"BENGHAZI to BUCHAREST".

A Second World War Memoir.

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4th.August 1993

The Free Romanian,
Regent Street,
London.

Dear Ncolae Ratiu,

Manuscript " Benghazi to Bucharest ".

Thank you for an interesting letter dated 3rd.August. Please note that I have changed the title as per above.

Print and publish in Romania - Why not.

To produce this final version of my story has cost me quite a sum of money. However, to make a profit is not the main object.

In spite of being most uncomfortably imprisoned in Bucharest - I have very fond memories of the country and particularly of the very many wonderful people I met when staying in Romania for four months after that.

The names that I remember appear in the story.

Two things would concern me :-

I. How could I correct, or check the text when I do not know the language.

2. Let there be an agreement that I receive a number of copies of the published article.

In addition, my copyright must be observed.

All the above is, of course, subject to your appraisal of my manuscript which is enclosed.

It may be that the early part of the story does not interest you, yet it is in entirety it is a Memoir.

I look forward to hearing from you when you have had opportunity to read and assess the whole manuscript.

Yours Sincerely,

Bert Whitley

MY R.A.F. FLYING LOG BOOK ESTABLISHED THE DATES.

THE STORY WAS INDELIBLY PRINTED ON MY MIND.

THANKS TO:-

COLIN LEADILL, whose comprehensive library of Royal Air Force books and magazines has verified many a technical detail contained in this book.

Miss SARA.L. FIRTH (Library Assistant) who so readily assisted me in research at the Scalby branch of the Public Library

to my wife, HILDA MARY

and daughters JANE and ANNE.

PHOTOGRAPHS.

01 Freddie, Johnny and self with Blenhiem IV about to set off for The Middle East, from Portreath, Cornwall.

02 In the Desert. Home sweet home, on a rare rainy day at L.G.116.

03 Sick bay attendants having a Christmas Day joke, 1942.

04 Baltimores in formation - from underside gun position.

05 223 Squadron sick quarters.

06 18 Baltimores ready for mass take-off in eschelon to starboard.

07 Self at Radio position in our Baltimore.

08 Our 223 squadron crew, Freddie, Johnny, Willie and Author.

09 German aircraft (ME109s) wrecked at Daba.

10 On leave at Alexandria.

11 Preparing to land at Ikeja, Nigeria.

12 Nakuru town centre.

13 Johnny and self at Nakuru, Kenya.

14 Crews of 178 Squadron.

15 Church and graves of my 178 Squadron crew, Romania.

16 Original telegrams from Air Ministry, to my Parents.

17 Original letter from International Red Cross.

18 Original telegrams to my girl friend, from Air Ministry.

19 Viorica Iliescu, Bucharest, Romania.

20 Sylvia and Mircea Placa, Bucharest, Romania.

21 Martin and Coca Horovitz, Bucharest, Romania.

22 The Author at the place where first captured, Romania, May 1944

23 Doug Calvert and self outside Athene Palace Hotel, Bucharest.

24 Climbing Vesuvius, Naples, when en route back to U.K.

25 Martin and Coca Horovitz with my wife and family, at our home in North Yorkshire 1957.

26 Press cuttings, 1957.

27 Original postcards sent by me from prison camp, Romania.

Fifty Two Years Ago.

Sometimes it seems like yesterday.

If you were a young 'rookie' wireless operator/air gunner fifty two years ago, young, hopeful, yet not knowing the terrors and strain of air warfare yet to come, you would be unable to contemplate or even visualise what adventures awaited you, what comrades-in-arms you would live and fly with, let alone the places to find yourself in.
Many wonders of the World beholden in awe, yet taken in the stride - so phlegmatic are the British when serving King and Country.
Before even some of those thoughts weave pictures of life and events to come, some jumped-up Corporal fills the present with horrible shouts of "pick 'em up there, left, right," and proceeds to drill, drill and discipline into raw recruits.

Much as all that was disagreeable at the time, you come to realise that the R.A.F.'s "lowest form of life" was transformed into a real man - henceforth available for specialised training, to become part of a very special force - the R.A.F Aircrew, with a real man-sized job to do - the like of which is still unknown.

What followed for me, in the years to come, was in turn, remarkable, wonderful, awe-inspiring and frightening, yet simultaneously breeding self-reliance, confidence and mutual respect for my crew members.

Yet, in the years of so-called peace, afterwards, left me with vivid pictures in the mind and constant thoughts reviewing the events of long ago - and repeated dreams, call them nightmares, what you will, that drove me to put pen to paper and set it all down.

The American made Consolidated Liberator (B 24) with its four 'Twin Wasp' Pratt & Whitney engines, each giving 1,200 horse power, left the target (Bucharest marshalling yards) and headed back for Foggia (Italy) at 11000 feet. The time was almost 2am.

The navigator had had to make several runs at the target before successfully bombing and the aircraft was now on its own - the rest of the raiders had long since gone, well on their way back to base.

The noise of the four powerful engines was enough to deaden the senses, nevertheless all gunners and look-outs were on their toes, particularly vigilant because as 'tail end charlie' the Lib was now very vulnerable.

With the target a quarter of an hour behind, all hell broke loose and 20mm. cannon shells made a colander of the whole aircraft in seconds.

Captain of the aircraft was mortally wounded. Smell of burning and cordite and the crash of shells was bedlam indeed.

The order to abandon aircraft was given as the Lib went into a spiralling dive, on fire everywhere.
Thus, very nearly, ended the story which begins on the next page.

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TO SERVE KING AND COUNTRY

I like Scarborough.

Scarborough's beautiful North Bay with almost flat and firm sands. Our family (eight children and 'Pa' just as keen) would play cricket for hours on end.

A 'seaside version' we played, with a long-on and a long off, for catches in the outfield. It was a triumph to hit the ball thus far, and an equal success for the fielder who made the catch

North Side, that was the place to be - not the tatty South Bay with its scruffy side shows and penny-in-the-slot machines.

From the North Side there were picturesque walks along the Albert Drive (as far as the Toll Gate), onto the Marine Drive, going right round the headland, beneath the Castle. On such a walk, your eyes for ever on the sea, observing every kind of sea bird. I never tired of watching Cormorants diving for their natural food, fish,- they rarely missed.

If you did not mind risking getting wet, dodging the waves as they broke over the sea wall was great fun. The heavy seas often driven by North or North East winds produced spectacular sights, with waves breaking to enormous heights almost all the way along the 'Prom'.

There was always variation, for a change, a walk along the cliff tops in a Northerly direction, then descend to play around 'Monkey Island' (not there today) before scrambling across Scalby Beck, by stepping stones, to climb the Northern headland and make for Jackson's Bay where to examine an old shipwreck.

On the very same cliff tops, it was, that I first made passing acquaintance with a charming school girl, who, many years and a War later, was to become my wife.

Enjoying that one week by the sea was interupted by a 'call-up' announcement on the radio. Like many, many more young men, I had to immediately register for duty with H.M.Services, and did so at the Labour Exchange in Huntriss Row.

That was in 1938, just after the Munich crisis and following Chamberlain's "Peace in our time" mission to Germany

With instructions to report at Wellington Barracks for a medical examination, in my home town of Leeds, a week's happiness and relaxation came to an end.

To this very day (and ever after within the family) I answered to the nick-name of 'Curly', not quite the right sort of name with which to embark on military service.

Right away, I decided that from now on, I would be known by my christened name, Bertrand, as in Russell, and was content that I would be called BERT, for short.

With that, for me, a new name, I presented myself at Wellington Barracks (another building not here today). The rambling, old, stone built, draughty barracks was no place to hold medical examinations when one was required to strip naked and in that state, hang around cold corridors for hours, awaiting the attention of busy doctors.

Always having been regarded as the weakling of the family, by reason of a troublesome appendix which was not extracted until the age of nine - and having two brothers and five sisters, it was quite something to be the only one of the brood to be passed A1.

This meant that I was cleared for flying, should the opportunity come along. I intended to see that it did.

In those days, a 'conscript', for that is what I was, was allowed to choose in which of the armed forces to serve. Already I favoured the Royal Air Force, but mulled things over in my mind. I could not swim, so the Navy was not for me. So many times had I heard of the horrors of trench warfare in the last Great War, that not in a month of Sundays did I want to go anywhere near the Army, let alone serve in it, in any capacity whatever.

Having made my preferences known, I was relieved, pleased and happy to be accepted for the R.A.F. The chance would come, after early training, to apply to be taken on as aircrew.

For a while, that is, until the beginning of the following year, life, still as a civvy, carried on with me continuing in my job as advertising layout artist with Lewis's (Leeds) Ltd.

I was in no hurry to leave home, or stick my neck out, and could not understand the many queries "bet you are looking forward to receiving your calling-up papers".
Most certainly, I was not, and my stomach fell through the floor the day my papers arrived.

GONE - MOTHER'S APRON STRINGS

Not long before I received my call-up papers, we in England had lived through the fateful day which brought Chamberlain's radio announcement "Germany has marched into Poland and so we are now at War with Germany". Within an hour or two the air-raid sirens sounded and the family took to the cellars for safety. That it turned out to be a false alarm did nothing to lessen the tension of the day.

My call-up papers included a rail warrant to Warrington. Taking very little with me, other than the civilian clothes I stood up in and small kit, which is toilet gear and shaving equipment, I said my goodbyes to the family and set off for the railway station.

Arriving at Padgate in 'civvies' is to feel rather foolish. Uniform would be more appropriate. Notwithstanding the dress, a batch of raw recruits from the station were marched, not very professionally, into camp. Thereafter, the column was marched along a row of nissen huts and dismissed in small batches into our new quarters.

Then we were 'sworn-in', giving our allegiance to King and Country, and I became 997264 A/C Whitley B.
Never saw 'The King's Shilling'. perchance the R.A.F. was hard up.

What a rude awakening next morning,
"Hands off cocks" bellowed the P.T.I. Corporal at the unearthly hour of six a.m. What kind of an establishment had I wandered into ? and what horrible language. Within a quarter of an hour we were outside, in the cold air, for morning gym session, all at the double. Then it was breakfast, of sorts, immediately followed by hours of drill, marching up and down with rifles. Left turn, right turn, present arms! which at this early stage of training was more humorous than uniform.

Next was the break we had all been dying for, lunch. Then right away we were back on the parade ground for another few hours of drill. The Corporal bellowed and swore at us. As the days passed we soon got into the way of the drill routine, executing all the movements almost to the satisfaction of whoever was in charge. Even so, the Corporal continued to shout and swear. Were the Corporals just doing a job, or were they natural bullies ?
I ask the question because occasionally we were drilled by a 'full blown' Sergeant. This Sergeant, whilst commanding respect and discipline was 'human' and even had a sense of humour. We worked with more will and enthusiasm under him than ever the hated P.T.I. Corporal could command.

In a few days we were kitted out with R.A.F. uniform. This was not done in any professional tailor-like way, but during a walk past a long series of trestle tables in the station stores department. Garments were slung at us as we passed along, trousers here, tunic there, followed by shirt, tie, socks, boots, with button stick and cleaning materials. Side cap completed the issue. The chaps doing the chucking were pretty good assessors of size. Most of we raw recruits got reasonable fits. I was very happy with what had been tossed across the table to me.

Then came the day for 'jabs'. The squad was stripped to the waist, both hands on hips and marched between two columns of Doctors, waiting with needles poised. We were to be protected against smallpox, tetanus, cholera, typhoid and many other dreaded diseases.

