Fall 11-2022

Dr Stuart Cox: Memories Of 5BFTS And The RAF During WW2

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Memories of the RAF during WW2

Stuart Cox, Course 11, Number 5 British Flying Training School (5BFTS)

Stuart James Cox was born on April 1, 1923 and 'handed in his logbook' on October 16, 2016. He was a member of Course 11, 5BFTS at Clewiston from September 25, 1942 to April 8, 1943.

After Clewiston, Stuart was posted to several airfields in the UK, one being Barrow in Furness where he met and married Eithne Forman, a Wren, in August 1944. Their son Robert (Bob) was born in December 1945 and their daughter, Amanda (Mandi), in 1950.

Stuart wrote a brief history of his life and Robert has kindly given consent to allow us to share the extract that he wrote about his time in the RAF.

Preface

In 1943, Stuart was posted to No 10 Air Gunnery School at Barrow where, as a Staff Pilot, he trained air gunners by simulating attacks on bombers so that they could as near as possible experience what it was like to be attacked by fighters. After time at a Spitfire Operational Training Unit at Eshott in Northumberland, he was posted to 65 Squadron. On July 15, 1945, flying a Mustang IV, he was part of the 65 Squadron escort for the Foreign Secretary, the Right Hon Anthony Eden, when he flew to

Berlin[1] and on June 8, 1946, piloted one of the 307 planes which took part in the Victory Europe Day Fly-Past Celebrations.

Stuart was offered an instructors' job at RAF College, Cranwell, but as this did not involve much piloting himself he resigned. He left the RAF on July 19, 1946, and went back to Queen's University Belfast to study medicine (where one of his lecturers was Errol Flynn's father, Theodore). Qualifying in 1953, he became a highly respected GP (MB, BCh, BAO) in Gillingham, Kent until retiring in 1980.

He became a local councillor, and later Chairman of Kent County Council. He was a JP, Chairman of Kent Police, Fire Service and Health Authority at various times before fully retiring. His interests Included golf and sailing; he was Commodore of the Medway Yacht Club. One of his greatest achievements was to rescue a local hospice from closure by making it part of his duty to local healthcare.

Stuart's happiest memories were from his flying years, and he supported many flying charities, in particular the RAF Benevolent Fund. His grandson (Mandi's son), also a doctor, became an orthopaedic surgeon at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham in February 2019.

Bob Cox, December 2022

Memories of the RAF by Stuart Cox

Before the RAF

Soon after leaving school, I saw in the Daily Telegraph an advertisement from the Royal Air Force for applicants for entry to their first University Short Course. Because the RAF was expanding so rapidly, there was a shortage of suitable entrants for commissioned rank. The scheme was that a suitable entrant would be sent to a university for two terms and then enter the RAF as aircrew for the duration of the war. A place at university and a grant after the war was promised. School Certificate at Matriculation level and a recommendation from one's headmaster were required. I did not realise it at the time, but this was a very important turning point in my life. Had I not done this, I would never have gone to university and then returned there after the war and qualified in medicine. Such are the chances that change our lives.

I had always wanted to go to university, but it was not possible, so this seemed to me to be an excellent opportunity. That it also involved joining the RAF at war was not a consideration. I do not remember discussing it with anyone, although I must have told my mother what I intended to do. I do not recall that she demurred. A next-door neighbour said that she was surprised that I was going to leave my mother alone. I applied and was called for an interview at the Air Ministry and was accepted. I was told that there would be a delay while the necessary arrangements were made with the universities. A week or two later, I was called for Attestation which was my entry into the RAF and taking the 'Oath of Allegiance to King George VI, His Heirs and Successors' and I was in.

In view of the delay, I decided to take a job. I had no idea how to go about it or what to do. At that

[1] *Eden was part of the British delegation for the 'Big Three' conference at Potsdam. The United States, Soviet Union and Britain met between 17 July and 2 August 1945 to decide how occupied Germany should be administered and to establish the post-war international order.*

time, I regularly read a magazine about flying and aircraft so decided to write to every advertiser in the magazines asking whether there was a job vacancy. One of the replies was from the parent company of a firm that made self-sealing petrol tanks for aircraft called the Wilkinson Rubber Linatex Company. The patent company was Harrison and Crosfield Ltd of 1-4 Great Tower Street, London. I was interviewed by a Mr. Walkinshaw who was a director. After reading my exam results he said that the vacancy was for an office boy and that I was too well qualified for that so perhaps I would like to be a Junior Clerk. Of course, I did not know what this meant but I had the idea that he thought that he was doing me a good turn, so I accepted. I started the following Monday in the Import Shipping department. The firm was in the business of shipping tea and rubber from the Dutch East Indies and had only a distant connection with aircraft. The pay was thirty-two shillings and six pence a week (£1.62½). I found, in an adjacent office, a friend that I had known at elementary school.

I was given a high desk and stool like Bob Cratchit in Dicken's *Christmas Carol* and a huge ledger and inkwell. I had to copy the numbers of bales of rubber from the ship's manifest that had come from the Far East. Another job that I preferred, was to go to the shipping companies around the City to collect the manifests and return the receipts. This was a most fascinating task involving as it did, going to the shipping offices and collecting the papers from the director responsible.

At this time, the sea war was at its height so there were daily reports of ships being sunk. I was much taken aback by the huge number of them because the newspapers did not always give full reports. The air raids had not at that time started on London, so I had great interest in wandering around the City along the lanes and narrow byways that had been unchanged for hundreds of years. This was particularly true of the tiny lanes around St Paul's Cathedral.

I had lunch at some interesting places one of which was the headquarters of *Toc H* (named after Talbot House which was founded by Tubby Clayton to give food and shelter to British soldiers in France in the Great War). This was situated right by the Tower of London[2].

In July 1940, the Battle of Britain began. There were sporadic raids at first concentrating on RAF airfields. The house in Chipstead, Surrey was only about two miles from an important fighter airfield at Kenley so some bombs dropped very close. As the summer wore on the Germans lost so many aircraft that they started nighttime raids especially on London.

While I was working in London we were continually interrupted by warnings of unexploded bombs. The Germans found that they could cause more disruption by delayed fuse bombs. Towards Christmas the raids intensified until the whole of the east-end was on fire. The main target was docklands which in those days was very busy. One morning on arrival at I found the office to be completed gutted by fire. It had been the heaviest raid of the war. Each day I travelled up to London having caught the 8.14am train from Chipstead. At London Bridge station I walked over London Bridge past the Monument (to the Great Fire) to the office. Looking at the river I could see that something odd had happened. The fire brigade drew its water for the hoses from the Thames by putting wide leather trunks into the river. These were hanging above the water level which was very unusual. That night there had been an excessively low tide, so the trunks did not draw water

[2] Talbot House (Toc H) was founded in Poperinghe, Belgium, in December 1915 by Neville Talbot and the Rev Philip Thomas Byard (Tubby) Clayton. After WW1, Tubby Clayton founded a Christian Youth Centre (later an interdenominational Centre) in London. In 1922, he was appointed Vicar of All Hallows by the Tower because the Archbishop of Canterbury thought that it would be a good base for Toc H work. The Wakefield Trust donated Numbers 41 and 42 Trinity Square, Tower Hill which respectively became the Toc H Headquarters and a Toc H hostel.

for the hoses and the fire brigade was helpless. That was about two or three days after Christmas[3].

We had to search the burnt-out office for any ledgers that were unharmed. They had thick leather bindings so quite a few survived. We moved to a new office to share with another company. I remember that the new office was in Plantation House in a street just off Great Tower Street.

My salary was paid into a branch of Barclays Bank at 5 Great Tower Street, next door to the office. Sometimes I had to go to the bank when it was closed and, because of the nature of the business, I had to ring the bell at the side of the bank for admission.

When I joined the RAF, the firm paid me a third of my wages until I was paid more by the RAF. Thus, when I went to Queen's for six months I had twelve shillings a week pocket money, the RAF paying for my board and keep.

I could not have continued to work in an office but what I would have done but for the war I hate to think. John Rogers, an old school friend, who is a year younger than me, took a job in a fur factory which was even worse. During this time, I was doing my Home Guard duties.

Frequently the railway was bombed so we had to get off and walk either to where we could get on a train again or walk the rest of the way to the City.

