

I REMEMBER THE DAY WAR WAS DECLARED. I WAS A LAD OF EIGHTEEN AND I WORKED IN A SMALL GARAGE. AFTER A LITTLE WHILE I CHANGED JOBS TO GO AND WORK FOR THE PRESSED STEEL COMPANY AT COWLEY. I WAS IN THE PRESS SHOP MAKING STEEL PANELS ON THE NIGHT SHIFT. I HATED THE JOB AND AFTER A FEW MONTHS I JOINED THE R.A.F. I SIGNED UP AT AN OFFICE IN NEW-INN-HALL STREET IN OXFORD. AFTER A FEW WEEKS I RECEIVED A LETTER INSTRUCTING ME TO REPORT BACK TO NEW-INN-HALL STREET AT A SPECIFIED DATE AND TIME. WHEN I REPORTED THERE WERE SEVERAL MORE RECRUITS AND WE WERE SENT TO PENARTH IN SOUTH WALES TO BE SWORN IN AND TO RECEIVE THE KING'S SHILLING. ON THE WAY BACK TO OXFORD AN OLD GENT IN THE TRAIN SAID THE WAR WOULD LAST SIX YEARS, WE SAID IT WILL BE OVER IN ONE YEAR. I OFTEN THINK OF HIS WORDS.

A FEW WEEKS LATER I RECEIVED A FURTHER LETTER SAYING REPORT TO THE RAF PERSONNEL RECRUITMENT CENTRE AT BLACKPOOL AND ENCLOSING A RAILWAY WARRANT FOR THE JOURNEY.

WHEN I ARRIVED AT BLACKPOOL I WITH MANY MORE WAS MET BY THE RAF SPECIAL POLICE WHO TOOK US TO A HALL WHERE WE WERE GIVEN AN ADDRESS WHICH WAS TO BE OUR BILLET FOR THE NEXT FEW WEEKS. THE NEXT DAY WE WERE TAKEN TO THE BLACKPOOL WOOLWORTH STORES THE TOP FLOOR OF WHICH WAS THE RAF UNIFORM STORES. I WAS GIVEN MY UNIFORM AND TOOK IT BACK TO MY BILLET AT 20 WELLINGTON ROAD. THERE WERE ONLY TWO SIZES, BIG AND BIGGER. IN THE TROUSERS THERE WAS ROOM FOR TWO OF US, AND THE TUNIC WAS REALLY FOR A MIDGET. AFTER A FEW DAYS OUR KIT GOT SORTED OUT AND THEN WE WERE SENT FOR OUR INJECTIONS. THESE WERE FOR GOD KNOWS WHAT BUT THEY MADE US VERY ILL. TO CURE THIS THEY MARCHED US UP AND DOWN THE SEA FRONT PROMENADE FOR SIX WEEKS.

THE DAY CAME WHEN WE PASSED OUT AND WERE POSTED TO OUR TRAINING COURSES. I WAS SENT TO SQUIRES GATE JUST UP THE ROAD FROM BLACKPOOL AND WAS PUT ON A FLIGHT MECHANICS COURSE. I REALLY ENJOYED THIS AND GOT GOOD MARKS. I THEN WAS SENT ON A FITTER 2E COURSE WHERE I LEARNED ABOUT AERO ENGINES. AFTER FINISHING OUR TRAINING CAME THE DAY OF POSTING AND WE ALL SAT IN THE STANDS OF BLACKPOOL FOOTBALL GROUND WAITING FOR OUR NAME AND NUMBER TO BE CALLED OUT. I WAS SENT TO 214 SQUADRON AT STRADISHALL IN SUFFOLK TO WORK ON WELLINGTON BOMBERS. WE WERE THEN BOMBING THE FRENCH PORT OF BREST EVERY NIGHT AS THE GERMANS HAD THE POCKET BATTLESHIPS SCHARNHORST AND GNEISENAU THERE. LIFE WAS HARD, FOOD SHORT, WITH LONG DAYS AND NIGHTS. I WAS MOVED TO WATERBEACH NEAR CAMBRIDGE TO WORK ON STIRLINGS THE NEW FOUR ENGINED AIRCRAFT WHICH WERE JUST COMING INTO Bomber COMMAND. I TRAVELLED AROUND EAST ANGLIA TO MANY STATIONS. I WENT TO AN AMERICAN STATION TO CHANGE AN ENGINE ON A STIRLING WHICH HAD MADE A FORCED LANDING THERE. IT IS THE LONGEST ENGINE CHANGE I HAVE EVER DONE. THE FOOD WAS SO GOOD I MADE IT LAST AS LONG AS I COULD.

I WAS POSTED TO WRATTING COMMON IN SUFFOLK, MILES FROM ANYWHERE AND THEN AFTER A TIME I WAS POSTED OVERSEAS.

TO BE CONTINUED.



IN PART 1 I TOLD HOW I JOINED THE RAF, WAS TRAINED AS A FLIGHT MECHANIC AND ENGINE FITTER, WORKED ON WELLINGTON AND STIRLING BOMBERS IN EAST ANGLIA AND THEN WAS GIVEN AN OVERSEAS POSTING.

I HAD SEVEN DAYS LEAVE AND THEN BACK TO BLACKPOOL TO BE KITTED OUT FOR OVERSEAS. WHEREVER I WAS GOING WAS CERTAINLY GOING TO BE HOT AS I WAS GIVEN TROPICAL KIT. AFTER A FEW DAYS I WAS PUT ON A TRAIN WITH MANY OTHERS AND SENT TO GLASGOW. HERE WE BOARDED THE ATHLONE CASTLE AND SAILED DOWN THE CLYDE TO JOIN A CONVOY. WE SAILED DOWN THE COASTS OF EUROPE AND AFRICA, AROUND THE CAPE OF GOOD HOPE AND ACROSS THE INDIAN OCEAN TO ARRIVE SIX WEEKS LATER AT BOMBAY IN INDIA.

