of one's boot, when fixed the platform is rigid for working on, over the water.

Final odd jobs of bonding, and locking bolts, were done then it was time for morning break. Tea & fritters at the H.A.A.F.I.

I called in to see the S.W.O. about addressing my application & medical report to Station Adjutant & he directed me to go to St. Angelo by the 11.15 transport and hand them in.

This I did. The sun was up, bright & warm by this time & hedgerows, fields & water all looked very lovely. The atmosphere was clear & the distant hills stood out in beauty reminding me of scenes in North Wales.

I returned to Camp by the 12.40 transport & went out to my aircraft by



26.

motor boat, at high speed, the engine being just perfect. As no-one was aboard & my "mates" had taken my coat & overalls ashore, I returned for dinner. In the afternoon, as the

had been refuelled & was almost ready to fly (being due to take off at 9 AM. next day) there was little to do & we spent a lot of the time lying on the main 'plane drowsing in the warm sun.

Later, the Sergeant came out & we looked busy, but were only 'scrounging' anyway. When he had gone, and as it had clouded over I laid in one of the four bunks in the cabin & later sat up in the Flight Engineers cabin, a single seat in the superstructure. At 4 $\frac{1}{2}$  we closed cowlings & gills & covered up the engines & waited until 4-30 before going ashore for tea. As it was our



27/  
our "long night" on we went back to  
Flight workshops to await instructions  
and were soon told to "buzz off" - just  
after six as night flying had been  
"scrubbed". So a shave, shower  
and bed finished the day.

Two "new" Cats came in  
this afternoon, making up 17 to our  
Station.

10.3.43.

Cold & showery at first, but slightly  
better later. Standing by at Workshop for  
a while, then, as "P"'s flight was put back  
24 hours, out to do a D.I. on her.

Afternoon off, walked to St. Angelo & back,  
collected rifle, went to tea, paraded for  
guard at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  & spent the evening writing.

Duty 3.30 to 7 AM.



29/.

11.3.42.

A bright morning, a trifle sharp in the wind. Standing by in workshop until break-time. I was detailed to assist the Barrack Stores people, with four other chaps. We loaded a lorry with iron bedsteads & conveyed them from one store to another, then had to carry bales of "biscuits" from one store to another. Heavy loads these! After dinner we were back on the job again and had to roll 23 barrels of chinaware from one store to another, then stack the beds collected in the morning. The sun was bright but now sudden squalls of rain and hail blew in from the west across the Lough. We then took the lorry & collected another load of bedsteads & stacked them, after that we took some miscellaneous stores to



29/

the Camp warehouse, and weary, aching & dirty, went to tea. Tired out I went to bed at 8.15 & was soon asleep.

12.3.43.

A brilliant dawn but - a severe frost had bound the puddles to ice & hail was frozen on the ground. On the higher hills a covering of white, either snow or frozen hailstones remained all day. When the motor boat landed me on 'P', there was ice everywhere. As she had to have a D.I., it was necessary to get the stands out - but the catwalk up the main plane from the hull, which usually is entirely "non-slip" whatever the weather, was a sheet of ice and I slid down every time I essayed a climb to the engine covers. The sun was melting the ice on the leading edge



30/

of the wings and my "mate" managed to  
clamber up there & take the platforms  
as they were passed up. As we took  
the engine covers off flakes & lumps of  
ice fell off into the water. (She was  
moored nearly a mile away from the  
camp, up the Lough beyond Knibbles  
Point & if one fell in it would take the  
motor boat longer to reach the aircraft  
than would be nice for the one who  
had been in the drink. The A.P.U.

would not start and the starboard  
petrol cock leaked. I had several  
trips to and from. When the sun  
got higher in the sky it drew up a  
great cloud of mist & the water "steamed"  
as though it was a hot spring & the  
effect was most weird. At times the  
islands, planes & land were hidden  
as the my boat ploughed through the



31/.

mist & "CATALINA'S" loomed up out of the white clouds like ghost planes. Quite suddenly it all evaporated. Nothing much to do for the rest of the day. Standing by in the evening from 5.30 till 7.45. but nothing to do.

13-3-43

This day dawned bright and sunny and less frosty than the day before. The motor boat journeys were very enjoyable in the sun - light to & from "P." As the starboard petrol cock was leaking there was not much for me to do - the Sgt & Corporal Fitters attending to it, so I sat around in the sun waiting for dinner time. Landed on the M.S. pier at 12.0 PM & went for dinner. Heard that the Station Commander wanted to see me at 2 P.M. I was filthy & wearing oilskin & gumboots & had missed the 1.30 transport! I reported in to S.W.O.'s office & they phoned M.T. Section



32/.

and found that a truck was going to St Angelo  
at 2 $\frac{1}{2}$  - if I could change & catch it.