I was moving up the queue, nearer to 'action stations', when, just in front of me, a strapping tall and tough looking recruit suddenly sagged and crumpled to the ground. He was quickly carried out of sight and the needles continued to be thrown by some of the most accomplished 'dart-playing' doctors I have ever seen

We were still marched straight ahead, right through the back door of the sick bay, onto the parade ground, for more rifle drill by

the 'Corp'. With stiffening and swollen arms, that was decidedly not funny.

There was no leave from Padgate, but on the second Sunday we 'sprogs' were allowed out of camp for three or four hours, in the afternoon.

Now then, typical of my father, he 'goes for a ride' in the car and arrived outside Padgate camp fence - without my knowing - just as I was leaving camp. Needless to say, I had a long chat with my parents and middle sister Phyllis, before being taken for a cup of tea and a bun. It had been an unexpected meeting, but none the less happy for that.

I remarked 'typical of my Father' because, only two years previously, when I was sixteen years old and on holiday in Scarborough, a similar thing happened. Cricket was my passion and my junior's team in Leeds had a 'twenty over' knockout match coming up. I asked my Father for the rail fare, 2/6d (old money) but he refused. Whereupon, I got out my old bike (second hand job costing only 10/-,old money) and cycled all the way on my own.

It was seventy-odd miles to Becketts Park, which is beyond and to the West of Leeds city. It was a long hard slog with many tiring inclines - all taken with no gears, thinking nothing of it. Unknown to me, Father gets his car out 'to go for a ride' and catches me up at Tadcaster (half my journey completed) just to see how I am getting along. Then he turned round and headed back to Scarborough and I carried on my way, played a game of twenty-over cricket and cycled all the way back to the coast.
This silly business of getting the car out 'to go for a ride'! He could have taken me, or, at least forked out the two shillings and six pence train fare.

WIRELESS TRANSMITTERS
RECEIVERS
AND THE MORSE CODE

A few days before leaving Padgate I had been before an Air Crew Selection Board. All had gone well, yet all I was offered was training for Wop/Ag (Wireless Operator/Air Gunner). At least I was now on aircrew and happy with that.
So, the weeks of misery at Padgate came to an end. Progress was made with a move to Compton Bassett in Wiltshire, to learn the morse code, all about radio (called wireless in those days) equipment and wireless operating procedures.
Compton Bassett was an enormous camp of Nissen Huts with hundreds of wireless trainees billeted there. The hated Corporal (where do they all come from) was there, one per hut housing thirty to forty bods each, Of course, the Corporal had his own little private room at the end of the hut, so to keep his eye on us and dish out 'jankers' as though they were going out of fashion

Learning the morse code, to reasonable speed efficiency is a very mentally tasking job. There were those who just could not cope, and those who went a bit doolally trying. Our squad of some thirty five bods had an elderly civilian instructor. This instructor was probably a retired merchant navy wireless operator. He did a remarkable job, by stages, to get us proficient at both sending and receiving, but it took some weeks. Yours truly enjoyed all of it and was very interested throughout.

Next was a searching look at the 'innards' of radio transmitters and receivers. Most young men of my age loved playing around with wires and valves, so that becoming acquainted with this equipment was to our liking. This part of the course was more interesting than anything hitherto and the weeks passed quickly, our heads filled with endless theory on the workings of radio..

Towards the end of the course came our first flight. In fours we boarded a Domini (small twin engined kite with the reputation of being the 'sick bag') for practical wireless operating from air to ground. This entailed half a dozen flights over the period of one week

Several of the trainees became air-sick in no time at all. Some got over it and some did not but I was 'chuff' at not being the least bit affected. Though somewhat keyed up about reading the very faint morse messages, transmitting was relatively easy and I rather enjoyed the whole of the flying exercises.

Then I had a very pleasant surprise - a week's leave with rail warrant supplied. In order to avoid the dreaded 2359 deadline, on return, I set off by an earlier than necessary train. It was bound to happen - the rail line was bombed and my journey delayed, so that I arrived back at camp some time after the 2359 deadline, in other words, late ! That was regarded as being no excuse for being late, the result was 7 days jankers.

We trainees had a hectic period of revision followed by exams. So, I passed and qualified as a wireless operator - to be given my 'sparks badge', worn on the sleeve of the uniform tunic

Next should have been a posting to Gunnery School. Perhaps there were no vacancies or perchance 'erks' were required elsewhere. I ended up being sent to Biggin Hill in the middle of the Battle of Britain.

Whilst on the morse and radio course none of we trainees had ventured out of camp - there had been much swatting to do. Now with the work behind us, there was oportunity for celebration. A number of us trudged, on one of our last evenings, to the nearest village. This turned out to be Calne. I had had no idea that the famous sausages came from such a small and dreamy village. There was just the one Pub, into which we managed to squeeze and enjoy a happy evening

A seventy two hour pass preceded the posting and I raced off home. Yes, even a week-end leave was nice, but I found that all my friends, of similar age were away, doing their bit for the country. With most of that short leave spent travelling, it soon came to an end. Then, fitted out with clean laundry I ventured once more into the unknown and entrained for Croydon, the nearest station to my destination

BIGGIN HILL
THE BASE OF "THE FEW".

With back pack and kit bag I got a lift from Croydon station to the R.A.F. camp and joined life on a real action station.

The airfield, for so it was, there were no runways, seemed to be surrounded by parked fighters. There were Hurricanes and graceful Spitfires in great numbers. It seemed that many more were airborne, for I saw several flying out of sight in steep climb, with one or two more making low passes over the airfield.
I guess that I was not aware of the World Saving Air Battle then proceedeing and should have known that the aircraft disappearing in a climb were really off to battle it out over the South Coast.

Told off for various duties, most of them menial tasks, I nevertheless set to with a will, all the time keeping my eye on the fighter activity, which seemed to be constant.
After a little while, having been shown the ways and means, I was put in charge of the flare path for night flying. To this time I had not known that our fighters operated at night, as well as day. During the day Spits and Hurricanes took off in any direction and landed likewise. But at night they required the assistance of an illuminated straight line. That was where the flare path came in. I had a truck loaded with gooseneck flares. These flares ran on paraffin with the wick standing up from something like a watering-can spout. I would take the truck across the field, in a straight line, and drop off the goosenecks at set intervals. On

completion, the journey across the field set up the necessary straight line of lights. Even so, when there was a panic on, the fighters would occasionally take off in any direction and I would just have to keep my head down. Landing was a different matter. With an aircraft in the circuit and on what is called 'base leg' I switched on the chance light, which lit up the whole field like daylight, and the fighters would come in to land on the right hand of the line of flares.

What with daytime duties and looking after the flare path at night, I was not getting much sleep. Then I was ordered to do duty on dawn and dusk patrol (a sort of home guard defending the perimeters of the airfield, as the sun rose and as it set). The patrol involved a number of airmen issued with the Lee Enfield rifle. At this time of year, then, the patrol was on duty by four am.. Came the early morning when, as required for this duty, an M.P. (military police) roused me to sign for the early call. I did sign, then immediately fell back in deep sleep.

Punishment for that non appearance on Dawn Patrol was a stern talk from the station Warrant Officer (whose R.A.F. service number was 69) and a further fourteen days on Dawn and Dusk patrol.

My memory of the rest of the time at this fighter aircraft base is vague except that I was ever aware of the eternal, night and day, panic take-offs, the subsequent dog fights and air battles that raged endlessly over the skies of Southern England. All of which gave a pleasant feeling of being personally involved in the great struggle.

However, I enjoyed most of my seven months (from 1st May to 30th November 1940) at Biggin Hill and could appreciate the exuberance of the fighter pilots, with a kill under their belts, to come screaming over the airfield in a victory roll.

Life was not all plain sailing, there was a horrible day when, during an air-raid, enemy bombers got a direct hit on an air-raid shelter which was occupied by numerous W.A.A.F.s. There were many girls killed that day and the establishment was very sad indeed.

Then I was posted to No 3 School of General Reconnaissance at Squires Gate - near Blackpool.

A.C.2s ON IRISH SEA PATROLS

Four or five 'sprog' wireless operators, like myself, arrived at Squires Gate. It was easy to see where postings originated - the alphabet - for my companions were my Compton Bassett friend Whibley, another chap I knew called Whitaker and the others with names starting with 'W's.

R.A.F. station Squires Gate was situated just a little distance South of the terminus of the famous Blackpool sea front tram service.

The Station was the home of No.3 School of General Reconnaissance, to which we wireless ops were now attached and we had been sent here to make up the crews of BOTHA s, or to give the full title The Blackburn Botha. The Botha, a'pig of an aircraft' as I have seen it described elsewhere. Even its name was to cause problems - "What is a Bother".

Without rank or aircrew pay and not much in the way of experience, we proceeded as wireless ops to patrol the Irish Sea - looking for any German submarines that dared to poke their noses into our patch. Wireless Ops did not rate a window or even a porthole, but sat in an enclosed, blank, cramped, space, behind the pilot and navigator - when all aircrew should have been able to scan the seas for trouble. All the radio traffic - messages etc.,- were handled in code, either in groups of jumbled letters or figures. Not surprising then, that one day, in difficult communication circumstances, a short message was received by me (via the 1082 and 1083 transmitter and receiver), R.U.O.K.. Decoded, it meant nothing to me and I felt awfully chuff after a few moments to realise that it was short for 'are you o.k'. The message was duly answered with a position report, supplied by the navigator.

The 1082 and 1083 wireless equipment was almost prehistoric. The receiver was bad enough, but the transmitter could be called steam radio, and the original, at that. It had just two tall, fat valves, each about half the size of a soda syphon, one being the oscillator and the other the power output valve. Should one of these valves fail,

(as they frequently did) then, by removing it and making alterations to the circuit, one valve in the oscillator position would suffice for low powered transmission. This is what I had been doing (and it took time) before receiving that cryptic 'R.U.O.K.'

Whilst at Squires Gate, I flew a total of 30 of those Irish Sea patrols, plus other flights, all on the Blackburn Botha. The Botha was made at Brough, near Hull - but its performance, range and load factor so poor that no further aircraft of the type were produced.

One variation in duty took place before I left Squires Gate - being detailed to fly, as gunner, in a Boulton Paul 'Defiant' on some short trip. The Defiant was similar to the Hurricane, but with the addition of a powered gun turret behind the pilot. This aircraft, when first used on operations against the Germans had some success by the element of surprise. Once the surprise was gone, it was a rank failure as a fighter and because of losses, was never used again. However, back to the story. When coming in to land the Defiant, the pilot was a little too low on approach, barely missing the 'chance light' and sliced the head, clean off, an airman standing beside it, with the propeller.

Life was not all work and no play at Squires Gate. I got time off, now and then and would take the famous Blackpool tram, which runs along the sea front, and have a look around Blackpool. Better still, was the time I took a walk around St.Anne's, and came upon a tennis club - St. Anne's Tennis Club, to be precise. In these wartime days, men were in short supply for playing mixed doubles. When watching the play, I was very soon invited to make-up, and was pleased to do so. Members were very friendly and helpful. I was soon fitted out with shoes and joined in play. Thereafter, whenever free time occured, I would go, kitted out for the job, and play tennis there frequently, latterly pairing up with the Chief Constable's daughter - and for that reason, would have been happy to stay.