My abiding memory of the City of London was that, for the businessmen who had been there some time, it was a big club where men of similar standing met at clubs, pubs, coffee houses and restaurants. Later when I was commissioned and had my wings I went back to the office and met an old friend who had been a junior clerk and was now a second lieutenant in an infantry regiment.

From Chipstead at night we could see the red glare in the sky of the burning buildings in London. The house had a cellar where mother had put some beds so that we could sleep there. After one night I decided that I would take my chance with the bombs. By day the sky was filled with vapour trails from the aircraft dogfighting with the *Luftwaffe.* When we were on Home Guard duty, if an aircraft or a parachutist came near us some of us (not me) fired at them regardless of which side they were on.

Because I was waiting for the RAF to tell me to report, I was able to buy some clothes for my two terms at university without clothing coupons. I went to Alders in Croydon with my mother and bought a sports jacket and grey trousers which I thought was the correct dress for an undergraduate. Otherwise, it would have been my school blazer. Actually, when I reported to Queen's some chaps were wearing school blazers.

One day a letter arrived from the Air Ministry telling me to report to The Queen's University of Belfast and enclosing a travel warrant. I had to look in my school atlas to find out where Belfast

[3] *On 29th December, 1940, the area [Tower Hill] was subjected to air raids that caused what was referred to as the 'Second Great Fire of London'. On that night London suffered its most devastating raid. From 6.15pm until the all-clear sounded three and a half hours later, some 100,000 incendiary bombs and another 24,000 high-explosive devices rained on the heart of the City, destroying many of the buildings that had stood since the City of London was rebuilt after the Great Fire of 1666. The Thames was abnormally low that night, and fire crews found it impossible to get their hoses through the mud and into the water. The water mains were soon fractured, and pumps ran dry.* https://www.iwm.org.uk/blog/partnerships/2020/04/tower-hill-blitz-quest-blog-linda-parker*. Downloaded 21.10.2022*

was[4].

The only thing that I remember about the journey is that I travelled across the Irish Sea from Stranraer in Scotland to Larne in Northern Ireland, and being impressed by the greenness of the grass. On arrival at Queen's, along with twenty-four others, I was met with blank stares and being asked who we were and what were we doing there. After enquiries were made we were told that we would be put in the Applied Science faculty to study aeronautical engineering, aeronautics, mathematics, internal combustion engines, zoology (why zoology?) and physics. Our zoology professor was Professor TT Flynn, the father of Errol Flynn the film actor. The mathematics was a complete waste of time for me because I did not understand a word of it. It consisted mainly of calculus which was a complete mystery. The rest I enjoyed. Later when I returned to Queen's to do medicine, what I had done then gave me exemption from all first-year subjects except botany for which I won the Gold Medal.

For more information about The Queen's University and WW2 RAF Short Courses, see Appendix 1.

We were given rooms in Queen's Chambers which were situated opposite the main gate to the university building. It was very comfortable indeed, each of us having a room to ourselves and a bathroom to every three rooms. Our meals were taken over the road in the refectory and good meals they were. Late one night in December 1941, I heard a strange shuffling noise in the road outside. I looked out of the window to see endless marching men; the shuffling sound was made by their rubber soled boots. I realised that they were Americans who had just come into the war (Pearl Harbour having been bombed by the Japanese on 7 December 1941). They were the first Americans to arrive in the United Kingdom.

We became members of the University Air Squadron. In fact, we were the only members because we took up all the facilities for our initial training in flying, navigation, Morse code and signalling, meteorology, air law, drill and so on.

The Commanding Officer was a Wing Commander Delap DFC whose claim to fame was that he was the first pilot to sink a German submarine from the air[5]. He was an excellent man and we all liked him. I became quite friendly with him and much later, discovered that he gave me a glowing report that probably helped me to be awarded a commission.

One evening, I was host to Lord Londonderry who was Honorary Air Commodore to the squadron and a past Secretary of State for Air. I learned from him the reason why I was posted to Queen's and not somewhere in England. He said that it was the policy of the RAF to post entrants to the University Short Course as far away as possible from their homes to give them a chance to grow up.

We played a lot of rugby against other university teams and service teams. One match was against a squadron from Aldergrove airfield[6]. We had to stay the night there, and were dismayed to find that the sheets on our beds in a Nissen hut were very damp. I learned then that the best thing to do then was to take the sheets off and sleep on the blankets only. We walked everywhere because

[4] Ron Cox, 5BFTS Course 22 (August 1944 to March 1945) was also an RAF cadet on a short course at Queen's. He and Stuart are not related.

[5] In March 1940, the then Sq/Ldr Miles Villiers Delap attacked a submarine from 500 ft scoring two direct hits. For recognition of this gallantry, he was awarded the Distinguished Flying cross (DFC)

[6] RAF Aldergrove was an important station for RAF Coastal Command in the Battle of the Atlantic. It is near Antrim and 18 miles north-west of Belfast by (the now) Belfast International Airport.

none of us had much money and what we had was spent on coffee, a few tram fares, fish and chips and little else. In the evenings in the Chambers, if a chap was going to the fish and chip shop we would give him our orders and he would take a suitcase in which to carry them back.

I was on the Chambers Committee. One day there was a complaint that there was some petty pilfering and we had to search all the rooms. One chap was sent down, but the most interesting discovery was a service revolver in one room which, in the current state of affairs in Northern Ireland, was rather serious. It was confiscated and nothing else done.

One of the first surprises I had on arriving in Belfast was the large number of small boys running about the centre of the city without shoes or socks. This was in mid-winter. They would hop on trams and try to sell newspapers for a half-penny.

On a few occasions we had flights in an Avro Tutor aircraft with Wing Commander Delap at Belfast airport at Sydenham[7]. The trips were more for familiarisation than learning to fly.

The squadron HQ was in a large Victorian house in College Gardens, a private road with gates at each end. It was more like a club and Delap would challenge us to games of backgammon on which he was very keen. We were issued with RAF uniforms which had University Air Squadron Badges on the top of the sleeves. We did our Initial Training in great comfort. Other aircrew entrants had to attend Initial Training Centres at such places as Padstow, Blackpool and Skegness. There the discipline was very strict and accommodation very uncomfortable. It was a nasty culture shock when we eventually reported to the RAF proper.

I existed at Queen's on the twelve shillings a week from Harrison and Crosfield. When we were at the end of our course in the Spring of 1942 I had no money and only a travel warrant to get me home. Luckily the Commanding Officer organised an athletics meeting and gave prizes of thirty shillings (now £1.50) in a sealed brown envelope to protect our amateur status. I won four events so was wealthy. The sport was an advantage to me later.

Little did I know that my having been at Queen's would be of benefit to me in a quite unexpected way the following year.

At last, I went home having enjoyed my taste of university. After a week or two I was instructed to report to RAF Aircrew Reception Centre at St John's Wood, London on 2 May 1942. My service number was 1394557 (557 for short). We reported to a modern block of flats called Abbey Lodge. The intake consisted of all university entrants and immediately we were hated by all the corporals in charge of us. It made it worse that we did not take them seriously. Our attitude was not understood by them and not to their liking. Another thing that annoyed them was that on arrival we were all promoted to Leading Aircraftsmen (the equivalent of Lance Corporal in the Army). On the second day I was ordered to have a haircut. I went to Austin Reed in Regent Street but on return was ordered to see the camp barber for a 'proper hair-cut'.

However, we were all in a cheerful frame of mind thinking that our flying training was about to commence. Wrong. We stayed there until 23 May, and then were transferred to Brighton in disgrace. I was never quite sure about this, but rumour had it that we had 'incited to mutiny' by not obeying an order. It was news to me. My vague recollection is that when our rooms were inspected

[7] *RAF Sydenham is now George Best City Airport, Belfast.*

some nitwit had left his space untidy, perhaps someone else had too, and this amounted to mutiny. My friend Colin Downes, whose autobiography I have just read[8] has it like this, *"After we paraded for a series of immunisation injections some cadets collapsed in a faint. We then dressed and were marched back to our billets. We were ordered to parade again in ten minutes in full marching order with an inspection to follow. The following morning, we all had varying degrees of fever and sickness* (to my knowledge we did not). *Some of us were unable to dress properly and were not able to fall in. Some kits were not laid out correctly and beds not made* (not in my room). *There then followed a period of confusion when some cadets went back to their rooms and lay on their beds. The corporals took this to be a deliberate refusal to obey orders. The result was that the report was sent up to higher authority and we were paraded at Lord's Cricket Ground before a high-ranking officer.* (I do not remember this)".