I tore over to my hut & changed into clean  
boots, trousers & gave coat & cap brasses a  
quick rub & just caught the truck as it  
moved out. Fortunately at St Angelo there

were several other men waiting to see the C.O. &

I could cool off a bit. Nevertheless I  
felt far from presentable. The adjutant

showed me in & the G.C. questioned me  
about my firm, my civvy work etc., and as  
to my present R.A.F. work & why I was a  
F/Mech. after consideration he said he

would put the application forward. I then  
walked back towards camp till a petrol  
van gave me a lift to main gate. Then

I got cleaned up for my afternoon off.

As it was Saturday there was not much in  
the way of transport. An Officer gave three of

us a lift to St. Angelo & we were fortunate in



getting a lift on a ration truck from there  
 night into Town. We had a ham & egg  
 high tea at the Central Cafe. I then left  
 the other two chaps, who had "dates" & I went  
 to the REGAL to see "The Man who Came Back" &  
 a "Donald Duck" cartoon.

When I came out of the Cinema at  
 8.30 I was amazed to find the High St.  
 still light & the sky was clear with  
 a sprinkling of stars in the clear blue  
 after light of sunset. The moon was  
 bright also. I went to the Y.M.C.A. &  
 consumed two sandwiches and a beaker  
 of tea. Then I commenced my starlit  
 walk back to Camp. Before long, however,  
 an Army Officer in a car picked me up  
 & gave me a lift to St. Angelo. I walked  
 the remainder of the way. Cleaned up  
 for the next day's Church Parade & had  
 a shower & went to bed.



14. 3. 43. Sunday.

The sky was perfectly clear when the sun rose & a translucent brilliance seemed present among the trees and on the water before the sun's light touched the camp. After Flight-parade we were told

to parade for Church at 9.15 at the M.T. Depot.

At the time named about 120 of us fell in & with an officer, two Warrant Officers & a Flight-Sergeant, marched to Killadeas Church where the Camp/padee conducted a very enjoyable service.

I don't think I have ever been out on such a beautiful morning & I was amazed & thrilled at the singular beauty of the day. The sky was perfect, the atmosphere absolutely clear & the light of the sun gave every tint in trees, shrub & grass its full colour & the effect on the wild flowers beggars any



description.

When I reported for work at 11.30 & went up the lake by m/b to see to "P" the surrounding fields, woods & high ground looked marvellous. "P" had gone up <sup>by</sup>

so we cruised around a bit in the big Walton Power Boat. As we were coming in to land "P" flew over & then made a good landing, so we went to bring the crew ashore. Later in the

day, clouds rolled over from the Atlantic & although they made a fine picture the sheer beauty of the day had gone. It became chilly later & after doing a D.I. on "P" I sat & read & smoked in the

gunners' cupola & waited for tea time.

Short day, so after tea I cleaned up my kit & went to bed to read. During the

last few days two fellows have fallen into the "drink". Apart from a soaking in the



cold water they were none the worse  
 Today, however, a youngster fell from  
 the hull of "N" which was drawn up  
 on the concrete repair beach. He was  
 falling feet forward when his legs  
 got entangled in an aerial wire &  
 he landed on his head. He was  
 taken in an ambulance, unconscious,  
 to hospital.

15.3.43.

Cold & windy, with a slight  
 drizzle to start with today. The  
 poor lad who fell off "N" passed away  
 without regaining consciousness.  
 I had to go to St Angelo at 10% to sign  
 commission acceptance slips. No  
 work up till dinner time. It cleared  
 up & became brighter in the afternoon.  
 Went out to "P" & dozed in radio cabin.  
 later ran the A.P.V. while a radio-



electrician worked on his boxes of mystery. Back for early tea.

In the evening took a rowing boat out to "P" to find my lighter which had dropped into the bilges then back to workshop for standby till 7 $\frac{1}{2}$ o.

16. 3. 43

Windy & rainy in morning.

"P" taxied around a bit this morn'g so I had another "ride". Odd jobs on it & half day off. Had a ride into Ennisbiller at 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ o by transport--all the way. Walked home all the way by moonlight at night. Did some shopping & had high tea at Central & went to Regal to see (again) the technicolour "Weekend in Havana" & Donald Duck!. Shower & bed 11.30.