A PAY RISE

About the middle of the time spent at No.3 S. of G. R., myself and another W/op went to see the Officer in charge of flying and put to him that we were flying without rank or pay and did not know if we were on operations or just training. There must have been some justification in that representation of ours, for we were awarded the magnificent sum of one extra shilling per day, from then on.

Whether it was true I know not, yet we few Wireless Operators were convinced that the unit had taken over the responsibility of patrolling the Irish Sea in order to free other units for more serious work. It had happened, in the early days of the War, that airmen of no flying rank had indeed manned radio on operational sorties. We had heard stories of the old Anson aircraft patrolling with Coastal Command and manned in similar manner by less than non commissioned officers. We were of the opinion that we W/Ops were being likewise employed, flying as AC2s - to our mind, verified by the award of that magnificent rise of one shilling per day.

Nevertheless, I enjoyed that first sample of serious flying work which had been the only way to become really proficient, an experience worthwhile. That, together with the pleasant time spent at Squires Gate was a useful start to a way of life. I felt a little more 'grown up' as a serving member of the R.A.F. at the end of my time on that unit.

At the end of June 1941 I packed my kit and travelled to No.1 Air Gunnery School at Pembrey in South Wales.

GUNNERY TRAINING

Life became interesting. A very 'clued-up' Sergeant instructor had us hard at it, until we could take to pieces and re-assemble blindfolded, the Browning 303 machine gun. There was theoretical as well as plenty of practical work. I will never forget the Sergeant's phrase, because it was the first time I had ever heard the likes of it "This male joint fits into the female joint, like so." _ and so guns of pretty well every type were assembled. The instruction on guns and small arms of many types continued for a couple of weeks. The theory was instilled in our minds by much swotting in the evening, with no time to go out for a pint.

We were then split up into small squads of six men to each and taken to the firing range - three days of this was great. Under very strict control for safety reasons, six men lined up, looking at the target which was positioned at various distances according to the exercise. Then, at the command 'Fire', we had five rounds to make our marks on the specific target. First was firing from the shoulder, standing up. Then similar action at the kneeling position. Finaly this was repeated at the prone position. The result of our shots to individual targets was noted. To complete the rifle shooting, we repeated the whole of the previous exercises with gas masks donned.

Then came hand gun firing - Smith & Weston revolvers were used for this, and none of we trainees did particularly well with the hand held gun, though it was quite an experience to have used one. Top score, overall, in the various forms of firing went to me, but then, I used to be a 'dab-hand' with the rifle at fair grounds.

The ground training more or less completed, we turned to putting it into practice in the air. Blenhiems were the aircraft used for air firing, it having just the one turret, therefore able to carry one gunner, for individual practice. The staff pilot knew the exercises and could position for firing at a towed drogue and then switch to ground targets.

The air firing exercises were spread over two weeks, giving us a reasonable overall time in the air, on the course. While waiting for flights we were pleasantly occupied using a ground, powered, turret and shooting at clay pigeons. That was a tricky exercise, more like the real thing, and we did not get enough of it.

The six weeks training course came to an end. I passed with good marks and was asked to stay as an instructor. Foolish perhaps, who can say ? I declined, wanting to make further progress in the R.A.F.

Before leaving Pembrey, I particularly enjoyed one flight in the short nosed fighter version of the Blenhiem with just the pilot and myself side by side, instead of being cooped up in a turret. We were in the air for two hours, myself seeing life in the skies from a different angle.

My half wing, along with Sergeant's stripes was awarded, together with a leave pass and travel warrant and I made the tedious rail journey home in a state of satisfaction and happiness. Believe my family were rather proud of their Sergeant son and as usual went out of their way to make my leave a happy one. A week soon came to an unexpected end when an Air Ministry telegram arrived with instructions to report to 13 O.T.U. at Bicester.

OPERATIONAL TRAINING UNIT.

Bicester airfield (again, just a large field) was occupied solely by No.13 O.T.U. and seemed to be overpopulated by Sergeant Pilots, Sergeant Navigators and Sergeant Wop/AG s. Long nosed Blenhiem Mk1V s were the only aircraft in sight, so I guessed I would train on the Blenhiem.

Pilots underwent conversion training, mainly in the form of take offs and landings (circs and bumps). Navigators set to work in school rooms with we wireless Ops/Gunners receiving more specialised training yet.

What surprised me more than anything was to be here, at the final training unit, before going on Operations and find myself without the company of any of the other Wireless Ops, or Gunners with whom I had trained on the various courses. Probably this could be put down to my lone posting to Biggin Hill, that had thrown me out of the 'stream'.

Life on the unit progressed as in any training establishment. In due course it was not unnatural that I should bump into a clean looking, fair haired, pilot, by the name of Price. We merely passed the time of day on these occasions. Likewise, I got to know many other of the chaps, for we were all of an age.

Rumours are rife in the services and usually turn out to be a correct source of information. Thus we knew that this short interlude preceded the main operation - getting 'crewed up' which would then be followed by more purposeful training, flying together as a crew, the serious stuff.

GETTING A CREW TOGETHER.

An important announcement appeared on the notice board in the crew room. It was to the effect that Trainees now have the opportunity to get together and amicably make up a 'Blenhiem Crew', henceforth to fly as a crew on operations when posted to a Squadron. The C.I., (Chief Instructor), a Wing Commander, must be given names and approve such arrangements.

It was fortunate that immediately thereafter, I once again met this Pilot, name of Price. Together, we walked a little way round the perimeter track, chatting. It was the first time we had really met, to get into conversation. We politely discussed flying together, from which came a mutual arrangement, I would be his wireless operator/air gunner. Johnny, as everybody called him thereafter, was about my own age and had a shock of blond hair which he kept fairly short. He was well made, broad shouldered, without being heavy, say about eleven stones.

Johnny would be a chap the girls would look twice at - he certainly liked his beer cold, and his women hot.

I had taken to Johnny for his self assurance, confidence and determination which fell short of recklessness, to be the man I would have the necessary faith and confidence in. Add to that, there was a certain something, a bond, perhaps, because the two of us hailed from Yorkshire and were both proud of being Yorkshiremen. Johnny came from Keighley which was only a matter of six miles from my own home.

Freddie Hazel - Sergeant, R.N.Z.A.F. was Johnny's choice as the navigator. We guessed that there was something aborigine about Freddie, given away by his dark complexion. He was an outspoken New Zealander, cheerful in his own foriegn way. Freddie certainly didn't let his appearance bother him. More often than not, a smile creased his otherwise 'Ape-Like' face. Freddie was stockily built and a little round with it, also giving the appearance of a fellow who was a bit of a

boozer. He was afraid of nothing on this earth and proved to be a good man to have on your side in times of trouble. Above all Johnny knew him to be a good navigator.

Johnny gave detail and names of our arrangement to the C.I. where it received the seal of approval.

So we became a crew, to fly together, to live together and to go through a long period of tricky operational flying together, respecting one another and never having bad words between us in all that time from October 1941 to November 1943. We were fortunate to so 'hit it off together' and become a crew.

Others were not so fortunate.
Those remaining aircrew not already grouped, were detailed, by order, to fly together.

From this time, at Bicester, every day, we flew on numerous exercises which took us all round the British Isles. The Mull of Kintyre was often a turning point on our cross country trips. When conditions were right (there had to be 'white horses' on the sea, so that the pilot could check height) we would spend many hours flying over the North Sea at fifty feet.

One time, on a cross country exercise, we 'buzzed' Keighley, Johnny's home town, then Bramley, my home town (village, really). It was a good visibility day in which we could easily pick out our homes, below. Johnny was sensible and did not fly lower than a couple of hundred feet.

We were knitting together well and as was natural, we would leave camp on a few evenings, toss up which way to go, for Banbury to the North and Oxford to the South were equidistant from camp, then finding a suitable Pub, chat the evening away over a pint of beer

On a very short leave, the three of us hared off to Yorkshire. We went to Keighley for half a day and met Johnny's Mother. Then to Bramley, my

home, where my Mother was pleased to meet Johnny and Freddie. We stayed awhile and had a meal together amid much chatter and laughter - for Johnny let himself go on this occasion. Our families had thus been able to see us together.

I do not know what Freddie's thoughts would be at this time. Poor Freddie, he was thousands of miles away from his own home. Yet it did not seem to bother him, he was happy enough and joined in all the conversation.

Then, back to Bicester and more serious work, before going overseas to get a crack at the enemy. That had been our embarkation leave.

There remains a story to be told of a rather naughty incident that took place in the latter time of our stay at Bicester. We were billeted in nissen huts, as usual. In November and December it was pretty cold and we had no fuel for the inevitable cast iron stove which was supposed to heat our hut. Daytime did not matter, we were busy then, but evenings were a different matter. You could have hung a side of beef in the hut, it would have kept well. Requests to our authority brought no fuel.

In the dead of night, a few of us, from our hut, went out in search of fuel, anything that would burn in the stove. We came upon a stack of coal, piled up against a wall. It probably belonged to a nearby bakery.

Anything that would carry coal was put to use. Kit bags, turned inside-out proved to be best. We took dozens of bags of the black gold, back to our hut and enjoyed warm evenings ever after.

We expected trouble, but never heard a thing about our escapade.

FLYING OUT TO THE MIDDLE EAST.

So busy were we with flying training that the 23rd December came by surprise and saw Johnny, Freddie and myself packing our kit and few belongings into a specially fitted-out Blenhiem 1V, it had long range fuel tanks in the fuselage. I would be sitting on tons of high octane petrol. We made the short hop to Portreath in Cornwall - the most Southerly departure point.

No memories of that one night-stop in Portreath, except a good meal, our minds were too occupied with thoughts of the morrow and whatever lay beyond.

Up at four o'clock next morning, Christmas Eve 1941, for a bacon and egg breakfast, followed by briefing and last minute checks on our Blenhiem and its radio equipment.

We took off at first light. Our route took us well out into the Atlantic, away from the Bay of Biscay and any problems in that area. After some hours it was good to see land again. We were then flying at eight thousand feet off the North West coast of Spain.

"Radio to Captain", I called. "There are three Spanish fighters, port beam, about same height". "Hold it Bert", Johnny replied. "They are just looking, we are outside territorial waters". Indeed, those Spanish fighters came no nearer than a mile, turned round and disappeared from sight.

Thereafter we had nothing to disturb a peaceful flight, other than I could occasionally hear Freddie giving Johnny some alteration of course to steer.

It was with some relief (to the rear end of the anatomy) that we reached the point to turn port (left) and approach The Rock from due West - not long to go now.

THE ROCK OF GIBRALTAR.

(May the Apes for ever stay)

Oh, yes, an awe inspiring sight it was, to glimpse Gibraltar for the first time.

We flew right round the Rock in an anti-clockwise direction, and so got a bird's eye view. Johnny was obviously doing a 'recce' before making a landing approach.

The sight of Gibraltar and the backbone of this ancient British Colony, for so I called the steep mini-mountain that forms the Rock, is most impressive to the first time viewer. The best way to make acquaintance with Gibraltar must be from the air.

Then we made to land. To line up with the, then, short runway (which takes up the short stretch of ground between the Mediterranian Sea, to the East and the harbour to the West) brought us almost wing-tip to the heights on our left. I guess I leaned the other way (to starboard) to imaginarily keep our port wing from touching.

We were at War, if not actually firing guns or dropping bombs - and so - what a comforting sight and military uplift (if the senior service will forgive the phrase), indeed, how wonderful and reassuring it was to see so many Royal Navy warships, of every size, nestling in the harbour or lying to moorings between the Rock, La Linea and Algeciros, both latter on the Spanish mainland.