As a result, we were sent to another reception centre in Brighton and were billeted in the Metropole Hotel, me in room 616. We were there from 23 May to 10 June 1942. We had a super time with a very friendly corporal who, when he took us on a march, he merely took us around the nearest corner and told us to clear off for an hour and meet him back there. We all went to a nearby coffee shop until it was time to return. He was a Corporal Gunter who has my best wishes wherever he is. We paraded each morning on the first-floor landing in the Grand Hotel. This does not sound the sort of treatment meted out to mutineers. I think that there was a rumour about incitement to mutiny as there always is this sort of story in similar circumstances. It makes a good story and Colin Downes dressed it up for his book. I remember the rumour going round but do not believe that it was true.

We were issued with our flying kit at St Johns Wood which included a heavy flying suit (which we never used), helmet (mine – photograph to the left - is now in a glass case in the Manston Museum[9]), three pairs of gloves (silk, wool, leather), a steel helmet (never worn), a kit bag white with two horizontal blue stripes (everything that we had was crammed in this) plus shirts, socks and underwear. I never wore the shirts and underwear preferring my own Van Heusen shirts.

We had a rigorous medical examination in the famous Long Room at Lord's. We all thought that we would go down in history as being the few who had had our trousers down in that hallowed place.

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[8] *By the Skin of My Teeth: The Memoirs of an RAF Mustang Pilot in World War II and of Flying Sabres with USAF in Korea. Colin Downes. First published 2005 (Pen and Sword)*

[9] ***RAF Manston History Museum and the Spitfire and Hurricane Museum,*** *Manston Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT12 5DF are both located at the Manston (Kent International) Airport (currently not in use as an airport), the site of the historic RAF Manston, Battle of Britain front-line airfield. https://rafmanston.co.uk and https://www.spitfiremuseum.org.uk*

On another occasion we had a 'gas parade' on the pitch at Lord's. For this we had to wear our gasmasks and enter a brick-built building on the pitch where tear gas was dispersed. We were told to take off our masks to experience the effects of the gas (not good).

While we were at St John's Wood billeted in a block of flats we were suddenly invaded by policemen. They had come to arrest a cadet named Cummings. He was taken to Bow Street police station where he was charged with multiple murders. He had murdered several prostitutes in the West End of London. Newspapers had reported the murders as the work of a modern Jack the Ripper. Cummings was a quiet unassuming type who we found it difficult to associate with such crimes. A friend of mine, who had been on guard duty when Cummings came in after curfew, was the principal witness for the prosecution. Cummings was arrested only four hours after the last murder because he had left his service gas mask at the scene of the crime with his service number on it. Cummings was hanged. His gas mask is now in the Museum of the Metropolitan Police at Hendon.

On 10 June 1942, we were posted to No 6 Elementary Flying School, at Sywell, Northampton. This was for flying training to get us to first solo to ensure that we had the ability to proceed to further training. It was called 'grading'. Some were not selected and went off for training as other aircrew such as observers, navigators, bomb aimers, air gunners and so on. As the war went on other aircrew were needed such as aircraft engineers and meteorological observers (my brother, Laurie, was a met observer). I see from my logbook that I did my first solo on 19 June 1942 after seven and a half hours of dual instruction from Pilot Officer Somers in a Tiger Moth. I did twelve hours and twenty-five minutes flying time there altogether and was passed as suitable for pilot training.

The Tiger Moth was a very good trainer, but one had to treat it right. Being very primitive, the only communication with the instructor was by a speaking tube which was very inefficient. The cockpit drill on getting into the aircraft was Switches on, Petrol on, Altimeter set for take-off, Tail-trim set, Slots unlocked, Sir. SPATS for short. Cockpit drill became the most important drill, our lives depended on it. The engine was started by swinging the propeller. It took an hour or two to overcome the disorientation of being in the air. It was easy at first to be lost as soon as one took off. I do not remember first solo as being at all traumatic, one was concentrating so hard on doing all the routine things that no sooner was one up that it was time to land. My solo trip took ten minutes.

Suddenly we felt that we were really in the RAF. Not yet. We were off to Heaton Park, Manchester, on 7 July which was an Aircrew Dispersal Centre[10]. We were there until 25 August awaiting posting to our future training centre.

Heaton Park is in the centre of Manchester and was entirely taken over by the RAF. We must have been some of the first there because we were all in bell tents much to our discomfort. It rained every day and mud was everywhere. We washed and shaved (those of us who did shave by then) in cold water at primitive ablutions. Meals were taken at a large mansion in the park entailing long queues. Meals must have been adequate; I do not remember them, but I do recall that we had to queue up for a very long time for each meal. We had been issued with a knife, fork and spoon colloquially known as 'irons' which were dipped in dirty greasy water to clean them after each meal. Some said that they started to queue for the next meal as soon as they had had the last.

We had a sports day there and I was volunteered for the 440 yards race which I won by miles. This

[10] RAF Heaton Park was functional from September 1941 to October 1945 as an Aircrew Dispersal (or Despatch) Centre (ACDC) acting as a "Holding Camp" for Aircrew awaiting Posting to other areas for further Training.

became my favourite distance having always concentrated on the 100 and 220 in the past. I think that running 'round the block' when we lived at Casella Road, London must have conditioned me. We had some leave from there entailing a nightmarish journey to London and Chipstead and back. Wartime train travel was awful on very over-crowded trains where one was lucky to find a seat and train times were unpredictable. One always seemed to be travelling at midnight. We were given travel warrants but not first class until we were commissioned.

A railway-cutting ran through Heaton Park so that it was possible to climb down to the railway lines and pass under a short tunnel and come up outside the park. Those of us who did this, then went to a small corner shop where in the back room, the proprietress provided us with large cups of tea and buns with a lot of butter for 'tuppence'. We enjoyed the tea and buns but even more we enjoyed doing it illegally. It became an interesting game doing this sort of thing and was called 'scrounging'. It was a way of remaining an individual and not one of an amorphous mass. It encouraged enterprise.

At last, we were all called to a parade to hear where we had been posted for flying training. At that time all flying training took place in Commonwealth countries and the United States of America[11]. (Was the Commonwealth still the Empire in 1943?). There was a great cheer when we heard the good news that we were leaving.

My group was off to North America but did not know where. We left Heaton Park on 25 August 1943 and travelled over night to Greenock in Scotland to board ship for points unknown. We embarked on the *USS Thomas H Barry*. It was a cargo vessel with the holds fitted with primitive bunks one above the other. We were well down in the ship with just the steel plates of the hull between us and the Atlantic Ocean. The showers had cold seawater and we had to use a special soap that lathered a little with seawater. The ship was very crowded, and we had to queue almost continuously for meals. The crew was American as was the food.

Our trip across the Atlantic was at a time when the U-Boat threat was at its greatest. Oddly I do not remember giving this a second thought. I think that the whole experience was a little unreal most of us never having been far from home before. The voyage was not without incident. We were in convoy with other ships and the battleship *USS Arkansas* for escort. There were destroyers on either side of the convoy. Our course took us South in the hope of missing the U-Boat packs. Five days out, I was below when I heard very loud explosion. I went up on deck to see what had happened and as I put my head up above deck level the naval gun that we had on board, and was only a few feet away from me, fired. A flash of light seemed to go through my head and the noise was enormous. An American ship, *SS Manhattan*, alongside us had black smoke pouring out of her and she pulled out of convoy. It had been hit by a torpedo and was listing badly. We all expected another torpedo at any minute but only in a detached sort of way. The firing of the gun left me deaf for a week.

We arrived in New York harbour five days later. Sailing up to New York past the Statue of Liberty and seeing the New York skyline was quite exciting. We disembarked carrying our kitbags and paraded in a large shed. There we were issued with ten dollars (four to the pound then) and waited. There was always a great deal of waiting in the Services. Eventually we were sorted into groups of

[11] The Empire Air Training Scheme (EATS) was established in December 1939. It was changed to the British Commonwealth Air Training Plan (BCATP) in 1942 ('The Plan'). Trained pilots, and also navigators, wireless operators, bomb aimers, air gunners and flight engineers. Countries involved in training were Australia, Bermuda, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, Southern Rhodesia, USA.

a hundred. Each group was off to a training school. My group were heading for Florida which was the most wanted assignment. Others were going to various places in Canada and some other places in the USA. The most unpopular was the American Navy Air Training School in Pensacola where rumour had it that discipline was very strict and idiosyncratic (those who went confirmed this). When the officer turned his back some chaps changed places with others if they had a preference for a particular destination. This must have caused great confusion when they arrived.