38/

17.3.43

Warm and sunny this morning.  
The lough like a mill pond. Did my  
first official D.I. on "P" & signed  
for it. It cooled a bit in the afternoon  
& rain clouds blew up over the  
western hills. Went to "N" to change  
plugs - but had no great hand  
in the matter. Sat in pilot's  
seat for a change - out of the rain.  
Short day. Evening spent in  
writing - To bed. 10.20. P.M.

18.3.43

Sunny but cool - not much to  
do all day. Brilliant, clear moonlight  
at night.

19.3.43

Not much doing in morning. Break



and pay parade occupied an hour and then, as "P" was flying on circuits + bumps, waited for her to depart, leaving me to breathe more freely, + to get away to dinner + afternoon off. Walked nearly to Inverinstown - had a lift the last two miles by car. One eyed town, very desolate, with nothing of interest to see. Thumbred car + got a ride to Enniskillen, had a "fry" + sat reading till 6 P.M. Walked part of way back to camp + thumbred a ride most of the way back to camp. Went to E.M.S.A. show at Camp Theatre, shower + bed. 11.30.

20.3.43.

Sunny but cold. Stiff wind blowing from South-east, making the lough choppy. M/B rides were wet as spray blew on board in clouds. The "kites" tossed about - to stand on wings + hull



40/.

was a venturesome do. Did a leisurely D.I. spread over the morning and afternoon. Spent the afternoon out on "P", writing letters for the latter part in the sun-warmed starboard cupola. The "Cat" was being walloped by the choppy water which resounded through the hull. As these craft only draw about 2'6" - 3' of water the top of waves hits a wide area of hull. Early evening in.

21. 3. 43.

Cold and windy day.

Did a full D.I. on "P" + covered up, a bit of a struggle with the strong wind. Motor boats chucking spray in soaking sheets all over the boat. In the afternoon had four hours of idleness - an utter bind. Very cold standing around too. Although "late" night-



A1/

we packed up at 5.20 p.m. In the evening, went to sing song and epilogue at Concert Hall.

22.3.43 . D.I. + drain starboard fuel strainer on "P". afternoon aff. Spent it in bed reading & writing. Made up arrears of letters.

23.3.43 . Bright and sunny. D.I. on "P" in the morning. In the afternoon went up for an hour in her. The lough was choppy and there was a plenty of bump and bounce. The water rushed & foamed past the hull & as I sat in the port "blister" I could see sheets of spray being whipped away beyond the tail. Soon a smoother motion was felt as she lifted clear of the water & there



only the rush of the slipstream from the twin, 14 cylinder Pratt & Whitney "Wasp" Engines, past the hull & cupola where I sat. Very soon the water below, looked like a model lake, on which model flying boats were floating. The dinghys & power boats looked very tiny, with a foamy "tail" which was their wash, streaming behind them. Quickly we passed over St. Angelo, & again the new 'drome, & the farmsteads looked toylike in their compactness. Fields & woods & ploughland all seemed symmetrical from this new altitude. We flew south east, then banked round in a left-hand turn, the earth falling away on the right hand & the sky seemingly coming down also. Then we turned northwards towards hoch Erne and were soon over the



"Sunderland" Unit, where I counted twelve craft, either ashore or on the water. Again, for all their actual size, they appeared to be but lovely toys. The Station at Castle Archdale looked compact & toylike. We turned towards Killadeas again, passing over many islands & on some cattle were grazing, some were completely wooded, some had complete farms & ploughed land on them, with some timber. Others had only a small cottage on them.

These populated islands each had one or two rowing boats drawn up on a "beach" - the only link with the mainland.

Soon, the nose dipped slightly and "P" slid downwards towards the water & flattened out for the glide and touch-down. As the craft neared the



44/.

water, it seemed to be rushing ever faster until we touched down. We did three similar "circuits and bumps" in different parts of the lough.

Finally, we ran in above Gubush Point & tascied in to the mooring buoy with the drogues strung out behind.

When secured to the buoy, I stowed the drogues, and unbuckled my MAE WEST.

The dinghy came alongside & took Wing Commander Baird, who was the Captain (pilot) of "P", the crew, and myself to shore, when I thanked the skipper for taking me, & returned my "MAE WEST" to the Crew Sgt. who had loaned it to me. The "Catalina"

was very steady in flight and, altho it was a gusty day, it did not rock, or bump. Acceleration on the water was strong and she climbed well and landed smoothly.



45/

24.3.43

Cool and windy. Usual D.I. on "P". Very little else doing. Camp Cinema Show "Wild Bill Hickok Rides" in the evening. The hero's accurate shooting under all circumstances caused great amusement to us all.