It was late evening when we touched down, after an eight hour flight. After de-briefing our first thoughts were for a cup of tea followed by a good meal. We did not get either. There was no apparent hospitality. Wandering around we came upon a mini open air cookhouse with jacket spuds baking on an open brazier. Temptation was too much (now about ten hours since our last refreshment) and we helped ourselves. No sooner had we done so than some Sergeant, obviously in charge, came up and

shouted 'Right, you've had your Christmas Dinner!' What a welcome ! we did not worry about the Christmas Dinner because we were due to take-off first thing Christmas morning, bound for Malta, the next leg of our journey Eastwards.

On this Christmas Eve then, there was no alternative but to find sustenance elsewhere. The elsewhere was Gibraltar town, where we had time to walk along the main streets to find a place to have a good snack, not forgetting duty-free beer. In the time we had, we managed quite a walk-about, past the imposing, and Gibraltar's biggest, civic building, Government House. Ending up in a nice little, English looking, pub, we spent a relaxing hour over duty-free beer.
In all, Gibraltar looked like Singapore, with all its defences to seaward and only a chain-link fence on the land border to the North.

THE DOWNFALL OF A NAVIGATOR.

Freddie, who could drink like a fish, palled up with some Royal Navy types and left Johnny and myself. It transpired that Freddie had gone back to ship with the Senior Service, been plied with large quantities of booze and had downed more than he could hold. So drunk had he been, that he actually fell from one deck to the next without really hurting himself. It is said that only drunks and athletes can fall without damage to life and limb.
At 4 am. Christmas morning we were due for briefing, being the lead crew of four Blenhiems making the next leg to Malta. Johnny and myself were getting dressed and ready for the fray, but saw no sign of Freddie. The two of us dashed all over the placeto find Freddie in a drunken sleep in another nissen hut. He had lost his way when making way back to camp in the early hours.
"Oh, Lord, will he be fit to navigate ?" were my thoughts. We managed to get Freddie to briefing on time. Drunk, and he the lead navigator ! We left Gibraltar behind, early that Christmas morning (1941), heading East in loose formation under a clear blue sky. There was a dearth of navigation aids in the middle of the Mediterranian Sea and I recall taking quite a few drift sightings for Freddie, who was worried about

the wind details given at briefing. We were certainly drifting South of our intended track, all the time. After two or three hours we ran into cloud. Then, as the cloud thickened, climbed above it, to find ourselves on our own. The other three Blenhiems were nowhere to be seen. The weather got worse. Soon we were flying 'blind' in thick cloud. After a little while Freddie said we would have to descend to let him get a bearing. Coming down through solid cloud should have been O.K. over the Mediterranean Sea. When we actually broke cloud, it was to be surrounded and dwarfed by mountains. Johnny engaged 9lbs boost - maximum power - to make an emergency climb. Fortunately we got away with it and each of us heaved a sigh of relief.

We were over Tunisia, a navigational error.

Johnny climbed to an agreed safe height on an estimated correction of track and we pressed on. Gradually the solid cloud thinned out, until in a while we were in clear skies, over the Med.

I called on the intercom, "Johnny, enemy aircraft, port bow, same height, on a course to cross our bows". "O.K. Bert, I see it", replied Johnny. "Don't start anything Bert", called Johnny. 'Roger', I acknowledged. It was our duty to get the aircraft to destination and not get otherwise involved.

A second or two passed and then I called again on intercom, "It's a Savoia SM79". "O.K." was the reply.

An SM79 is similar to a Blenhiem but has three engines. It was probably bound for Tunisia on a mission similar to our own. Nevertheless, my guns were trained on him - no doubt his guns were trained on us. Both aircraft, one Italian, one British, kept to their original courses and height and passed each other just a couple of hundred yards apart. I watched the SM79 out of sight, then concentrated on other things.

Freddie wanted me to get a course to steer for Malta.

I called them up on radio, but the only reply I could get was 'Air Raid In Progress' - which was not very helpful. However, we made a good landfall, were able to set down quickly on the runway during a lull in the air-raid, parked the Blenhiem and ran for the shelters - not before we had collected our kit and a sleeping bag each, which we found in the aircraft, more of that at a later date.

THE GEORGE CROSS ISLAND.

In spite of apprehensive thoughts of approaching Malta to land in the middle of an air-raid, - for so many reasons - it was good to see our destination 'all present and correct' in its proper position. This, because it was not unknown for an aircraft in transit to make an error in navigation and head towards Sicily and trouble. There were other nasty possibilities - enemy fighters from the nearby tiny, German held, Island of Pantelleria. Those same enemy fighters often patrolled the area we were flying through.

The first sight of our destination had been the Island of Gozo, where its lighthouse is the pinnacle, standing some six hundred feet above sea level.

So soon out of training, we were to join an Island under siege, a far flung Colony standing in defiance against all that Hitler's forces could throw at it.

Indeed, it was a frightening sight, the air above the tiny Fortress Island alive with aircraft and their trails. The sky speckled with bursts, long continuous bursts of anti aircraft shells, making huge and nasty black puffs, in angry reaction to the raiders

Even whilst all that melee proceeded I could not help but be aware of the 'flat top' island's upright steep cliffs, which formed the coastline, shining white, to remind one of the White Cliffs of Dover. So, yet another Colony had something of a friendly appearance with which to welcome us. There was not much else to welcome us and I certainly did not fancy poking our nose into the air battle going on over Malta at that time.

We flew South of the Island - going Easterly - then, in a lull in the air-raid turned to approach Luqa, and landed on the runway, which starts on the very edge of a steep and deep precipice. Fortune favoured somebody, because we had landed without interference.

Malta certainly deserved its accolade when awarded the George Cross, a little later, for enduring with such resistance and fortitude, the continuous German and Italian air-raids. Which air-raids went on for years, without let-up, during Malta's darkest days - and nights.

We were allocated beds in the usual Nissen hut, just for the one night. In the few hours of evening left to us, we had a quick look round Valetta and, because every airman had heard about it, we took a walk down the street called straight. Straight Street, it was not a place to linger in.

A bite to eat was the next item on the agenda. We got just that. Food was so very short on the Island, we got 'a bite', and nothing more.

Next morning we rose very early (used to it, by now) and presented ourselves at briefing, for the next leg, to Cairo. This time, Freddie was all present and correct.

Immediately, we were told that our Blenhiem had been taken over by 69 squadron. 69 squadron were losing aircraft and needed ours as a replacement for attacking shipping. Attacking shipping - rather them than us - we had heard about that dangerous game.

Thus we were stuck in Malta, for goodness knows how long, and proceeded to make our own arrangements for a longer stay.
If nothing else, this delay gave us time to see something of the Island. We walked and walked, transport, and fuel to run the transport, being unobtainable. A further visit to Valetta gave us time to really appreciate the fine old buildings and view the battered harbour with its many wrecks. Johnny, as was normal for him, found female company in Sleima.

Next was another long walk, over Malta's stony, dusty roads, as far as St.Paul's Bay. It was worth the walk. We explored everywhere and everything and concluded it was a pretty place, ideal for holidays.
Then the long trudge back, by which time Freddie was looking the worse

for wear, or was it for lack of beer. It was nice to be able to say we had been to the bay where the disciple, St.Paul, is supposed to have been shipwrecked, an event, so very long ago, that gives the bay its name. When we got back to the airfield it was to be told that our billet had been changed. We moved to a Nissen Hut in Marsaxlokk Bay, probably because it was a little more peaceful out there, but left us rather out of the way of things. We had been not long in Marsaxlokk before a Corvette or Frigate of the Royal Navy had to beach in that little bay, as a result of enemy action against a convoy trying to get round the South East of the Island to Valetta.

Upon occasion, when out walking and caught in an air raid we did use the remarkable shelters which were carved out of the solid limestone rock, of which the whole Island was one big lump. However, we would normally 'stay up top' to see what exactly was going on.

It is a pity that I could never have the opportunity to approach Valetta Grand Harbour from the sea. Such would have been the remarkable sight first confronting the invading Turks in the year 1565. Yes, there was history all over the Island, and much more, in the making, during this terrible conflict.

We had no aircraft, no squadron, no base and no duties. However, we were called upon to make the occasional reconnaissance flight for 69 squadron, once or twice having a prowl around the South of Sicily, then making haste back to Malta before any enemy fighter could interfere. Air raids on the Island were never ending, sometimes we sheltered, but more often watching the overhead action. In the midst of one of the air-raids our hearts were in our mouths in sympathy for one poor Blenhiem, returning from a sortie, being shot up by our own ack ack, light and heavy, which followed him wherever he banked, twisted and turned. There is some similarity between the Blenhiem and a Junkers 88 but trigger-happy Malta gunners shot first and asked afterwards.

Another great and frightening sight was the arrival of what was left of a relief convoy of supplies to Malta. In the midst of a terrible air

battle, only two ships, from a great number, survived to limp into Valetta harbour.

Food was very short on the Island. A couple of trips into Valetta found us enjoying some doubtful goat's meat, in any scratch meal we could find, to supplement rations.

I had a short spell in hospital with an ear infection, made worse by some energetic probing by various doctors. This alarmed me. Very soon I got Johnny to come to hospital with pseudo posting notices - which got me an immediate discharge. Left alone the ear soon improved.

At the end of January, we, as a spare crew, boarded a Wellington aircraft bound for Cairo. It was another long eight hour flight. Though never having been in a multi-gun turret, I volunteered to relieve the rear gunner at the half way stage. Sure enough, in tense concentration of scanning the black night sky from an unfamiliar turret, I must have inadvertantly pressed the firing button. To make matters worse, the guns 'ran away'. By the time I had pulled back the firing pins and stopped the guns firing, the staccato rattle of same had put everybody on edge. The flight continued uneventfully to Cairo West - not far from the Pyramids - where we landed in the early morning.

GIZA AND THE PYRAMIDS

As we made to land at Cairo West military airfield, we could just make out, in the half light of dawn, the outlines of the Pyramids. One is immediately aware that, down there, on earth, is something worth seeing. From the height we were viewing there was nothing majestic, and no impression of size to be seen. Even so we knew what we were gazing at and wanted to see more. Obviously, the site of the Pyramids would have to be visited on terra firma.

A little later, when the first 24 hour leave came along, we made haste to visit that historical site at Giza.
There are three Pyramids at Giza, but my attention was rivetted to the largest, THE GREAT PYRAMID, which absolutely dwarfs the humans gazing at it. This one, of the three, is truly enormous, and of course, the three together make up one of the SEVEN WONDERS OF THE WORLD. According to information given, the GREAT PYRAMID stands 480 feet high and is constructed from huge limestone blocks, each one weighing two and a half tons.

No words or pictures can ever prepare you for your first sight of the PYRAMIDS. Their size is hardly conceivable until standing before them. I was struck by the symmetry of the blocks, their positioning in layers and the precise accuracy of construction which created the pyramid shape, almost without a flaw.

An attempt to scale the blocks which look no more than steps, from a little distance away, was useless, the blocks stood as high as my chest, so I gave up the attempt.

The actual date of construction is only guessed at by those who delve into such things, but it must be some years before 2650 B.C. - and of course, it was a tomb for the mumified bodies of Kings.