However, we were not yet on our way South because we travelled North to Moncton[12], New Brunswick in Canada. Obviously it was not always possible to ship large numbers of people around and make all the connections fit exactly. We arrived in Moncton on 6 September 1943. At least the camp was properly fitted out with purpose-built barrack blocks and reasonable facilities. At that time all the Juke Boxes were playing the tune *Tangerine* which, when I hear it now, instantly reminds me of being there and all the strange surroundings. It must have been a very exciting experience, but I do not remember it in that way.

September in Canada is a wonderful sight with all the trees in autumn leaf and a huge variety of red leaves. One day I took a bus to the end of the line and walked in the forest. It was good to get away from the RAF for a short while.

The RAF organised an athletics meeting against a Canadian Team. Moncton had a good stadium and a cinder track. The first time I had seen one. I ran the 440-yard race as I had in Manchester with the same result. As far as I can recall that was my last athletics event.

We spent most of our money (very little it was) on food. We most enjoyed being able to buy hot cakes with maple syrup and butter and ham and eggs. We had a piece of apple pie if we could afford it. We did not drink then.

We set off for Florida on 22 September 1943. It took us three days to travel to Clewiston, Florida, via New York, Boston and Savannah. We stopped off in these places to change trains and a few hours away from the train in New York and Boston. In NY, some of us visited the Empire State Building and The Diamond Horse-Shoe Bar where we saw Jack Dempsey. In Boston, we had a meal and visited a club where Count Basie was playing. Luckily the train was air-conditioned because the temperature gradually became warmer. When we detrained in Florida, the humidity and smell of vegetation was like stepping into a greenhouse.

We were taken to the airfield by bus about five miles outside a small town called Clewiston. The airfield and staff were all American civilians. It was called the Embry Riddle Aero College. The airfield was in the middle of the Everglades an extensive swamp and marshland. The Seminole Red Indians lived in the Everglades. They used to come into Clewiston to sell craft products that they had made. The Seminoles were the only Red Indian nation not to have signed the peace treaty with the United States government and so were still technically at war with the USA. A short distance away was Lake Okeechobee a circular lake about thirty miles in diameter. This part of Florida was given over to citrus farms and large cattle ranches reclaimed from the Everglades. The airfield was about one mile square and was all grass. A central area had a control tower and accommodation set around a swimming pool. There was a dining room and a café and sports facilities including tennis courts. It was rather like a country club but not quite so lavish. Of course, the weather was

[12] RAF Moncton or 31 Personnel Dispatch Centre (PDC) was established in 1941. From here, RAF aircrew were posted to training schools throughout both Canada and the USA.

perfect but very hot. Donald Budge[13], who had won Wimbledon the previous year, was physical training instructor.

We were allocated quarters in the usual air force way; in alphabetical order. Here I might add that because of this method one was always thrown up against the same chaps. I became friendly with Derek Clandillion, John Clay, Peter Deverson, Colin Downes and so on because we always paraded in this order. Clandillon and Clay were close friends and came from the same area of London. Unfortunately, they were both killed later in training while flying together and are buried in a special graveyard in Arcadia FLA dedicated to RAF personnel killed while training in Florida[14].

Flying training was divided into two parts, primary and advanced[15]. The aircraft used for primary was the excellent Stearman PT17 and for advanced the North American AT6A (known in the RAF as the Harvard). All the instructors were American and had been in a variety of occupations before we arrived including crop dusting, flying circuses and 'barnstorming'. Some had a very strong southern American accent which we soon became used to. They all had a 'seat of the pants' approach to flying. My first instructor was JW Hawkins. (You might wonder how I remember all these details; they are all in my logbook). My first flight was on 21 June 1942 and lasted 25 minutes.

Another important element in training was in the Link Trainer. This was a simulator consisting of a small mock-up of an aeroplane linked to a table nearby which had on it a 'crab' which moved across the table responding to movements of the controls of the 'link'. It was used for instrument flying training. A hood came down over the cockpit so that one had only the instruments to show what was happening. It was absolutely vital to be good at instrument flying for night, cloud and fog flying. Extreme concentration was required. This was even more important in instrument flying in an aircraft when the movement of the plane in turns and so on could deceive the senses and one had to be very strong minded indeed to ignore one's basic instincts and rely on the instruments.

At the weekends we were able to go into Clewiston on the field bus. This was in charge of a real southern character who always wore two revolvers and whom we called the 'sheriff'. When we returned to the field he would send round the bus a sheet of paper for us to sign our names. These would read as Adolf Hitler, Benito Mussolini, Clark Gable, Mickey Mouse etc. He never noticed because we were convinced that he could not read. We went to the tiny wooden cinema to see old films and a 'cliff hanger'. Some went to a bowling alley and others visited the homes of instructors or local residents. They were all most friendly and hospitable. Many were proud to claim British ancestors, particularly the Scots.

Adjoining the field was an orange grove so that we all had a box of oranges under our beds.

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[13] Donald Budge is the only man to have achieved the Triple Crown (winning singles, men's doubles and mixed doubles at the same tournament) on three separate occasions, Wimbledon 1937 and 1938, and the US Championships in 1938. He was the world Number 1 amateur in 1937 and 1938 and world Number 1 professional in 1939, 1940 and 1942. Don Budge became Embry Riddle Director of Athletics in August 1942.

[14] Derek R Clandillion and John A Clay were killed in a plane crash on January 19, 1943. Their bodies were found about 20 miles north-east of Okeechobee and they are buried in the Commonwealth War Graves Commission British Plot at Oak Ridge Cemetery, Arcadia.

[15] Training was originally in three parts – Primary, Basic and Advanced Training (PT, BT and AT). The Stearman PT 17 was used for Primary training. For cadets in the early courses, the Vultee BT-13A was used for Basic training and the AT-6 Harvard for Advanced training. Following a fatal crash at 5BFTS (Clewiston) in January 1942, and concerns about the safety of the Vultee BT-13A, it was withdrawn from the training programme and cadets starting basic/advanced training in August 1942 undertook it all in the AT-6A.

At regular intervals we had weekend passes so that we were able to visit Miami or Palm Beach. Sometimes we went by bus and at others we shared the hire of a car. Although we could all fly only one or two could drive a car. I always stayed in an hotel but others stayed with families.

At Christmas, eight us were invited to the Beach Club at Palm Beach. This was a most lavish private club with every facility that one could imagine. We had Christmas lunch around the pool and were delighted to live like millionaires for a day. There we met the Kennedy family (Jack who was then in his mid-twenties later was President of USA). Christmas in the sub-tropics is not the same.

Apart from the flying there was ground school where we had lectures and practical work in air law, navigation, meteorology, signals, armament etc. and physical training which included PT and games. Soft ball was very popular as was athletics of all sorts. Once we made up two teams of fifteen and played a demonstration game of rugby in Clewiston on a cinder baseball pitch wearing American football boots and socks up over our knees. The Americans could not understand how we could play such a violent game without body protection.

The USA was domestically still as if it were peacetime. All town lights were on, and radio beacons were still operating. These could be used for navigation. One would fly along the beacon listening to the radio. While one was on course a steady sound was received but to one side of the beam one would receive either a dot or a dash. We avoided this as far as possible because such systems did not operate in wartime England.

A regular exercise was cross country navigation. This would involve setting a course to visit towns around Florida and working out the courses to steer according to the weather and wind speed and direction. We visited towns such as Punta Gorda, Immokalee, LaBelle, Brighton, Moore Haven, Venus, Olga, Brooksville, Bonita Springs, Fort Meade, Fort Ogden, Hilolo, Boynton, Melbourne, Frostproof, Murdock, Fort Myers, Plant City, Ocala, Lakeland, Sarasota, Fort Pierce, Myakka City, Naples, Babson Park, Kissimmee, Belle Glade, Winter Haven, Stuart, Arcadia (where the RAF cemetery is), Palm Beach, Sebring, Homestead, Fort Lauderdale to name but a few.