25.3.43

Mild and calm. Took out a dumb dinghy (rowing boat) to do D.I. on "P". this was quickly done. I went to M.A.A.F.I. at 10.20. for usual morning tea & cakes or fritters. (Tea & "wads" (rock-cakes) are usual standby). a little later the Church Army Van arrived, dispensing more tea & cakes. I got ten cigarettes & a cake of soap also. No more work, and dinner followed and I was free for the afternoon off. I



46/

got a lift in a lime lorry to "Skilly"  
and did some shopping. Then had high  
tea at the Central Cafe & went to the  
REGAL to see "Somewhere in Camp".  
A very laughable comedy starring Harry  
Korris, "Enoch" & Co.

Walked all the way home at night  
after a snack at the Y.M.C.A., with  
two chaps from the hut next to mine.

26.3.43

Thick fog on the Lough early on.  
The water was flat calm. Went to do a  
D.I. on "P" - back to Tea & Wads &  
out again to finish off. The sun came  
through, roasting hot, so I spent a  
pleasant half hour lying in the sun  
on the front turret.

Had the rowing boat out in  
the afternoon & rowed all around some



47/

some of the islands & creeks. Really a scrounge! Got aboard "O" and had a quiet read in the rear gunner's compartment & then in a starboard bunk till tea time.

To E.M.S.A. show in the evening - "SCOTCH BROTH" - quite a gay leg-show. The horse chestnut trees are showing lovely leafage.

27.3.43

As "P" was flying early, there was nothing to do, so went for a walk along the beach, round by daffodil beds, to billet. Had tea and cakes at Church Army Van on the M.T. site. Then back to hangar to wait for dinner time. Took a dumb dingly out in the afternoon but it was very windy & rather a struggle to get back to pier again. It was good fun though. Can late flying stand-by in evening.



48/.

28.3.43.

"P." was brought up on beach  
& into nose-hangar for a 45-hour (minor)  
inspection. I had to go with a party  
to carry air-crew's clothing lockers  
from the crew huts to newly built crew  
rooms. Afternoon - off duty. Reading  
and writing. In the evening I walked  
to Saint Angelo Station & back, but  
had a decent supper in the M.A.A.F.I. there.

29.3.43.

Nothing to do all day.

Rainy & windy. Went out on a  
scrounge to "H" until "break" in the  
morning. Standing around & scrounging  
& smoking in N.H.S. in afternoon.  
Cinema show evening - "Boom Town".



49/.

30.3.42 .

High wind + pouring rain all day. Nothing to do - so were stood-off in the afternoon. Went to hut reading + writing, + continued after tea. Late in the afternoon the wind rose to gale height + the Lough was lashed to a fury of spray + choppy sea. The CATALINAS rode ~~into~~ it out nose to wind, straining at their buoys, tossing a little as the waves surged around their hulls. Motor boats were covered with spray as they churned through the rough water. The wind howled through the trees, and the tall firs rocked ominously in their insecure rootings of sloping, muddy soil. Branches broke + fell from lichened oaks.



50/.

31. 3. 43. Wet - rainy & cold. Little to do. Took the D.I. list round to all the sections, then to Concert Hall for a lecture chat from one of the officers. To "break" then back to Concert Hall till dinner & the afternoon off.

Walked to St. Angelo before a contractors lorry picked me up & took me to Enniskillen. It was early closing day there so no shopping required attention. I walked up to the Fonthill Memorial Grounds & looked over the Town, before going to Lemstens Cafe for high tea. Then after a walk to sink it, I went to the REGAT to see Conrad Veidt - 'NAZI AGENT' and, after tea & a snack at the Y.M.C.A. walked back to Camp in a howling wind. No adventures befell me although anything might have



51/

occurred in that wind lashed darkness. Usually, walking home past the farms & cottages on the Enniskillen - Killadeas road, there is a pungent smell of peat smoke from the chimneys of these little dwellings, but on this night the wind whipped it all away & dispersed it. In one field the red embers of a hedge trimmers fire of sticks & branches had revived in the blast & glowed warmly in the night. I did the journey in 1 hour 40 minutes.

1. 4. 43.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Royal Air Force dawned rainy & windy and altogether unpleasant. We paraded at 9.15 A.M. on the maintenance "beach" - much "new blue" & shiny



buttons in evidence. a gray curtain of rain drifted across the Lough & wetted us well & truly. The waves broken over the concrete runway & out on the Lough the Walton Powerboats had their canvas "dodgers" up. They & the motor dinghys proceeded through sheets of spray.