That the Pyramids could have withstood the elements for over four and a half thousand years, and still be, to all intents and purposes, as good as when first built is truly amazing.
Cheops had forced everyone to work as slaves in construction, which took a period of at least ten years. At that time, so long ago, there would be as many as a hundred thousand men working at one time. Some of those virtual slaves worked in the Arabian hills, where the stone came from, cutting out the gigantic blocks Others would drag the stones from the hills down to the Nile, for water tranportation near to Giza. From the Nile, those great blocks of stone still had to be manhandled quite a distance to the construction site.
Lessons at school told me how such a great pyramid may have been constructed, but seeing it (or them) one can only wonder how the unbelievably massive task was ever carried out.

THE SPHINX.

The Sphinx, almost within a stone's throw of the Pyramids, is no less awe inspiring. Carved from one enormous piece of rock, again it dwarfs all around it. It is a huge statue with the head of a man and the body of a lion. Centuries of sandstorms carried by high winds have caused some erosion, particularly to the nose. Whatever causes it, the face emanates a distinctive air of mystery, that cannot be avoided by any spellbound onlooker.

Here we three were, gazing in astonishment at such a World famous location. We, involved in a War nearby. Napoleon must have stood where we are now, for he won the battle of the Pyramids in 1798, Pray that we win this next battle, almost 150 years on.

Having gazed in awe at the Pyramids, this was yet another remarkable sight to see, causing one to wonder why ever such a huge figure of stone came to be carved and erected. For what purpose.

Even at this time in the Second World War, I was surprised that the surrounding area at Giza was so commercialised. Arabs abounded, touting to get the unwary on to the back of a Camel, no doubt collecting many Piastres for so doing. The back of a horse was strange to me and I was not attracted to the Camel.

All of which brings to mind
a well known services rhyme :-

> Now the animal urge of the Camel
> is far greater than anyone thinks,
> in a moment of sexual excitement
> he tried to bottle the Sphinx,
> Now, the Sphinx's posterial passage
> was blocked by the sands from the Nile,
> which accounts for the Camel having the hump
> and the Sphinx's inscrutable smile.

Yes Camels and Arabs were about, in numbers, plying for trade. Yet *nobody thought to make available literature and information* giving detail of this Wonder of the World site.

LIFE IN A HATED TRANSIT CAMP.

After landing at Cairo West, we were de-briefed - not that any of us had anything to say. We had flown from Malta on a dark moonless night, and like the blind man who bumped into a lamp-post, 'saw nothing at all'. There were only details of aircraft and equipment states to report. Thank goodness, there was hospitality at Cairo West, for we had not met much, on our journeys, so far. We were directed to the Sergeant's Mess, and despite the early hour of dawn, were at once served cups of welcome tea, followed shortly by a good meal.

Right after the meal, Johnny, Freddie and myself were taken by transport to a 'transit camp', the name of which we soon learned, was Amariya.

There we were thrown right back to where we started R.A.F. life in 1940, being treated, once again, as the lowest form of life. This, our first real glimpse of life in the Middle Eastern Desert, was sheer misery. A tent was our billet. It was a good job that we had 'lifted' those sleeping bags from our aircraft in Malta. Without them we would have had to sleep on the bare sand. At least, now we could settle down to a well earned sleep, tucked up in sleeping bags, laid on the sand floor.

Next morning, very early, we could not miss the horrible shouts of 'on parade'. We did not think those shouts were directed at us - but were soon corrected when a burly Sergeant burst into the tent and repeated the command, in a voice that would have taken FIRST PRIZE in any shouting contest.

It seemed that what went on in a transit camp in the Middle East was a psychological effort to get one, in the mind, so eager to do battle, that any alternative to the camp, would be like heaven on

earth. It was obviously a place where one is 'bulled' until a posting to a squadron comes along.

That we were, all three of us, Sergeants, mattered not one iota. We were drilled and kept 'on parade' throughout each day we spent there. There were other sufferers, like ourselves, and none of us allowed out of camp, at all. Food I do not remember, so it cannot have been much, or good.

It seemed that life, in this form, would go on for ever.
What a relief therefore, one morning, on the usual parade to hear our three names called out, 'fall out and report to the orderly office !'. There we were told that we had been posted to 223 Squadron. The reader can guess we were keen to go.
With our sleeping bags rolled up and all our Worldly possessions stuffed into kit-bags, we were driven, by pick-up truck to Ismailiya.

223 SQUADRON.

The three of us were taken by pick-up truck to Ismailiya, where, in no time at all, we found the Salvation Army canteen. There we had 'wads' and tea, in a break from travelling. From there, we scrounged a lift, to Shandur, which was the base of 223 Squadron.

Shandur is sited in desert country, South of Cairo, on the Suez Canal side, just South of the Little Bitter Lake.

We were expected, taken to the orderly room to go through various formalities, such as 'next of kin','Religion' and all the other things that make you aware,'we are here to stay'.

A large tented camp covered an area at the North side of the usual vast area set aside for flying. there was even a runway, running East - West, which would give take-off or landing, low, across the Suez Canal.

The tent allocated to us was occupied by one peculiar individual, an old member of the squadron who had been with the outfit in Eritrea. He told us that the squadron flew Fairey Battle aircraft in the campaigns of the 'Horn of Africa',against the Italians, and the squadron had only just moved North to join the Desert action.

This chap, whose name I forget, had an old gramophone of the wind-up variety, complete with a real old fashioned H.M.V. trumpet. The trouble was, he only had one record, (with more clicks than tune) which he used to play interminably, nearly driving us mad. Needless to say, we did not spend much time in the tent which he seldom left, in those early days at Shandur.

The squadron Commanding Officer, whom we seldom saw, was Wing Commander T.M.Horgan. The two Flight Commanders were Squadron Leaders, Joel and Wallace. It was impossible to move twenty yards

without bumping into one or the other of the Flight Commanders. These two, keen and efficient Squadron Leaders, both men all crews were happy to be led on operations by, at this early stage, took it upon themselves to knock the squadron's crews into shape.

Johnny, Freddie and myself felt ourselves fortunate to be allocated to "A Flight" commanded and led by S/Ldr. Wallace. At this time, our crew became a four-man outfit with the addition of a mid-upper gunner, by the name of Willie. He was a youngster, fair haired and of very slight build. He looked as though he would snap in two, in a slight breeze. For all that, Willie was a cheerful soul, who stuck to his guns, metaphorically, rather than physically.

There was much to be done. All the squadron's pilots were put on 'circs and bumps' in the conversion to 'Baltimores'. The Baltimore was an American aircraft, twin engined, with more power than our old Blenhiem, and though still a tail wheel type, was much more modern. It was even fitted with the latest in wireless equipment, the Marconi 1154 and 1155. This transmitter and the receiver were better than anything I had come across previously and made operating, and life in that area so much simpler.

"From Maryland comes Baltimore,
To Egypt and the promised land,
To strafe the Hun, whose desert war
Ends suddenly in desert sand"

From:- The Egyptian Mail
31st, August 1942

Most of the squadron's pilots coped with the conversion to Baltimores, without much trouble. Johnny took to the new aircraft like a duck taking to water, and had no trouble at all - for which, Freddie and I were truly grateful.

One of the pilots, with whom we had become very friendly, name of Gerry Relton, was not so lucky. He made his first 'take-off' O.K., but landing turned out to be a very different matter. Coming in to make his first landing, he more than touched 'terra firma' very firm, and bounced a mile.

By the time this had happened a couple of times, the whole squadron's personnel had mustered round the airfield (hard sand) to watch Gerry 'bend' something. Aircrews are a rotten lot, always seeming to delight in somebody else's predicament, at the same time, having hearts in mouth in sympathy. By the time Gerry had made a few attempted landings, each time bouncing high off the runway, there were OOHs and AAHs all round.
All credit to Gerry, however, he stuck it out and did the right thing to go round-again, and again, every time he failed to land. At about the seventh attempt, he made it, and thereafter, never had any trouble.

What work Freddie was doing all this time, I have no idea, but I was dispatched to Amman, capital of Jordan, on an Aircraft Recognition course. This was a very sensible move, something which would be more than useful, in fact necessary, an aid to survival, I'd say. It was an enjoyable course during which the students attending became real experts at recognising aircraft, from every possible angle and silhouette. Naturally we took in British aircraft, it wouldn't do to shoot our own side out of the sky, but the accent was definitely on every type of enemy aircraft.

By the time I returned to the squadron, things had moved a long way. Now was the time for cross country exercises, each one of us really getting used to the aircraft and its facilities. After some time on trips that took us round Lydda (Palestine), Suez and the Siwa Oasis (way South in the Western Desert), it was time for almost unending practice at formation flying - which would be essential when we were to go on 'ops'.

All the pilots became adept at this formation flying - wing-tips tucked inside wing-tips, first in a 'vic' of three aircraft, then a 'box' of six and finally with eighteen aircraft, ie, three boxes of six each.

At the end of this intensive training Johnny, Freddie, Willie and myself were given 48 hour passes. We hitched a lift to sample the joys of Cairo. It was not long before we found our way to the Gazirah Club, where I accompanied Johnny on a round of Golf. The other two had found other things, to please, elswhere.

Shepheards Hotel was not for mere Sergeants like us - Officers only, were allowed in that establishment. But we enjoyed ourselves in other places. There was Groppi's Cafe where we could enjoy European style cakes and coffee. Another place we liked, served Turkish Coffee taken alternatively with sips of ice cold water.

Enjoyed as much as anything was to sit outside a pavement cafe, drinking Stella Beer and watching the girls go by - there were many, pretty French girls about, and for that matter, many of other nationalities besides the local Egyptians. Indeed Cairo was a cosmopolitan city with many Mid and Near East inhabitants.

The squadron was now declared ready for operations against the enemy, and designated the Eighth Army's close support squadron. As required, the Eighth Army would be able to call upon us to bomb enemy tanks (Rommel's Panzers amongst them), enemy motor transport concentrations or other targets of choice.

This was the kind of work we did subsequently, exclusively at the request of the Desert Rat's Commander. Only twice in the whole Desert Campaign did we attack any other special target.

"GOOLIE CHITS".

At this time all crew members were issued with 'Goolie Chits'. Rumour had it that these were to save our manhood, in case we should have looked upon their women, when come across by Bedouin or nomadic Arabs, if we had been shot down or force landed, in the Desert.

Actually, the 'Goolie Chit' was a letter, written in Arabic and stating that the King of England would give a reward if the Airman was helped and returned to the Allies.

The foregoing was the last, in a long line of preparations, before the whole squadron now flew West into the Desert.
We faithfully carried the 'Goolie Chit' whenever we flew on operations, still hoping that there would be no cause to use it.

The land battle 'Front' would be around Benghazi at this time, and the squadron made base at a 'Landing Ground' - just an area of flat hard sand and designated by numbers - there were many such landing grounds in the desert, this, well to the rear of the 'front'.

Our third outing, to bomb the Germans, was one of the few not aimed directly at the fighting area. The Generals wanted to know what, if any, forces and equipment the enemy had, positioned South in the desert

Just three of our Baltimores, in tight vic formation, were sent, unescorted, over trackless wastes of desert, and at our extreme range of three hours duration. Any prowling ME 109 could have annihilated us. This operation was called an offensive reconnaissance, and at the end of it, we were to attack Fort Antalat. All went well, most of the way, and we did bomb Antalat.

Three Baltimores, each loaded with 2 x 500 lbs, and 3 x 250 lbs bombs, dropped the lot on that Fort at Antalat and we doubted that there were more than six humans at the place.