One day a chap called Hatcher had to make a forced landing but, not having a radio, was unable to let us know. An instructor took off and found him. Hatcher appeared to be lying unconscious in the cockpit, so the instructor landed but the swampy ground caused his plane to turn upside down. Then Hatcher appeared by the instructor's plane to enquire as to his health. The instructor asked Hatcher why he had not indicated that he was unhurt, and was told that he had fallen asleep and did not hear the instructor's aircraft.

We completed our primary training on 29 November 1942. We then moved on to the AT6A (which we all called the Harvard). We felt like aces. On primary we had worn yellow flashes in our caps, now we were excessively proud to wear red flashes and looked down on yellow flashes as real beginners. It really was quite an exciting experience to move from a small open cockpit biplane to a powerful closed cockpit low wing monoplane but wonderful. We were all grateful to King George VI for giving us such a treat.

Here I might say that we were all looking forward to getting back to England, I certainly was.

My total flying time up to now was 70 hours. At last, we were to fly an aircraft more like the fighter planes that we had joined the RAF to fly. My first trip in the Harvard was on the 8 December 1942. It was as enjoyable as we expected. We went through all the important aspects of flying that we

had with the PT17 except that it all happened quicker and more powerfully. We went further on cross country trips both day and night. At night town lights were on, and here and there were what appeared to be town lights but were actually campfires of the Seminole Indians who lived in the Everglades. On 20 January 1943, one of the aircraft did not return so we all took off and searched for them. This was when Derek Clandillon and John Clay were killed. It was evident that they had been low flying and had dug a wing in and crashed.

One day there was a hurricane alert, so we were all allocated an aircraft and instructed to fly north and find airfields at which to land and stay there until we were recalled. Colin Downes and I took two Harvards to Silver Springs at Ocala. We landed at an American Army Airforce Base. They had no idea who we were, and we did not tell them that we were still training. We were treated as officers and spent three days in relative luxury with no expense spared. We were loath to return.

One night on returning from a cross country flight with another trainee acting as navigator in the rear cockpit, I found the airfield completely covered by fog at ground level. Not wishing to divert to Miami I foolishly decided to see if I could land. I let down gradually with only the control tower sticking up through the fog as a guide. I put down flaps so that I could reduce speed to about eighty miles per hour. At a very low altitude of a few feet just as I thought I was over the field I put the wheels down and at the same time my navigator, thinking he was helping, pulled up the flaps. This caused the aircraft to fall out of the sky like a brick. I am still here because the aircraft landed on its wheels and rolled to a stop. I had to radio the tower and ask someone to guide me in. I had to switch on the very powerful landing lights so that they could find us. The next day I was asked by all the instructors how I did it. I kept very quiet trying to give the impression that it was nothing. Actually, it was as near death as I had ever been. But it was a very valuable lesson learned.

One day we were told to parade to welcome a visiting pilot who was going to give a display of aerobatics. An American fighter aircraft appeared and proceeded to give a brilliant display. The instructors applauded and smirked at us with pride at the display. The aircraft taxied in, and out stepped an RAF squadron leader who had only one arm. Jaws dropped. This was Squadron Leader James McLachlan DSO DFC who had continued to fly operations while having only one arm. He later gave us a talk telling of his experiences in France, over Dunkirk and in Malta. He expressed his words with the most colourful language that we had ever heard. It did our morale the world of good.

At last, we came near the end of our course with ground school examinations and flight tests. We awaited results with bated breath. (How do you bate breath?) Not only would the results determine whether or not we gained our wings but also whether we became sergeants or pilot officers. Ten of us were commissioned, I was one of them, and the rest put three stripes on their sleeves. Of course, those of us who were commissioned could not buy uniforms, so we put white armbands on. As you can imagine it was a great day and difficult to believe that it had all happened. It was 9 April 1943.

The newly commissioned took off for a formation fly-past while the others had a group photograph taken. I have a copy of that photograph which was given to me when I went to the RAF Club in Piccadilly on 9 April 2003. Nine of us turned up to that reunion all of us looking old and all talking about their various medical complaints. I did not recognise any of them since I remembered them when we nineteen or twenty. It was agreed that it would be our last reunion.

When I received my ‘Wings’ I had done 214 flying hours.

The next day we were on the train back to Moncton, New Brunswick. There I lost no time in buying a uniform at a store which did a good trade fitting out new officers. I returned to my room and put on this new gear and felt like a million dollars (as they say). Later when I left the building a cadet approached and gave me my first salute. It was John Rogers, my best friend from school, who had just arrived and was on his way to a training base in Canada.

While we were waiting for a ship to take us home, the Officers Mess put on a concert. As these things usually do it caused great laughter and was made exceptionally good by a Flying Officer Jimmy Edwards. He was obviously very talented in the comedy business and after he left the RAF was at the Windmill and was famous on radio, television and films.

We paraded for pay and were given a sum in Canadian Dollars which were spent on extra kit. Later on, returning to England I discovered (as no doubt others did) that I had been paid for the same period into my bank. This windfall I spent on the best greatcoat that money could buy at Fortnum and Mason's. It was of the best Crombie cloth and so well-tailored that it did not feel heavy and was beautifully warm. In the years to come it was a great friend. The Air Ministry soon discovered their mistake (probably I was not the only one overpaid) and wrote to me asking for a refund. I offered to pay back £5.00 a month and they agreed at once. When I returned to Queen's I took the RAF buttons off the greatcoat and replaced them with leather ones.

The ship bringing us back to England was a French vessel called the *Louis Pasteur*. I was lucky to be in a first-class cabin (with twenty-five others). The ship sailed alone because it was thought that its superior speed would keep it safe from U-Boats. At least we were going in the right direction. Some of the passengers played poker all the way home. When we were a few miles from Liverpool we were greeted by three Spitfires flying low over the ship. Whoever thought to do that was right because it was just what we needed.

We left Moncton on 27 May 1943 and arrived at the Queen's Hotel, Harrogate via Liverpool on 5 June 1943. This hotel was a stopping off point where we stayed until our postings were decided. The first day when I entered the dining room a Group Captain called out me 'Hello Cox'. It was Miles Delap who had been CO of the Queen's University Air Squadron. My friends were impressed.

We were there until 30 June 1943.

Then I was off to another holding unit in Bournemouth staying at the Carlton Hotel which had been General Eisenhower's HQ. (I stayed there many years later and did not like it).

In Bournemouth I had my first taste of command. I was put in charge of an intake of one hundred aircrew from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa. At first they tried to slope off when they could, and it was difficult to keep track of a hundred officers who were determined to have a good time. Nobody checked on us, so one morning I paraded them and told them to disappear for three days but report back to me then or else. I was relieved when they all turned up and said to me that it had been the best decision an officer had made since they joined.

On 13 July 1943, I was posted to an airfield at Peterborough for flying familiarisation with wartime England. While there I was promoted to Flying Officer with an increase in pay. The aircraft were Miles Masters and were a pleasure to fly. There was no regular instruction, so we set ourselves things to do. We spent our time flying about the country looking at things of interest. One day I flew over to Sandringham and other well-known spots. Much of the time we organised air races

around landmarks such as Ely Cathedral, Thetford and King's Lynn.

In Peterborough, I used to go to the local repertory theatre. The interest was not the rather mediocre acting but in seeing the same cast taking different parts each week. It must have been difficult to learn a part for next week while playing this week's part. One week, a great fuss was made of the most popular young male lead who it was said was off to success in London. Not long afterwards I saw him in a café in London looking very down on his luck not having been the great actor that he was in Peterborough. The airfield in Peterborough was near enough to the town centre to be able to walk there. Unfortunately, for night flying we moved to a satellite field at a village called Sibson. We stayed there for a week before moving back to Peterborough. We made that move once more before leaving Peterborough on 23 November 1943 for Walney Island, Barrow in Furness.

I should mention one incident when I did not cover myself with glory. We were billeted in wooden huts with a room each. The rooms were heated by cast iron stoves. One very cold day I lit the stove and opened the damper to get the fire started. Just then I was called away urgently and forgot to close the damper. When I returned I found that the stove was red hot, and a hole burned in the wall. I had to go to the CO and explain. He said that I was not the first, he had done the same thing himself.