We were fallen-in in flights and marched to the Concert Hall, where the Camp Padre conducted a service. Following this the parade marched past the Station Commander, Group Captain Caster. M.C., & we were soon dismissed - 117c

Then I had to do a D. I. on "O" so I quickly donned overalls, gumboats, oilskin & sou'wester, collected grease gun, tools & my mate from the hangar, & went out across the waves to



53/

the very wet CATALINA in a Walton Power-boat, a new one only received here this week. The Inspection was soon accomplished although it was an unpleasant task, cumbered with so much clothing, & with high wind, rain, and a tossing "kite" to hamper action. Getting the ballooning cover on was a "bind" too, but soon all was lashed & secure, bulkhead doors closed & the cupola shut when we were back on the "Walton". Then to shore to sign up F. 700 & then to dinner free men for the great day.

The afternoon & evening, still unpleasant as to weather, were spent in bullet writing & reading.

Here's to the R.A.F., the Junior Service, and the best!



54/

2.4.43.

Milder & brighter today. D.I. to do on "O" then to pay parade. "CATALINA" "O" is featured in the book "Coastal Command", although the pictures were not taken here at Killadeas.

In the afternoon the weather became good for flying & I went up for a flight in "D", piloted by Sq. Ldr. Edwards. After a long-run take off towards Loch Erne, we flew over the Sunderland base, then on to St. John's Point in Donegal Bay, Aran Island, across Tory Sound to Tory Island. We circled the Island once or twice, then flew straight back, using blind flying instruments, to our base.

It was a most-interesting trip, lasting 3 hours, all but 10 minutes. We flew at 100 MPH most of the way, at heights varying between 3,100 and 4,500 feet. The loughs, islands,



and mainland was most interesting & lovely to view, from above. As before, everything below seemed to be formed in miniature, & peat bogs, streams & ponds, gleamed like silver. It is amazing how much water there is about here. At some points on the flight clouds were met at about 3,000 ft, we climbed through these & went up to the 4,000 ft range. & then we were in glorious sunshine with a sky of pellucid blue above & what looked like a great plain of unbroken, unmarked snow of cotton wool texture. Far below on the white surface the shadow of our CATALINA followed our movements. At one aerodrome far below us a "Martinet" took off and tore away ahead at double our speed. We passed two of our CAT's returning to the base one, far below and another about 300 ft below us. Later, when circling Loch Erne, a Sunderland touched down & taxied in below



56/

us. We made a perfect landing at Killadeas & were soon moored up. After covering up we went ashore, handed in our "Mae Wests" and went to tea. At one time I had to take over from Flight Engineer.

3.4.43.

Standing by most of the morning as 'O' was out on exercises. She returned at noon & we D.I'd her & then had dinner. Went by liberty bus to 'Skelly for shopping, high tea & Cinema "Born to Sing". Home at mid night but as double summer time had started, it was 1.0c, into bed at 1.20.

4.4.43. Time to get up came all too soon. "P" was out on the water after her minor maintenance inspection. Went to her to give a D.I. While on board the petrol launch came along & refuelled the tanks.



57/.

Then, when the "Tanker" had gone, a launch (Walton) hitched up & towed her to a mooring buoy away from the hangars.

The D.I. & clean up finished we went to dinner. In the afternoon, as she was not flying, I went on board &, drawing the cover off the pilot's cockpit, sat up in the navigator's seat for a crafty read until tea time. Very tasty - very sweet!

Early to bed.

5. 4. 43.

Rough wind caused the surface of the lough to be muffled with waves & white horses. Later in the morning it came on raining. 'P' returned from flying at dinner time so we had to D.I. her in the afternoon. By then it was blowing gale hard. The journey in the Walton was a hazardous trip with sheets of water blowing over us behind the canvas



dodgers. The "kite" was pitched about lustily & the rain poured down. Getting the stands out was perilous as on top of the main plane the wind tried to push stands and mechanics off into the seething "drinks". The inspection over, we were glad to get inside the "blisters" for a smoke.

Later, the sun came out but the wind was even stronger. Getting the canvas covers on the engines was a dangerous job, as they billowed out like balloons. The port one filled even though I was lying on most of it & it blew back & deposited me & myself on the main plane - it was tied at the rear, or I would have travelled magic carpet fashion into the tossing & cold brown water of the hough. After three hours on board I was not a little glad to get ashore for tea, after signing up for the inspection.



59/.

Evening spent writing & reading. Early  
bed.