The return journey was made without any enemy interference, but one of the three Baltimores ran out of fuel and belly-landed short of base, in the desert. Johnny must have known what he was about, and conserved fuel, for we landed back at base O.K. with little to spare.

The reader will gather that the Baltimore was a fairly short range bomber. Because of this we always made base at some landing ground, just behind the front line.
The front line moved forward with army successes, or backwards with defeat, consequently our base moved West or East from time to time, to one or another of the many landing grounds. Many times there would be variation. When things were static our base would become semi permanent and sometimes therefore, we would fly off to a forward L.G., refuel, make our attack from there, and return to our L.G. in the rear, again. In this way we could settle for a period and try to make more of a home in our tents.

To do this, we pitched our ordinary ridge-tent, then dug a rectangle (size of tent) underneath it, four feet deep. That was a lot of hard work, in the solid hard packed, stony, sand. The result was a tent one could stand upright in, and became our own air-raid shelter, at the same time. One could go further in the search of luxury and carve little shelves out of the side walls, thus having somewhere to keep small kit etc. Oh, yes, we liked what comfort could be arranged, in an otherwise comfortless existance. Naturally, we dug entry steps at the tent flap end.

At one L.G., after an Army advance, we took over a similar, already dug, hole for the tent. It had been dug by the Germans, in like fashion, and saved us a lot of work. It had to be checked for booby traps before occupying.

All the landing grounds were so chosen because they were areas of flat, stony, hard packed sand. They had no runways - take-off and landing could be in any direction. Setting off on a raid was worked to a fine art. Two or three aircraft taking off would have prevented further take-offs until the resulting, self-created sandstorm had subsided. So, one mass take-off took place. The leading aircraft would be at the left hand end of a line of eighteen Baltimores, and all moved off, in eschelon to starboard, together.

This gave one mass take-off, with the result that, all aircraft were in the sky together, it was easy to take up the tight formation immediately, and then set course. Perhaps you can imagine the resultant sandstorm created by thirty six slipstreams.

In these early days, we bombers flew without fighter escort. We had occasional trouble with ME 109 s, but far worse was the heavy anti-aircraft fire from the dreaded 88m.m. guns, (ack-ack) met over the target area.

British aircraft in the desert, indeed, in the whole of the Middle East were inferior to types of aircraft flown by the enemy, who also had numerical superiority, almost up to the time of El Alamein. Previous to that, light bombers were Blenhiems with Wellington Bombers operating at night on longer range bombing missions to Mediterranian ports such as Benghazi or Tripoli.

When Baltimores became operational, Blenhiems were taken out of service. Then Baltimores took over the daylight raids and Wellingtons continued their night work.

Only just before the halt at Alamein did we have the luxury of fighter escort, who were with us thereafter. That did not happen, yet awhile.

Meantime, when manning the underside guns - my position for action, I felt secure, and to some degree protected, crouching over a small square, 2ft. by 2ft. of armour plate. I found out very soon, that this so-called armour plate was merely plywood painted steel grey.

Natural sandstorms were infrequent, except at one time of the year (about England's mid Summer) when the Khamsin winds blew. Then everything would be blanked out and no flying possible. The longer the wind blew, the higher would the blank out reach. On the deck visiblity could be reduced to a matter of a few yards, and in the featureless area one could very soon become lost, if trying to go far. But worst of all was the discomfort. Sand would get everywhere, in eyes, ears and cover skin and clothing with a fine dust. Sand would also get into food. I remember that it took me many years, in later civvy life, before I would eat strawberries and cream, because sugar is added to that dish, and the resulting crunch of sugar between the teeth so reminded me of a mouthful of sand - which had been not unusual in the sand storm conditions

SHAFTO'S CINEMA.

About this time, Shafto's mobile open air Cinema visited the squadron to give an evening's entertainment.
Mention 'Shafto's' anywhere from Cairo to Cape Bonn and you would get a big laugh. With the whole squadron squatting on the sand, Airmen, Sergeants, Officers, the lot, gazing at a temporary screen The film would appear on the screen UPSIDE DOWN, accompanied by bursts of laughter. In a minute or two the picture would appear again, this time BACK TO FRONT, - loud laughter. When the giggles died down, picture would re-appear, run for a few moments, split film and BREAK DOWN. By this time, all of us were nearly peeing ourselves with laughter. Never remember the film, but we had a hilarious night.

WATER SHORTAGES.

At certain landing grounds water would be in very short supply and at these times, one had to be very clever to clean teeth, shave and wash in one mugful of water, each morning.

The sleeping bags we had cleverly annexed in Malta, now came into their own - and I slept in mine every night, for more than a year, without ever being able to have it washed - I believe I left it standing up in the Desert when posted for a rest, from Ops, at the end of the 'tour'. That is a long way ahead yet.

EXTRACTS FROM MY LOG BOOK

Taken at random

18th. June 1942.
In one box of six Baltimores (unescorted) bombed aerodrome, transport and road at Gazala.
Later, was able to append newspaper cutting 'It is learned that the increased enemy air activity has died down considerably, following a successful attack by the R.A.F. on the enemy's forward aerodrome at Gazala'.
The attack apparently had considerable effect.

7th. July 1942
One box of 6 Baltimores (unescorted), attacked ship in harbour at Mersa Matruh. One direct hit on ship, several on wharf and camp. Three oil fires burning four hours later. Next day, ship reported sunk.

21st. August 1942
With fighter escort, attacked enemy transport concentrations in Southern sector. Leading last vic of eighteen Baltimores. One of our aircraft shot down and we ourselves returned to base with damage to the aircraft.

This latter operation had been against transport and tanks. The Germans defended well and an awful lot of 'flack' was thrown up at us, as is usual. Bursts of the dreaded 88mm shells were all around us and despite our close formation, even in between the aircraft. Some wag suggested that we would be able to get out and walk on the black puffs.

It was not time for fun. Our number two Baltimore, that is, the one on our left, formating within a few feet of our own aircraft, received a direct hit from the 88mm guns - it must have hit the centre of the Baltimore's belly.

That poor Baltimore reared up, almost vertically, continued as though looping the loop, then screamed down, out of control, towards the Desert sand, far below. It had been piloted by a friend of ours, Sgt McClure.

We thought we saw a couple of parachutes, but could not be certain. Our own aircraft sustained damage from the same blast and we had to limp back to base.

Our normal height for bombing run was between seven and eight thousand feet though the actual bombing was from a shallow dive to, say, six thousand feet. This height just about removed us from the range of 20mm. and 40mm. light anti aircraft guns. Nevertheless we were still at the mercy of the heavy stuff, the famous German 88mm guns, which put up a terrific barage of nasty black puffs, loaded with explosives and lumps of metal.

We had sporadic periods of activity in so far as flying operations were concerned. Then, in the retreat to El Alamein were going on ops not once, but even two and three times per day, as the army called for support in its rearguard actions.

These were worrying times which once saw us taking-off from a forward landing ground, to fly East out of trouble, with German tanks appearing in sight.

A BATH IN THE BLUE MEDITERRANIAN.

One time, between ops, when stationed at some L.G. not far South of Mersa Matruh, some of the aircrew were taken by pick-up truck to a lovely beach, West of the town. For the first time, in many months, we had a real bath and swim in the blue Mediterranian. We had a couple of bars of Sea Soap between us. None of us had swimming trunks, but then, all males present, nobody else within miles. We just stripped off and dashed into the sea in delight. What a treat.

As long as we did our duty and behaved reasonably, there was no 'bull' on the squadron. For example, most of the personnel wore 'brothel creepers' or, to be polite, suede desert boots, which were effective in keeping sand out of feet. Issue or similar khaki shirt and shorts, so long as badges of rank were worn, completed the usual desert dress.

Our Baltimores, usually operating in three boxes of six aircraft each, ie. eighteen aircraft together in very close formation (for fire power), were referred to, by the Germans (this from German P.O.W.s) as 'The eighteen imperturbables'.

Willie, who receives little or no mention because he was a very quiet lad, seldom having anything at all to say, now showed a mean streak. Flies were the never ending bane of our lives - and there was nothing we could do about it. Willie did!. Whenever we were resting in our tent hole, Willie would catch flies with his hands and proceed to pull off their wings - all the while cursing flies and saying 'There, you so and so s, see how you like walking !'

One of the squadron's Baltimores was sent, on some business, to make a round trip to Lydda (Palestine) and back. Whilst there, the crew filled the aircraft with oranges. Because of the war, the orange-groves were not being tended and anybody could help themselves.

Back at our landing ground, the Baltimore 'pranged' when coming in to land. Oranges spewed all over the vast, flat expanse of the L.G. and

rolled quite some distance. Everybody available quickly gathered up the fruity offerings. Johnny, Freddie and myself, with armfuls of lovely fruit, made our way back to the tent.

Oranges were eaten ravenously. Many were sick from eating too much citreous fruit, the first we had seen in the desert.

The 223 squadron sick bay was merely a marquee and situated right at the far side of the landing ground. Sergeant 'Mac' who was the senior sick bay man and a great friend of mine, would ask me over on the occasional evening for a chat - which was usually of 'Blighty' etc. One such evening, when returning across the bundoo to bed down for the night, I was caught in the middle of nowhere when bombs started to fall. Half way across the L.G. on hard packed stoney ground, there was nowhere to shelter.
Believe me, I scooped a tiny hollow, with my hands and flattened myself there until danger passed.
Had anybody seen it - that could have looked decidedly funny.

Food in the desert was pretty poor. There was little for breakfast, bully beaf and bully beef for lunch. Not the lovely corned beef you have, straight from the fridge, but a horrible, warm, soggy mess, sometimes accompanied by sweet potatoes sent up from the Delta. Reconstituted dried egg would appear as a treat. However, mugs of tea were always available and, it was not unknown for us to have a brew-up by our tent. In this case, a little petrol poured into the sand, acted just like a primus stove, to heat a billy can of water.

CHURCHILL'S BIG MISTAKE.

Once, on a 48 hour leave to Alexandria, we called in at the Fleet Club for a beer and a rest. We took an awful lot of 'stick', bad tempered stick, from the Royal Navy personnel present. The Navy types there, were not only antagonistic towards the R.A.F., because of the Greece and Crete disasters but could well have become violent, but for a strong stand made by Freddie. Johnny and I had always known that Freddie would be a good man in times like these.

All the above came about following Churchill's biggest mistake. Viz :-

On Churchill's whim, men and war materials were withdrawn from the desert and sent to Greece when that country was threatened by Germany. In the event, the forces were not strong enough and were WITHOUT THE NECESSARY AIR SUPPORT. In that day and age, it had already been proved that an army could not operate without air support. We had no aircraft with range and no bases to get them near enough.

So that there was defeat in Greece, costing thousands of troops and many ships of the Royal Navy.

Then the remaining forces withdrew to Crete in the vain hope of defending that land from the Germans - again without the necessary AIR SUPPORT.

Germany's first parachute invasion soon disposed of allied defences on Crete. There were yet more terrific losses in lives, plus, we lost many more Royal Navy warships than we could afford. It was easy to see, therefore, why the Navy types had no time for the R.A.F. personnel after that. They thought that they had been let down, by the R.A.F.

If all that was not bad enough - the removal of men and war materials from the desert campaign almost proved fatal. It very nearly cost us the whole of the Middle East, when Rommel advanced against a weakened foe, right to Alamein, where we in the R.A.F. were doing our bit to stem the tide.