Now we are on familiar territory. I was very lucky to be posted to Barrow which was No 10 Air Gunnery School. I was appointed as a Staff Pilot to train air gunners by simulating attacks on bombers so that they could as near as possible experience what it was like to be attacked by fighters. It also involved doing patrols out over the Irish Sea to detect U-Boats which at that time were trying to attack our western ports. It was a wonderful experience to be flying every day and a good way to gain valuable flying hours and responsibility. After a while I was made flight commander which gave me some responsibilities in administration and learn how the RAF was organised (and allowed me to give myself extra flying).

We flew every day that the weather allowed either over the sea or over the Lake District. The airfield was at the northern end of Walney Island. Walney is the Anglo Saxon for windy and it was. We lived in Nissen huts (made of corrugated iron) and had a wooden hut as an Officers Mess. One day I was flying quite low and ran into a flock of seagulls one of which flew into the leading edge of my starboard wing making a large hole. I was concerned that it would make landing difficult but in the event it went off well. I was surprised that no-one asked me why I was flying so low.

At dinner one evening the CO, Squadron Leader Ian Ramsay, asked for volunteers to take the Mayor of Barrow's daughter to a ball. There were no offers, so he pointed to me sitting opposite to him and said I was volunteering. I was not amused. Anyway, I did it and found that the mayor's daughter was quite attractive (her name was Pat Burrell). Another chap named Jackson and I made up a four and took the CO's car to the hotel where the ball was to be held. The girl that Jackson had asked was Eithne Foreman. During the evening we seemed to change partners, me ending up with Eithne and Jackson with Pat Burrell. Such is the way that fate works. Many years later when Eithne and I were watching television and an advertisement came on for Hoover vacuum cleaners, the woman showing it was Pat Burrell who had become an actress. Eithne recognised her at once.

From then on we met as often as possible with my spending evenings at 40 Church Street. Eithne's parents welcomed me warmly especially when they learned that I had been at Queen's and knew Belfast. We were married at St George's Church on 26 August 1944. My best man was Victor Berry,

a pilot and two or three other friends came to the reception in the front room at No 40. We went to the Swan Hotel at Newby Bridge in the Lake District for our honeymoon. We were both twenty-one.

Eithne's father, William, was rather a heavy drinker spending all his leisure time at the Majestic Hotel with his friends. He was keen on horse racing and once had a part share in a horse. Every year he went to Liverpool for the Waterloo Cup for hare coursing. For a living he imported linen from Belfast and sold it in Barrow and Ulverston. He did quite well I think.

The household kept out of his way when he came home. Dix, Eithne's brother was a Lieutenant Commander in the Royal Naval Reserve as Chief Engineer on an aircraft carrier. He had been a chief engineering officer in the merchant navy before the war. Doris and Lois, Eithne's sisters were in the WRNS[16].

Eithne joined the WRNS, but I cannot be sure when that was. She was in the signals section and had to learn the Morse Code. Fortunately, I could help and she learned it in no time. She looked very smart in her uniform and had crossed flags on her sleeve to signify signals. First she was stationed in London and later at Speke Airfield in Liverpool. As I write this I seem to recall that she joined the WRNS before we were married. I am rather vague about this.

Admiral Sir Max Horton, Commander in Chief of Western Approachs had his HQ at Speke. One evening when Eithne was on duty an urgent message came from the Admiralty in London for Horton to mobilise the fleet and put to sea. The duty officer was drunk and unable to pass on the message, so Eithne did it in the duty officer's name. For this show of initiative in an emergency, she was mentioned in dispatches which was very unusual for a Wren. She had a certificate for this, but it is lost but I do have her war medal.

One weekend I borrowed an aircraft and flew down to Speke from Barrow and luckily was not found out.

My stay at Walney Island was soon up and I was posted to a Spitfire Operational Training Unit at Eshott in Northumberland. There we had a familiarisation course on the Spitfire. On my first trip I tried a slow roll but instead of a leisurely roll over as in previous aircraft I had flown it flicked over so fast that I flung my arms around the cockpit and knocked the glass out of my Omega watch. Eithne gave me that watch on my twenty-first birthday. Now my daughter, Mandy has it.

At Eshott I learned something of the fighter pilot's art. Flying the Spitfire was all that it is said to be. It suited me wonderfully. The cockpit was small, and one did not so much as get into it but put it on. I did over fifty flying hours there bringing my total up to seven hundred and fifty hours. My experience gained at Walney Island was invaluable. I was at Eshott for two months before being posted to a fighter squadron.

I mentioned a fellow cadet who was hanged for murder while we in London. Another suspicious death occurred while we were at Eschott. A girl friend of a Canadian pilot was shot. He said that he had been tapping on the table at her house with a loaded revolver to the tune of a song called *Pistol Packing Momma* when it went off accidentally. He was tried for murder but was acquitted and sent home to Canada.

[16] *WRNS – Woman's Royal Naval Service, popularly and officially known as 'The Wrens'.*

On 9 April 1945 I was promoted to Flight Lieutenant and added another ring to my sleeve (this was the equivalent rank to Captain in the army). I think that my pay went up to about £2 per day.

The squadron[17] was then based at Peterhead in Scotland. To my astonishment I found that they were equipped with the latest Mustang aircraft. Normally one would be sent to an appropriate OTU but now it was a matter of learning the cockpit drill and off. I soon found that the Mustang was as good an aircraft as the Spitfire but in a different way. It was fast and had a long range but not quite as nimble as the Spitfire. Unlike the Spitfires our Mustangs were not painted in camouflage colours but was left unpainted silver. They looked very smart.

The squadron was in Scotland to harass the Germans who then occupied Norway. It was a long way across the North Sea. The Mustang was perfectly suited to this work because of its long range. Not long afterwards the squadron moved to Bentwaters in Suffolk not far from Woodbridge. It was a good station which we all enjoyed. It was an easy trip to the continent from there. My first trip was to Lille in France and back to Chatham escorting bombers.

My logbook reminds me that I took the CO Squadron Leader Johnny Foster on leave to Belfast in a two-seater aircraft. He asked me to do it because of my having flown from Sydenham aerodrome in Belfast. His father was a dentist in University Square and Johnny had been a first-year medical student. Many years later, after I had qualified and was in charge of the private wing at the Royal Victoria Hospital, his wife was admitted for an operation. On the way back from Belfast I made for Barrow which was more or less on my way back to Bentwaters. Crossing the Irish Sea there was thick cloud and I was unsure of my position. Suddenly I was surrounded by anti-aircraft fire which was lucky because I remembered that there was a range just North of Barrow so I knew exactly where I was. I see that it took me 2hrs 30min to fly from Bentwaters to Belfast and 45min to fly back to Barrow.

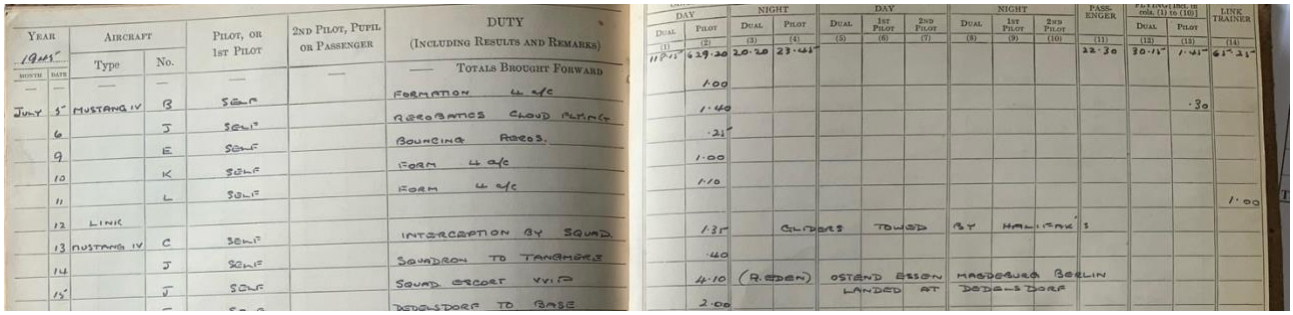
We visited such places as St Omer, Rotterdam, Wilhelmshaven, Flensburg (Denmark), Eindhoven, Cherbourg, Ostend, Essen, Magdeburg, Dedelsdorff and Berlin. My logbook tells me that we did a Royal Escort trip on one occasion from Northolt to Christchurch but I have no memory of it or even where Christchurch is.