6.4.43.

Too rough to work on kites - no  
flying. Sent back to billet after dinner.  
Half day afternoon - cleaning & mending.  
Evening at cinema "Desert Victory" &  
"Coastal Command".

7.4.43. Too rough to work on "kites" in the  
morning. Sent back to billet in the  
afternoon as no work could be done.  
Early bed in evening.

8.4.43. Grey & rainy. D.I. on P. in  
morning. Odd jobs on her in afternoon  
& then reading. Harrooned on her for  
an hour. Kit replacement parade  
in evening.



60.

9.4.43

Did a D.I. on 'P' in the morning. Had a trade test exam at 2 for my A.C.I. It was my afternoon off so I went to St Angelo to fix up my leave booking. Then on to Enniskillen for tea & to the REGAL to see 'ALIBI'. Had a snack in the Y.M.C.A. & then was lucky enough to get a ride in the light Van back to Camp.

10.4.43

As P was put up/s owing to a fault in the port carburettor, there was nothing for us to do. We went for a walk around the beach & woods and returned in time for the Church Army Van with its tea, cakes & fags. Went to H in the afternoon for a crafty read.



61/.

11.4.43.

"P." still U/s. "Crew room" handed over to us today. Nice to have cover for wet & chilly days. Spent morning therein, reading. The padre let us have some games, from the Comfords, in the afternoon.

Although on late party we were dismissed at 6 $\frac{1}{2}$  after a run around the Lough in a Walton to hurry the chaps up, on kites.

12.4.43.

"P." still U/s. Had a job of repairing the crank of Squadron Ldr. Lywood's bike. Worn to pot, so put a metal shim in with cotter pin & it tightened up alright. gloy he. OFF in afternoon. To St. Angelo to rearrange leave date. Walk in evening along Irvinestown Road.



13-4-43.

Had a job of cleaning up new  
 'A' Flight indicator board - roughing  
 it with emery cloth and "signwriting"  
 new columns thereon. This took  
 up the morning. In the afternoon  
 there was nise to do, so I had a crafty  
 read on "H", out on the water.  
 Walk - evening up Irvinestown road.

14-4-43

D.I. on P. in - had to mend up  
 loose exhaust pipe on A.P.U. happy  
 pipe with asbestos string and bushing  
 the jubilee clip connection with  
 sheet asbestos.

Reading and draughts -  
 the afternoon.

Walk along Irvinestown Road in  
 evening.



63/

15.4.43 . D.I. on "C" in morning.  
afternoon off. An army car took me  
into Enniskillen. On the road a lorry  
would not let us pass. The Captain who  
was in the front seat opened the door &  
bawled at the driver but he didn't budge  
his lorry, so the Capt pulled out his  
whistle & blew & blew till it did move off  
the crown of the road. Such language!!

Did some shopping & had tea. It was  
warm & bright in town. Went to Regal  
to see "March of Freedom" Robt. Young.

Lovely moonlight night. Had a snack  
in Y.M. then walked around town  
till 11.15 & the leave bus brought us  
back. Nothing much to report. Gated to St. Angelo

16.4.43 Lovely warm sunny day.  
Lough like a mill pond. Enniskillen in  
Transferred to A Flight Office for



64/

clerical work for a while. Nothing much to do. Glorious sunset at night. - then the moon came up beautifully. Went to a good ENSA show at Camp Cinema.

17. 4. 43.

Working in Hlt. Office. Not overmuch to do. C. ran ashore & hit a rock & punctured the hull oh what a flap & panic. Chilly day after yesterday.

18. 4. 43.

Half day - started for a walk but ~~cycled to St Angelo for supper~~  
it came on to rain. To Sunday Citadel in evening.

19. 4. 43.

Nothing much to report. Cycled to St Angelo Naafi for supper

20. 4. 43.

Quiet day. Cycled to Enniskillen in evening. Had supper at YMCA. Shower & bed.



65/-

20-4-43. Nothing much doing. Nice day.  
Walked up Inverestown Road - Evg.

21-4-43

22-4-43. Quiet day. ENSA - all American  
show in evening. Good show, very  
enjoyable.

23-4-43. Strange Good Friday  
Dental parade in morning - all O.K.  
Ensa "Scotch Hf to" ok.

24-4-43. Office work morning -

Half day to Enniskillen for tea.  
Pictures at Town Hall "Twilight on the Trail"  
housey hole. Pouring rain for 8 mile  
walk home. No coat - but not too wet.