None of the foregoing detracts from our enduring high regard of Winston Churchill - a Giant of the 20th.Century, who led Britain and her Allies through 'Toil, Sweat and Tears' against the Nazis, so valiantly, and won.

LIFE IN THE DESERT.

Cigarettes were supplied free. They came to us from South Africa, labelled 'Cape to Cairo', we called them 'cough to consumption'. Just occasionally we would get a chance to barter with wandering Bedouins and get some eggs against a packet of 'C to Cs'.

Everybody on the squadron would suffer frequent bouts of Gyppy Tummy. The cure for this was cruel but effective - a strong dose of Epsom Salts. Then, of course, repair to the 'plank over a ditch loo', thinking all the time of the airman who fell in.

The Middle East postman was not exactly overworked.
Letters from home were a rare treat, to be read several times, over a long period. Nevertheless, I received a well spaced stream of news from home - even with interesting newspaper cuttings, some of which refered to our own exploits in the war effort. It was cheering to have a Christmas card from a girl friend I had met some years before the War. At the time of meeting she was only a grown-up school girl, still in gym slip and myself just eighteen years old. From then, we corresponded and friendship grew to 'courting by post'. At the end of the war we were married, not before she kept me waiting while sizing up a cousin, over from America,

Going on a short leave to Alexandria - on my own this time - Freddie, our well paid R.N.Z.A.F. navigator described exactly the watch he wanted bringing back. It was a Movado, half gold, half stainless steel. He even told me from which shop to get it. He gave me £30 to buy it with.

In Alex, having had the Four'Ss' - a shit, a shave, a shower and a shampoo, followed by a good night's sleep on a real bed, between clean white sheets, I duly got Freddie's watch, and one for myself. What is good enough for a navigator is good enough for a Wop/Ag.

Well off, financially, oh yes, there was nothing to spend money on in the desert. So that, when going on leave we only had to ask for

whatever we needed, out of accumulated pay. (my daughter Anne has that same watch today, and it is in good order too).

Returning from leave, when broke, one could book in at the transit camp for a free bedding down, and breakfast, pending a lift back to squadron. This was at the same dreaded transit camp we hated when first arriving in the Middle East as 'sprogs'. But not the 'bullshit baffles brains' we got on our first stay there. Operations staff and aircrew were now treated with some respect and privileges.

From Log Book:-
1st.September 1942. As close support for battle of Deir el Ragil, bombed enemy tanks and M.T.. Several direct hits and numerous near misses. Heavy flack. One of our aircraft shot down in flames.

4th.September 1942. With eighteen Baltimores, escorted by Kittyhawks, bombed tanks and transport in Southern sector. Several near misses, some fires and a violent explosion. Intense, accurate heavy ack ack. Pilot slightly wounded by shrapnel.

Later that day, squadron recieved congratulations from the Kiwis who were able to 'mop up' 93 tanks. (Kiwis refers to the 2nd.New Zealand Division) called 'The Div' by its serving troops.

As a precaution, Johnny was taken to a field hospital and kept in for a couple of nights. More a check on concussion than treatment for a surface wound at the side of his head. We, that is, Freddie and myself visited Johnny, just to pull his leg. He was soon back with us.

TO THE GOLD COAST AND BACK.

During a lull in the fighting, and whilst General Montgomery built up his forces before Alamein, we had a pleasant break. As a crew, just Johnny, Freddie and myself, were sent off to Accra (then Gold Coast) to collect a new Baltimore which had just been flown across the Atlantic via Ascension Islands. We three got an air-lift to Heliopolis (Cairo),

where, as passengers, we boarded a DC4 - a Pan American aircraft - the first tricycle aircraft I had ever seen. (tricycle meaning having a nose wheel, not a tail wheel). Thus it was already in flying attitude.
It was DC4 No.120143 flown by a Captain Gibson. The route took us via Wadi Seidna (Sudan) to Maiduguri (Nigeria) and then on to Accra.

We spent a couple of days in Accra. To see a bit of the country and the people, we walked round the market. It was extraordinarily colourful, the women wearing dresses or wrap-arounds of so many colours.
We were invited by American service friends to the American 'P.X.'.
The PX, no doubt the American equivalent of our N.A.A.F.I. put NAAFI in the shade for facilities and the multitude of items available. With limited dollars we could take little advantage in the choice of goods to buy. N.A.A.F.I. stands for :- "Never 'Ave Any Fags In'.
Then, next day, we took Baltimore FA295 for an air test and found it O.K. and ready for the trip North, and war service in the Desert.
Next day we left Accra bound for Ikega and acting as navigators for a number of fighter aircraft, also making the trip. That was just about our first experience of fighters weaving around us, not that they were actually weaving, they did not have the fuel for anything but straight and level flight.

FACE TO FACE WITH A LION.

On the following day we flew in the same loose formation to Kano, with a further night stop there. The next leg took us to Maiduguri, still in Nigeria. That being a short hop, we continued after refuelling and refreshments to Geneina, in the Sudan.
Here the convoy halted whilst we in the Baltimore made a square search for an aircraft (an old fashioned bi-plane) which was missing. We did not find it, and so back to Geneina. On the following day, still leading a gaggle of fighters, we flew to El Fasher. Everybody trooped off to find refreshment, I delayed a few moments to see to radio, then - GOT THE SHOCK OF MY LIFE. Was just about to enter the Sergeants Mess, when out trots a young Lion, barring my way. Having recovered, got past the Lion and into the Mess, it was to be told the story. The young Lion, it was not that small,(about my own size) had been brought up from

the cub stage by one of the staff on the station. None the less frightening to me.
Next day we did three relatively short hops (fighters had less range than us), totalling six and a half hours, via Wadi Seidna, Wadi Halfa, to Luxor in Egypt. The last leg, next day, saw us back in the desert, and with the squadron, at LG213 - and so back to normality.

Still in the lull, I decided to try and get to see my brother-in law. He was a Captain, serving with the 4th. Indian Division, somewhere up the desert. By means of walking a bit, hitching a bit and asking of just anybody, I finally got directions to 4th. Indian Div Headquarters. I got hold of Terry alright, but was disappointed that he did not make much time to be with me. No 'nosh' and not even a beer - I thought afterwards that perhaps he was embarrassed with myself only a Sergeant and he a Captain.
So much for that pointless trudge over miles of unmapped desert.

GENERAL MONTGOMERY.

In the build up to the big battle, Monty visited our squadron.
All aircrew and others who could be spared from duty, assembled and squatted on the sand. Monty, standing on a truck, used as a platform, gave us quite a pep talk and explained what would be required of us when the command to 'GO' was given.

General Montgomery, who became renowned as one of Britain's foremost Generals - famous in the annals of World War Two's history.
Montgomery - synonymous with El Alamein.
At this time, we, the Eighth Army, were almost back to back with the Suez Canal, on a line drawn South from Alamein - only just short of Alexandria. Had that line not held, all of the Middle East would have been lost.

Monty had been appointed to resurrect the Eighth Army and restore Britain's fortunes in the Western Desert.

In the first place we heard snippets about General Montgomery, and then, much more about him, until he became a household word, or should we say 'tenthold' word, in this case.
Everyone in the desert came to realise that, here is the man, Monty, to lead us back to victory and rid Africa of Nazi and Italian aggression.

Then, with the word going round, and his name becoming a legand, he POPPED UP IN PERSON to talk to all the personnel on the squadron.
That he could find time to visit 223 squadron was gratifying, but then, as his own, his very own and only, close support squadron, Monty knew what he was doing. Monty left us in no doubt that he knew what he was going to do. He explained most of it in detail, to us. All that was missing was the date of the big offensive.

In his talk to us, Monty came over as a likeable man, who knew what he was talking about. He certainly was not a tall man - but he built up his stature by his personality and clear speaking.

We, the squadron, gave Monty three hearty cheers.

In essence, Monty had given us the same message that he sent to all under his command. The words he used to us on the squadron were more applicable to our flying element. However, it is worth recording here, the actual written message which was to be read to all ground troops under his command before the commencement of the great Battle of El Alamein.

PERSONAL MESSAGE

from the

ARMY COMMANDER

To be read to all troops.

1. When I assumed command of the EIGHTH ARMY, I said that the mandate was to destroy Rommel and his Army, and that it would be done as soon as we were ready.

2 We are ready NOW.

The battle which is about to begin will be one of the decisive battles of history. It will be the turning point of the War. The eyes of the whole World will be upon us, watching anxiously which way the battle will swing.

We can give them their answer at once,

It will swing our way.

3. We have first class equipment; good tanks; good anti aircraft guns; plenty of artillery and plenty of ammunition; and we are backed up by the finest air striking force in the World. All that is necessary is that each one of us, every Officer and Man should enter this battle with the determination to see it through - to fight and to kill - and finally to win. If we do all this there can be only one result - together we will hit the enemy for 'six', right out of North Africa.

4. The sooner we win this battle, which will be the turning point of the War, the sooner we shall all get back home to our families.

5. Therefore, let every officer and man enter the battle with a stout heart and the determination to do his duty so long as he has breath in his body.

AND LET NO MAN SURRENDER

SO LONG AS HE IS UNWOUNDED AND CAN FIGHT.

Let us all pray that "The Lord Mighty In Battle" will give us victory.

B.L.Montgomery.

THE BATTLE OF EL ALAMEIN

An American squadron, U.S.Army Air Force, (recently arrived) and equipped with the more graceful, but businesslike Mitchell bomber, (one of the modern generation of bombers, with a nose wheel) had trained with us during the lull. From now, they would 'help us hit hard at the Hun'. It would be nice to have company with *whom* to share the flack ! Monty had given us the cheerful confidence to do the job.

At about 21-30hrs, on the 23rd.of October, we, at LG 213, some way behind the front line, could hear a distant, continuous rumble, which fairly shook the air around us.
I am not qualified to make an account of the ground fighting or any comment upon it. The squadron's part in the battle, though attacking the same enemy, was at a different level, physically and metaphorically. The battle had started - what we could hear was the Eighth Army's artillery commencing the big barrage.
Thereafter, we flew on 'ops' two and even three times a day, almost every day, attacking targets at the Army's request, and helped to start the chase that pushed Rommel all the way back to Cape Bon, way beyond Tripoli.
In the great battle, there was an air of excitement throughout the squadron. From this time on we had fighter escort. What an uplift and *secure feeling* we got from the presence of fighters, weaving around us, would that it had always been thus.
Throughout October and November, we gave the Eighth Army all the support it asked for. Chasing the Hun from Alamein really lifted our spirits - we could certainly sense victory, so long as we did our stuff.

An example of activity recorded in my log book:-
27th.October 1942. Shallow dive-bombed Panzer Divs in Northern sector. Several fires started and many near misses. Heavy ack ack.

2nd.November 1942. Bombed motor transport and station at Ghazal. Heavy and accurate ack ack. One of our aircraft shot down over target.
And so our maximum effort progressed with some very satisfying results.

A TRIP TO THE HOLY LAND.

Now, we got a break from 'ops', our crew being sent on seven days leave. I have in my possession to this day, the original letter written to my parents and family, and dated 12th. December 1942 - set out below :-

"It is eight days ago, today, that our crew was given leave. Short notice it was, but we can always be ready for leave. Johnny, Freddie, Willie and myself, persuaded a Fl/Sgt Rust, known as 'Rusty' to us, (a South African boxer of note) to get leave and come with us. We had already decided to go to Tel Aviv. It's worth a look round those Biblical places and will be the nearest to English of any overseas country that we are likely to see. Rusty wouldn't fly, but we had an airlift as far as Heliopolis, which saved five hours road travel, and gave us time for a bath and a feed, plus a look around Cairo, before train time. Then Freddie decided that he couln't face the long train journey, so three of us met Rusty and set off by train at 2-30pm.