Germany surrendered on 8 May 1945. This end of the war in Europe is known as 'VE'-Day. After two atom bombs were dropped on Japan they surrendered on 15 August 'VJ'-Day. It was an astonishing feeling that at last after six long years the war was over. It is debatable whether anyone won. On 8 June 1946 there was a further celebration in respect of the entire war which allowed all nations to take part; this was 'V'-Day.

On 14 July 1945, the squadron flew down to Tangmere in Hampshire for a special duty. We were to escort Anthony Eden, the Foreign Secretary, to Berlin where Winston Churchill was to meet with the President of the United States and Stalin for a Summit Conference at Potsdam. The next day we entertained Eden to lunch in the mess and then took off with the Stratocruiser airliner which he travelled in. I see from my logbook that it took us 4hrs 10mins to get there. Eden landed at Gatow the Berlin airport, and we landed at Dedelsdorf nearby which had been a Luftwaffe fighter squadron base. It was a superb mess; the dining room being underground with beautiful natural wood panelling carved with woodland scenes. The German staff was still there and served us well. Later

[17] *65 Squadron*

we flew home taking this time only two hours because we did not have to fly at the same speed as an airliner. On the way we flew over the Ruhr where the cities were reduced to rubble for many miles. We were shocked at the damage.



Year	Month	Date	Aircraft Type	Aircraft No.	Pilot, or 1st Pilot	2nd Pilot, Pupil or Passenger	Duty (Including Results and Remarks)	Day Dual	Day Pilot	Night Dual	Night Pilot	Day Dual	Day 1st Pilot	Day 2nd Pilot	Night Dual	Night 1st Pilot	Night 2nd Pilot	Pass-enger	Pilot (1) to (10) Dual	Pilot (1) to (10) Pilot	Link Trainer
								(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(13)	(14)
19A4							Totals Brought Forward	11[illegible]	629.20	20.20	23.45							22.30	30.15	1.45	61.25
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									2.00												
JULY	5		MUSTANG IV	B	SELF		FORMATION 4 a/c														
	6			J	SELF		AEROBATICS CLOUD FLYING														
	9			E	SELF		BOUNCING AEROS.														
	10			K	SELF		FORM 4 a/c														
	11			L	SOLO		FORM 4 a/c														
	12		LINK																		
	13		MUSTANG IV	C	SELF		INTERCEPTION BY SQUAD.														
	14			J	SELF		SQUADRON TO TANGMERE														
	15			J	SOLO		SQUAD ESCORT VVIP														
							DEDLSTORF TO BASE														
										(R.EDEN)			OSTEND ESSEN LANDED AT			MAGDEBURG BERLIN DEDELSDORF					

Stuart's Logbook entry showing his flight escorting Anthony Eden

Many years later when I was President of the Union at Queen's I used to meet the famous people who were awarded Honorary Degrees. One of them was Anthony Eden who I met again.

One of my first flights with the squadron was memorable for the wrong reasons. We took off as a squadron of twelve aircraft in formation. Being new, I was number two to an experienced chap which meant that I had to stick to him whatever happened. As we crossed the Channel the cloud thickened up and we climbed to get above it. Unluckily, there was no top and soon the squadron began to break up. I stuck to my number one confident that he knew where we were. The snag with close formation is that one is so engrossed in staying close that only the leader knows where he is. Number one and I fell away from the others and continued to climb in an easterly direction so that I guessed that we were deep into France (or perhaps Holland or Germany). We reached 40,000 feet where, the air being rarefied, the controls of the plane became very sloppy and made formation flying very difficult. At last number one decided that he had enough and turned for home. I was pleased at this because I was just wondering how high Mont Blanc was. Later I found that he was as lost as I was and had merely turned on to a westerly course hoping to hit England somewhere. Actually, we crossed the coast at Felixstowe.

A similar thing happened sometime later when I borrowed a Mustang to fly to Barrow for a weekend. On my course the cloud gradually rose higher and higher and me with it. I had a course to steer so knew roughly where I was but soon reached maximum height and had to start to let down through the cloud. I soon discovered that there was no bottom to it. I decided to turn onto a westerly course and fly until I was sure that I was over the Irish Sea. I let down carefully until I could see that waves and turned back towards land. I was sure that an easterly course would bring me in over the coast at Blackpool where I knew that the coast was flat. Then I remembered Blackpool Tower which was about 500ft high and thought that the risk of hitting it was too great so pulled up into the cloud again. By this time, I had had enough so put in a *mayday* call. It was answered by a WAAF[18] in Hull who gave me a course to steer and a rate of descent of 500ft per minute. I broke cloud at 300ft over Fleetwood Harbour and was able to tell the WAAF that I knew my way from there. Of course, as soon as the cloud became a problem I should have returned to base, but I was on my way on leave.

I was very fortunate while we were stationed at Bentwaters to be selected to go to the Central Gunnery School (CGS) at Catfoss. I was ferried there by Colin Downes in an Auster. It was a great privilege to attend the CGS; only a very select few had the chance to fly with the top fighter pilots

[18] *WAAF – Women's Auxiliary Air Force*

in the RAF. The film *Top Gun* was made about a similar establishment in America. I was delighted to find that they had the latest Spitfires so had enormous fun. We dealt with all sorts of weapons from guns, rockets and bombs to dive-bombing. I was delighted to be awarded the top grade for dive-bombing. When I returned to the squadron I was promoted to Squadron Gunnery Officer to oversee all aspects of weaponry as well as being flight commander of B Flight. I became a bit of an expert in weaponry and later served on a special committee which met in Whitehall called Post Hostilities Planning which had sub-committees dealing with all aspects of the future of international affairs and in, my case, equipment of the future RAF. I have never heard of any reference to this committee since.

On another occasion I was posted to the Royal Air Force College at Cranwell to attend the Officer's Advanced Training Course. I cannot remember how long this course lasted but it must have been about three months. There were about fifty of us all long-serving and of higher rank. As one might expect the course was extremely well organised and was aimed at preparing officers for senior command ranks. I think that the RAF had decided to prepare for peacetime conditions. All aspects of those attributes that were required for commanding officers were covered including taking Courts Martial, Air Force Law, Catering, Giving Summary Justice, Supplies and all matters involving administration. Each of us had to address the rest on any subject of our choice. I did it twice, once on dive bombing and the other on the blood in humans. I must have had some idea of doing medicine then. One outcome from this was that when I returned to the squadron the CO delegated to me all duties involving air force law including Courts Martial, investigation of crimes and so on. This involved travelling to other units for which I was provided a car and a WAAF chauffeur. This was a great learning experience considering that I was then twenty-three years old. I think that it was during this course that I grew up.

The squadron moved from Bentwaters to Hethel an airfield near Wymondham a few miles South of Norwich. This was a smaller field with more primitive facilities.

It was while we were at Hethel that my son, Robert, was born. Eithne and I had taken the decision after discussion that we should have a baby. The war seemed to be going on forever and we thought that it was a good idea. And it was. He was born on 3 December 1945 at Barrow. I am unsure whether it was at No 40 Church Street or at the nursing home nearby. I was unable to get leave until 4 January 1946 when I flew to Barrow in a Mustang. As far as I know, Eithne had no difficulties and all was well. She had by now left the WRNS and stayed at Barrow until we moved to Belfast in October 1946. We decided to name him Robert because we liked the name and Geoffrey after Geoffrey De Havilland and Stuart after me.

After the war Hethel was bought by Lotus cars and that is now where they are made. We stayed at Hethel until February 1945 when I took the squadron to Spilsby near Skegness for gunnery training. We were there about three weeks. While there a Mosquito aircraft landed for some reason, and I prevailed on the pilot to let me fly it. After a single seater it seemed enormous but was really quite small for a twin engined aircraft. Instead of returning to Hethel we moved to Horsham St Faith which was in Norwich (now it is Norwich Airport). This was a peacetime RAF aerodrome and had superb quarters and mess.