25-4-43. Easter Sunday - but one wouldn't  
know it here. Went to Service at  
Concert Hall 09.30 hrs. Nice sermon -  
poor singing. Howling gale, big,  
breaking waves & blown spume on houghs.



66/

26.4.43. Rough & rainy day. Working, writing letters, working out Income Tax, in Flight Office. Walked to Temple's farm for supper.

Tuesday 27.4.43. Rough & rainy. A Grumman Goose 2-engined sea plane or flying boat visited & moored up in the bay. A neat little craft. 2 bladed props. Saw it take off. although on a choppy sea it only ran about 100 yards and lifted clear and then tore away like fun. In the evening started out to walk to Angelo. M.T. Trapp picked us up so we went on to Tony Cross & walked back. Had Tea & Cakes at Angelo NAAFI, then into the Cinema to see "The First of the Few" a smashing film. Walked back to camp.



69

came over in afternoon. Released them & they landed at St Angelo.

4.5.43

Chilly at first - but calm. It came out warm later. Nothing much to do all day. Had a dhringz ride in morning. To early dinner. Nothing much doing in afternoon. Had crafty cup of tea in aft. and then a dhringz ride & took it over myself, back to pier. P.O.R. came out recording my ACT. Worked till 7. To Cinema at 8 to see "The Fleet's In" again.

5.4.43

morning in office - rainy at first but cleared up later. Half day. Walked to Castle Archdale - through Ene Sunderland Base. Had to check in at the Guard Room



70/

and the Sgt 'c' phoned through to Intelligence Officer to ok my visit. I then went down to Maintenance hangars where several of the "Sunderlands" were beached.

Saw the engines (Pegasus 18's) on stands undergoing inspection & servicing. Climbed on board one & was amazed at its size & roominess. In the cabin a fitter was asleep on the bunk, warmly wrapped up in flying coats. Another was making toast over the primitive stove in the galley! Fitters are the same wherever one goes, apparently.

After having only one "deck" on the "Catalinas" it seemed strange to go up & down - stairs to the different control rooms on the big boat.

The engine platforms, instead of being slotted inside the A/c as on the Catalinas - are built in the wing



7/.

of the Sunderland, and come out on a panel hinged in the leading edge of the main plane. A fitter can get inside the wing on these boats & even work inside the rear of the engine nacelle. The F/E's cabin is a mass

of controls. The spaciousness of the craft is the <sup>rising</sup> overbearing impression one gets. I was there about an hour

or more, & then walked back to camp in time for supper.

6.4.43 Sunny & warm. Got

work cleared up at 11 $\frac{1}{2}$  & was sent to Enniskillen with instructions to collect F/sgt Goodings cycle from a house there. I took a repair off to mend suspected punctures. ~~Before~~

I had a lift in the milk & swirl truck to St Angelo & then on the petrol tankers



72/.

Wandered around  
to Enniskillen. shops & Town & finally went to  
Central Cafe for dinner. Had a nice  
dinner for 2/-! Then proceeded to  
work on the cycle. Found two punctures  
& mended. Heavy showers came on.  
Mrs Maguire ask me to come in for a  
cup of tea & when I went in there  
was a big cup & new buttered rolls on  
the table. These people are very kind.  
Eventually the rain went away & the sun  
came out again & I started back to  
camp. Another puncture at Tony Cross  
but I soon mended that & came on to  
camp. Saw a Martinet land at  
Angelo. There was an AVRO ANSON  
on the ground there, also a Dakota  
which had been towing  
~~para~~ gliders. Got back to camp  
in time for tea.



73/.

7.4.43. "Over to You" Archdale Concert Pt. V &.  
8.4.43 "Cinema" Nothing but the Truth.  
Bob Hope - Paulette Goddard.

7.10.43. Cold & raining. Trouble in the night  
10.10.43. Cold & sleety. Snow falling early in  
the day. The distant high hill ranges white  
with snow, looking fine when fitful sun  
shone. Learned at breakfast time that  
during night. Flying "Catalina" M had  
crashed on the water and was submerged, &  
'F' had seen aground.

all the way Was detailed to go to beach as  
M was being towed in by the Archdale  
Pinnace at 8.30. Sent out in a rowing boat  
with two men to get a rope hitched on for  
beaching here. S/L Edwards came aboard to  
inspect it. Port wing tip was bent & bashed ~~down~~  
up. we rowed along leading edge of main  
plane & inspected petrol tanks. Prop tips  
were just above water, scratched & bent.



74/.

The Starboard wing tip was bent down & crushed so it would appear that the whole outfit did a complete somersault before coming back on water nose down.