WE WERE TAKEN TO A TRANSIT CAMP TO AWAIT POSTING. I WAS POSTED TO CHITTAGONG ON THE OTHER SIDE OF INDIA IN EAST BENGAL NEAR BURMA. TO GET THERE INVOLVED A JOURNEY OF ONE WEEK ON A TRAIN WITH THE DISCOMFORT OF WOODEN SLATTED SEATS. WE THEN HAD TO CROSS THE RIVER GANGES. TO DO THIS WE HAD AN EIGHT HOUR TRIP ON A PADDLE STEAMER WHICH WAS MADE IN THE NORTH OF ENGLAND IN 1889 AND WAS STILL GOING STRONG. ANOTHER TRAIN JOURNEY AND WE REACHED ANOTHER TRANSIT CAMP. FROM HERE I WAS POSTED TO COX'S BAZAR WHICH IS FURTHER DOWN THE COAST NEAR THE BURMA BORDER. HERE WE SERVICED A SQUADRON OF BEAUFIGHTER TWIN ENGINE FIGHTER BOMBERS. THESE WERE BEING USED TO FLY INTO THE JAPANESE INVADED PARTS OF BURMA TO BLOW UP RAILWAY LINES AND BRIDGES WITH THEIR ARMAMENT OF 8 ROCKETS. DURING THIS TIME I WAS ALSO GIVEN POSTINGS TO CRUDE AIRSTRIPS IN THE BURMESE JUNGLE WHERE WE LIVED IN TENTS. WE SERVICED THE AIRCRAFT AT THESE OUTPOSTS AND EFFECTIVELY EXTENDED THEIR RANGE OF OPERATION.

WHEN RANGOON THE BURMESE CAPITAL FELL TO THE JAPANESE I WAS POSTED TO MADRAS IN SOUTHERN INDIA WHICH WAS ANOTHER 10 DAY TRAIN JOURNEY. THE ONLY CLOTHES I HAD WHEN I CAME OUT OF THE JUNGLE WAS A PAIR OF SHORTS, A TATTY SHIRT, A BUSH HAT, AND A PAIR OF BOOTS. THIS WAS PARTLY DUE TO THE JUNGLE CLIMATE CAUSING EVERYTHING TO ROT. WHEN I GOT TO MADRAS I GOT A NEW KIT, THIS TIME IN JUNGLE GREEN. AGAIN IT WAS TWO SIZES TOO BIG, SOME EVEN BIGGER FITTING LIKE A BELL TENT. AFTER A FEW ADJUSTMENTS BY AN INDIAN TAILOR IT FITTED MUCH BETTER WITH ENOUGH MATERIAL OVER TO MAKE ANOTHER KIT.

AFTER A FEW WEEKS I WENT DOWN WITH AN ATTACK OF MALARIA. I THOUGHT I WAS GOING TO DIE BUT AFTER A FEW DAYS I WAS O.K. HOWEVER I SUFFERED FROM IT FOR YEARS AFTERWARDS. AFTER A SHORT TIME I WAS PUT ON A NEW ZEALAND MEAT BOAT FOR ANOTHER MYSTERY TRIP. THIS TIME WE FOUND OUT IT WAS TO MALAYA. WE HAD BEEN AT SEA ABOUT THREE DAYS WHEN WE HEARD THAT THE ATOM BOMB HAD BEEN DROPPED ON JAPAN AND THEY HAD SURRENDERED. WE DID A BEACH LANDING NEAR PORT SWEETENHAM HALF WAY UP THE MALAYAN COAST. JAPANESE SOLDIERS WERE EVERYWHERE AND MANY DID NOT KNOW THAT THE WAR WAS OVER.

MY NEXT STOP WAS KUALAR LUMPUR AIR STRIP - NOT AN AIRPORT IN THOSE DAYS. THE PLACE WAS VERY RUN DOWN BUT IT WAS A LOVELY COUNTRY. MY NEXT STOP WAS THE AIR BASE AT SINGAPORE. NOW THE WAR WAS OVER IN THE FAR EAST LIFE WAS EASY. I WAS WORKING ON DAKOTAS AND SEVERAL TIMES FLEW UP TO BUTTERWORTH NEAR PENANG IN ANOTHER VERY NICE PART OF THE COUNTRY.

HOW THE WAR CHANGED MY LIFE - CONTINUED

AT LAST MY NUMBER CAME UP TO BE DEMOBBED AND THE JOURNEY BACK HOME. I COULD HAVE BEEN DEMOBBED IN AUSTRALIA BUT CHOSE TO COME HOME. THIS TIME THE JOURNEY TOOK JUST THREE WEEKS CUTTING THROUGH THE SUEZ CANAL.

THEY SAY THE WORLD IS A SMALL PLACE. I WAS HITCH HIKING UP THE ARACAN ROAD IN EAST BENGAL WHEN AN ARMY PETROL TANKER STOPPED. THE DRIVER WAS A CHAP I WENT TO SCHOOL WITH. MONTHS LATER I WAS WALKING DOWN A STREET IN SINGAPORE WHEN I MET A CHAP FROM MY HOME VILLAGE.

THIS HAS BEEN A GENERAL SHORT STORY OF MY WAR EFFORT.