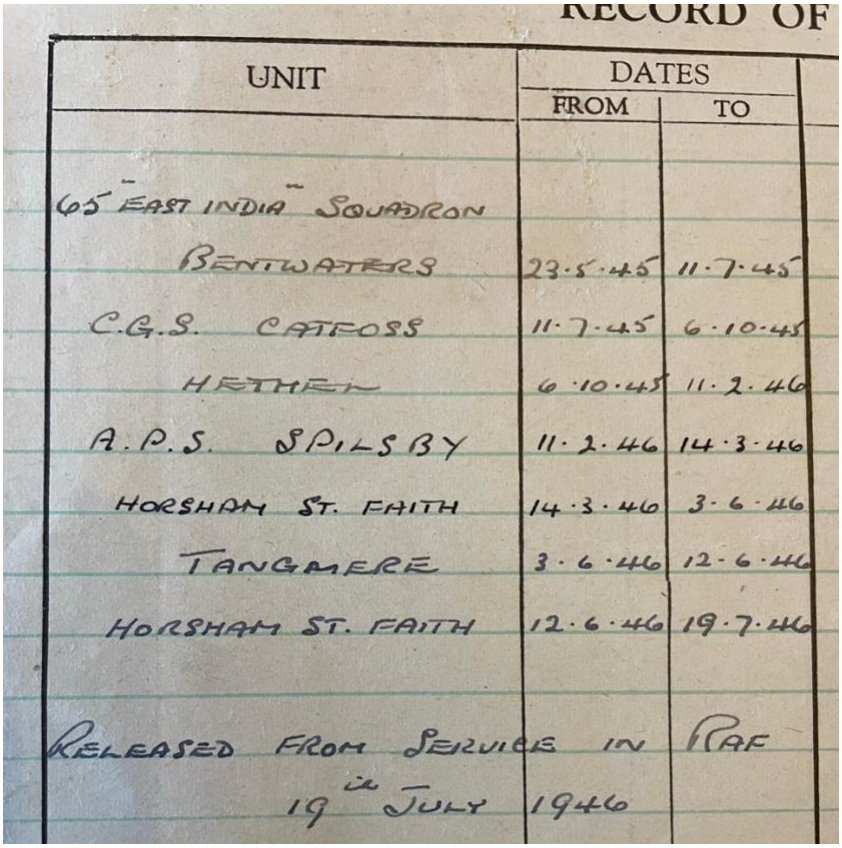
On 14 May 1946 we went to Tangmere to rehearse for an important celebratory fly-past on 'V' Day. We stayed there two days and returned to Horsham St Faith. We returned to Tangmere on 3 June for five days intensive formation flying. The squadron was by now highly experienced and felt that it was a waste of time. The fly-past took place on 8 June. It should be remembered that the war in

Europe ended on 8 May 1945 and was known as 'VE' Day. The war in the far East ended in August and was known as 'VJ' Day. The fly-past in June 1946 was a very special affair at which King George IV took the salute at the end of The Mall near the Palace[19] from a Saluting Base put there for the purpose. There was a march-past of contingents of all services and nations who had fought on our side (except for some reason the Poles).

We took off from Tangmere and flew east along the South Coast a mile out to sea. As we progressed squadron after squadron joined us and at North Foreland we turned round the coast of Kent and up the Thames estuary at a height of eight hundred feet. We were instructed not to fly in as tight a formation as usual in case there was an accident and an aircraft fell on London. We crossed the Thames into London and along The Mall. Then when we reached Kew Gardens and the Pagoda we turned left and returned to Tangmere. The whole trip took 1hr 45mins. After another few days we returned to Horsham St Faith.

In March 1946 we re-equipped with marvellous brand-new Spitfires. I went to the hangar to see mine which looked beautiful and marked my usual YT B. YT being the squadron letters and B for mine. Now that I was coming to the end of my service in the RAF, I was delighted to finish on Spitfires. Actually a few days before I left we heard that we would be converting to a twin-engine fighter, a De Havilland Hornet. To this end we had a few hours experience in an Airspeed Oxford to prepare. It was odd to sit in an aircraft alone (pre-war at that) with seating for twelve behind me it having been designed as an airliner.

I had one last trip in a Harvard to Barrow for a one-week leave on 2 July 1946. My last flight in a Spitfire was on 17 July for 1hr 15 mins. After a party in the Mess that night I set off in a car for Norwich railway station and wept all the way.



RECORD OF

UNIT	DATES FROM	DATES TO
65 "EAST INDIA" SQUADRON		
BENTWATERS	23·5·45	11·7·45
C.G.S. CATTOSS	11·7·45	6·10·45
HETHEL	6·10·45	11·2·46
A.P.S. SPILSBY	11·2·46	14·3·46
HORSHAM ST. FAITH	14·3·46	3·6·46
TANGMERE	3·6·46	12·6·46
HORSHAM ST. FAITH	12·6·46	19·7·46
RELEASED FROM SERVICE IN RAF on 19th JULY	1946	

[19] *Buckingham Palace*

I had enjoyed my time in the Royal Air Force. There were bad parts of course, like the Curate's Egg. Squadron life suited me. There was no imposed discipline, and everyone did his job to the best of his ability because we all relied on one another. I became expert at what I was doing and found the thought of starting again at something new was rather daunting.

The demobilisation process I found demeaning. I reported to a Centre in Uxbridge and was issued with a Discharge Book and told to select a suit and other clothes which were then put in a large cardboard box for me to take away. I was so annoyed that I sold the whole lot to a man outside for £2.

I did apply for a permanent commission and after an interview at the Air Ministry was accepted. In my innocence I thought that peacetime RAF would be the same as wartime. As soon as the new way of doing things started I realised that everything had changed. I was told that I would be posted to the RAF College at Cranwell as an instructor. That was it. I told the RAF that I had changed my mind and decided to return to Queen's to do medicine. Another turning point.

John Rogers did stay on and nothing that I heard from him later convinced me that I would have enjoyed it.

Stuart Cox

Appendix 1

The Queen's University, Belfast and RAF Cadet Short Courses during the WW2

At the beginning of the war, a Joint Recruiting Board was set up at Queen's, consisting of representatives of the University and of the Ministry of Labour (Northern Ireland). Along with the function of selecting and recommending candidates for commissions, and reporting on the 386 short course cadets for the Royal Artillery and the Royal Engineers, the Board (Chairman Professor A. Macbeath and Secretary Mr. J. M. Freeland followed by Dr. R. H. Hunter) reported on the 331 cadets for the Royal Air Force who took short courses at the University. At the beginning, a number of these cadets were of local origin, but later it became the policy of the Government to send cross-channel cadets here and Northern Ireland cadets to Universities in Great Britain. They were all boys between 17 and 18 years of age, selected as showing promise of taking commissions, mostly straight from school. Each course lasted six months and, in total, seven courses were held for the Air Ministry. At Queen's the cadets were treated in every respect as full members of the University and those of them—and they are many—who returned to the University after service have been treated as fully-matriculated students and been credited with the subjects which they passed as cadets. So far as was practicable, the cadets attended ordinary University classes. The early RAF courses were distinctly technical in character, but later RAF courses aimed rather at giving the cadets some general education in Arts or Science, over and above the technical instruction which they received with the University Air Squadron. The RAF cadets, whose supervisor was Dr. E. M. Lindsay, Lecturer in Astronomy, and subsequently Professor E. E. Evans, were for the most part housed in Queen's Chambers, where the successive Wardens were Dr. R. H. Hunter, Dr. W. Townsley, and, from October, 1942, until the end of the war, Dr. John Colhoun, Lecturer in Mycology.

The University Air Squadron, which was established in January, 1941, with headquarters in College Gardens, dealt with 587 cadets during the war. The training given aimed at providing the basic groundwork necessary for aircrews, flying experience being given only as and when possible. The Commanding Officers were, in succession: W/Cdr. P. J. Halahan, *D.F.C.,* W/Cdr. M. V. Delap, *D.F.C.,* S/Ldr. P. P. Troughton-Smith, and F/Lt. N. D. Nimmo, *D.F.C.* The following members of the University staff at various times held commissions in the R.A.F.V.R. (Training Branch), for duty with the Squadron: Professor W. H. McCrea, of the Department of Mathematics, Dr. E. M. Lindsay, Lecturer in Astronomy, Professor E. E. Evans, of the Department of Geography, and Mr. J. Black, Assistant in Mathematical Physics.

https://www.lennonwylie.co.uk/QueensUniversityWW2Record.htm

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