It was eventually beached but sank to main plane level with water. In the

afternoon F was floated down with a huge hole in her hull. a power boat

& Fire Float supported her & she was eventually beached in a nose hangar.

The fire float was pumping water out all the way along, but as a pipe burst in the float, she nearly flooded herself into the bargain.

panic all day. Bags of flap.

11-5-43.

day.

girl.

Parade.

Chilly but more sun. Early Cinema in evening "Zieg fields Practice parade for "Wings for Victory"



75/.

12.5.43. Half day off - mending & reading in afternoons. Practice parade for "Wings for Victory" in evening, after which I cycled to Enniskillen to see "One of our Aircraft is Missing" at the Regl. A lovely evening for our riding.

13.5.43. It poured with rain today and everything became a quagmire. I was glad to be indoors. In the evening went to film show at Camp Cinema & saw "The lady has Planned" followed by "What's Cooking" - an EUSA Show.

14.5.43. Warmer in the morning, turned out sunny later. We had a final practice parade for "W for V".

15.5.43. Glorious warm sunny day. Half day off. Cycled in to Enniskillen to do some shopping. By transport, through lovely

parade at 10.00 for transport to



76

to Castle Derg for "Wings for Victory"  
Parade. March around town. Speeches  
tea - then nothingness till the coach  
left again at 12.30. PM. Their aim  
was high £20,000 but they had every  
confidence in doubling it - as they had  
done so well for previous efforts. (Rolling donkeys)

Sunday

16.5.43. glorious hot sunny  
day. Out in dinghys as much as  
possible.

17.5.43.

Sunny & hot. On half-day,  
cycled to Enniskillen. Sat in sun in  
Park & read till tea time. Had tea at YMCA  
& walked around by the lough & around the town.  
To TOWN HALL Cinema - saw "HARD STEEL".  
Cycled back to Camp. Glorious afterglow &  
moonlight - arrived back at 11.40.

Parade in ... for transport to



77.

18.5.43. Sunny & hot. Had some dinghy rides. Sunbathed for two hours near hut. Then shower & bed.

19.5.43 Sunny day. Paraded at 4.30 for Castle Derg. Boxing & Wings for Victory Dance. Told to parade 6.30 for Five Mile Town. Transport left at 7.0 & we stopped off an hour at Fintona. Arrived at Five Mile Town about 9.15. Walked around - lovely countryside. Had fried egg & chips at Victory Cafe & then to dance, till 2 A.M. Transport left for camp 2.20 via Enniskillen, arriving at 4.0 A.M.

20.5.43 Changed into working clothes & went up to Flight Office in moonlight to get load of work cleaned up. Had breakfast & got back to work & finished up by 10.45. Went to billet for wash & shave and had hour in bed. Parade at 2.30 P.M. for Transport to



78/.

Fintona.

Paraded with Home Guard

C.D. A.T.C etc & marched past  
Lady Montgomery (Gen Mont's Mother) &  
around Town & to Station yards for  
speeches. Had free tea in

Parochial Hall. Strolled around till

after seven - then a crafty run to  
Bunragh was organised & we arrived  
there at 8 P.M. Had two hours

looking around, then back to Fintona  
to the Dance. Arrived back in camp

at 3.45. & to bed till 7.30.

Catalina T crashed. Missing 3 hunt.

21.5.43. a little jaded. Quite a busy

day at work. Dull & cool.

Shower & early to bed.

22.5.43. Cool & inclined to rain.

No flying after morning. Letter writing in

aft. Cinema in evening.



79

23. 5. 43

Ordinary work-day.

24. 5. 43

Half-day off. Cycled with

Nick to Cemaigh, via Inverestown and Drumore.

Nice country ride. The intermediate towns were

awful dumps, but Cemaigh is pleasant.

has nice surrounding country. We wandered

around, did some shopping and had tea at a

Cafe. Then explored the town & finally went to

Enniskillen by train & cycled back to camp

from there. Nice warm day & enjoyable

outing. "Catalina" S. came to grief.

25. 5. 43

Ordinary work-day. Moved into

Hut 572.

In the evening I cycled to

Enniskillen to see "Ruggles of Red Gap".

26. 5. 43

Ordinary working day.

Had showers

& went to bed early - reading & listening

to radio.



52.3.43  
191  
27.5.43

Ordinary working morning.

Half-day in afternoon. Cycled to Enniskillen  
& out beyond the town to read & write.  
High tea at Central Café. Then, after  
sitting up in Park, to Cinema - Regal  
to see 'Tontilla Flats'.