The carriages have one long seat either side, no compartments, poorly sprung, windows that don't shut, no lights at all, and worst of all, wooden, slat seats - like a garden seat only worse.
After a scramble, we got seats, chatted and watched the Delta scenery crawl by - stopping at every quaint, mud hut village station.
We could see oxen doing the irrigating, by pushing a pole lever round a well. Little asses (not the kind Mum used to call us) with loads twice as big as themselves, with a dirty little native, perched right on top. Camels, with loads that completely cover and surround them, and, of course, the inevitable 'Yashmak' native women, balancing something on their heads - be it only an empty basket, or a kiddy.

By the time we got to Ismailiya, it's getting a bit tender to sit down. Soon it's dark and we dose away or chat and smoke until somewhere round about midnight, when we reach Kantara, on the border, where Naafi thoughtfully provide tea, bread and cheese. The train halts for half an hour. Then nothing but tired dozing, waking discomfort, till we see the

sun rise over Palestine - and the cold air from the desert makes sure we do not drop off to sleep again.

Change at Lydda - and we crawl out looking, or feeling, a bit dirty and tired eyed, to wait half an hour for a local train, equally crowded, to Tel Aviv.
Just after 9am. we arrived at Tel Aviv - then our troubles were over - hotel, bath, breakfast and a couple of hours in bed. Clean and refreshed we set out. The weather is nearest to English I've seen out here, in fact it had rained for two weeks before we arrived - we are lucky. Pleasant sunshine most of the time, but cool enough to wear full battledress all the time.

Oh, we had a grand time, everybody speaks English, and so we got what we miss most - a little homely companionship with other than service men.

Going on conducted tours (run by the Services Club) we saw lots of those places you read about in the Bible. Jerusalem, including the old city and all it's historic churches, each commemorating something or somewhere, out of the Bible. Mount of Olives (now no olive trees), The Garden of Gethsemane, The Dead Sea, The City Wall, and The Wailing Wall. Then Bethlehem which has much more to show. The Well of Healing Waters, the street up which Christ carried his cross, and the Birthplace of Christ. Here I point out that stable does not mean what we interpret the word. As in this case, most stables were natural caves. Inside the 'now propped-up cave' we saw the actual spot of his birth.

We had together, a high old time in between sightseeing, playing lots of snooker and billiards. All too soon the brief seven days came to an end. The journey back was much the same as before, though at one of the halts, natives in the traditional long white robes, came up and down the track, shouting 'harda egg a fryda bread' - we bought some, and it was good. We travelled all the way to Alexandria, by train, then hitched our way back to the squadron.

I had had with me £12 for seven days leave, hotel, living and sightseeing expenses. Whilst always eating of the best and having a good time, managed to bring back £2. Not bad for expensive Palestine. Another pay-day when we get back to camp, so, plenty in hand, nowhere and nothing to spend it on." This latter included for comparison of expenses then, and now".

Though staying in Tel Aviv we had had every intention of visiting Jerusalem and other Holy places. We, that is Johnny, Rusty and I, joined a bus load on the road journey to Jerusalem - a long climbing journey, up the hills behind Tel Aviv. Then when we reached the summit, only to descend, via what is known as the 'seven sisters', a series of steep descending hair-pin bends, with solid rock on one side and a precipice on the other.

We arrived safely in Jerusalem, centre of the Holy Land, and the land of three religions - Christians, Jews and Muslims, - no wonder lasting harmony has never been achieved there. When in Jerusalem one cannot fail to remember the Crusaders of the 14th.Century, when European Christians fought to recover the Holy Land, and particularly Jerusalem, from Islam.

Wherever you go in Jerusalem there is some fine old church, building or Mosque. I was very conscious of seeing the place we as youngsters had read about and sung about - and again was quite overawed.

To see the church built upon the site of Jesus's birth place and to descend to the - call it a cave - which is supposed to be the actual spot of Christ's birth, was the summit of our walking all around Jerusalem, Wailing Wall and all.

From a point of vantage in Jerusalem it is possible to look across a little valley and see Bethlehem. Little houses there, appear most enchanting, lightly covering the hillside with a pleasant glow of colour - such a beautiful soft yellow stone are the cottages built from.

It was an unforgetable visit, one which my parish Vicar, back home, would have given his eye teeth to see, and he said so, afterwards.

PILOT'S D.F.M.

Came the day when we were 'tour expired' ie. having done the required 50 flying operations. Actually I had done 52. Then, with little said, and practically no 'goodbyes', we were posted, as instructors, for a period of 'rest'.
Just before leaving the squadron, the award of a Distinguished Flying Medal, came through, for Johnny Price, our pilot.
A local Yorkshire paper reads:-

"Was in damaged aircraft"
For bringing his aircraft safely back to base, though wounded in the head, a Keighley pilot, John Vaughan Price, of 223 squadron has been awarded the D.F.M. In September 1942 Sergeant Price participated in an attack on enemy troops and transport in the Middle East. His aircraft was subjected to heavy and accurate A.A. fire and sustained severe damage. Sergeant Price, though wounded by a shell splinter, dazed, and suffering from concussion, proceeded on his mission and flew the aircraft safely back to base. A member of the crew was Wireless Operator/Gunner B.Whitley of Bramley."

My last raid, before leaving the squadron, had been to attack, at low level, retreating enemy tanks and transport, on the Coast Road, West of Fuka. There was intense light and heavy flack. Two aircraft, from our small number of eighteen, were shot down over the target. Another eight of our friends 'gone for a burton'.
I have to say that I was both surprised and relieved to hear that our crew was to be retired from 'Ops', tour expired. Nobody had ever put a figure on what our squadron service was to be. Until the very moment of the announcement, I had never looked beyond the next raid, and had thought that, just as 'there is no promotion this side of the ocean', we would just carry on until something happened. In the event, Johnny, Freddie, Willie and myself were the first crew to be posted from the squadron, to a period of rest. It so happened that we had taken part in more operations than any other of the crews, so far.

Throughout the year of 'Ops' I was scared stiff, but kept a stiff upper lip, and pressed on, as we have to. Probably the only thing to keep some of the squadron's crew members going was the R.A.F.'s horrible system that should anybody cry-off Ops then he would be branded "lack of moral fibre" and stripped of rank, with much more and worse to follow at subsequent stations after being immediately posted, in disgrace. Peculiarly, when commissioned, a year later, my fears either disappeared or were kept more in the background, and, as an officer should, I cheerfully set an example to anybody, several times volunteering to fly on Ops when not necessarily required to do so.

Looking back on life in the desert, let's say it was pretty rough, and crude. We had 'desert lilies' sprouting at every landing ground, wherein to urinate. For other purposes, one oblong ditch with a plank across its length - seating for four or five bods at any one time - with queues at times of gippy tummy. Food has already received my comments. Comfort and facilities like baths or showers - there was none.

Place names, such as:-
Agedabia, Benghazi, Sidi Barani, Derna, Tobruk, Mersa Matruh, and more important, El Alamein, will conjure up memories for all those who fought in the Western Desert.

I remember well, the stomach twitch at briefing before going on a raid, with a vivid memory of the German Jeep going 'hell for leather' in the direction of our bombing approach, until the line of bombs finally caught it up and one bomb dropped fair and square, right on top of the jeep.

In all the foregoing, little mention has been made of the ever present scourge of flies - the bane of our lives in the desert.

Flies and scorpions were the only things that lived in the barren, dusty desert, together with the mad fools who fought over it.

A "REST", or FLYING INSTRUCTORS.

We flew South, yet again. This time we took off from the Nile. Yes, we were waterborne.
Where Willie had been posted for his period of rest was not yet known. Johnny, Freddie and I boarded a Caledonia flying boat of Imperial Airways - when on board I could only gasp at the size and room compared to our cramped strike aircraft. We flew the first leg to Wadi Halfa (been here before though on dry land) and then, after topping up with fuel, on to Gordon's Tree, Khartoum, capital of the Sudan, landing on the Nile there.

We had a night-stop at Khartoum, where the three of us borrowed bicycles to have a sightseeing roam around. We had a good look round as we leisurely pedalled along, getting as far as Omdurman. Omdurman is the native village of Khartoum - a conglomerate of mud walled dwellings - more like mud huts which were built very close together. We saw only the one entrance to the village, which I suspected was more the size of a city, an earthen road. The place looked so closed-in and crowded, we got an impression of unfriendliness, and did not venture further, returning to the more civilised and European looking area round about our hotel.
Next day saw us taking three short hops, first to Malakal, which is still in the Sudan and the most Southerly town therein.
In the air, very soon after leaving Gordons Tree is the most tremendously thrilling sight. Looking down, through the port side portholes we had a bird's eye view of the junction of the White Nile and the Blue Nile - that spectacle is only a few miles South of Khartoum. It seems that we only stopped at Malakal to offload mail and perhaps take on fuel, in either case we did not disembark. Next stop was at Port Bell, a small village and staging post, on the shores of Lake Victoria, and then to Kisumu which is also on the Lake.

Here we did disembark, saying goodbye to the comfortable, spacious flying boat that had brought us thus far South, in comfort that should hardly be allowed in Wartime. Obviously, Imperial Airways were still purveying luxury travel, as far round the World as they could reasonably go, still 'Showing the Flag'.

Midst thoughts of where are we going, what will it be like ? we were transported overland, this time, to Nakuru, which was to be our base and home, for the next six months. Nakuru is a pretty little town, clean and tidy looking, about eighty or ninety miles North North West of Kenya's capital, Nairobi. At four thousand feet above sea level, in lovely unspoilt, luscious, green countryside, Nakuru is only a short distance from a lake of the same name. Nakuru R.A.F. Station takes the name of the Town, but is actually some miles from it.

For the first time since leaving England - and this February 1943, we were shown to quarters in single story barracks, not tents. It is shameful to call the spacious airy building, 'barracks' it was better and deserved a better name. Though all three of us were still Sergeants, we were allocated a small private room each. We found such conforts as a real bed, with the crowning glory of clean sheets, and a bathroom with plumbing. Plumbing ! say no more. We had baths, Baths ! , a change of khaki and were then taken to the equally, to us, luxurious Sergeants Mess for a meal.

We reported to the orderly room, next morning, to be granted fourteen days leave, right away, a very nice guesture and the first time we had ever been greeted with leave, when arriving on a station and before commencing our duties as instructors. Since we were strangers to the country and area, we sought advice as to where we should go, on leave. Good advice was given and arrangements made for us to travel to Mombasa, on the Indian Ocean coast, still in Kenya, if nearer to the border with Tanzania, to the South.

Next day, dressed in our 'Sunday Best', for by this time we were really smartly attired in Bush Jacket and equally smart new Khaki Shorts, we were transported to the railway station, in nearby Nakuru Town, where we found that bookings had been made for our rail travel, with a reserved sleeping compartment, to boot. The compartment took the whole width of the carriage, and, being the rear compartment of the carriage, had a door in one corner which opened onto the corridor. The compartment was more than roomy for the three of us, nicely furnished with comfortable seats. Four bunks could be folded down from the cabin walls to make comfortable sleeping accomodation. All this necessary, for the journey would take three full days.

A glance at a map of Kenya will establish that we faced a long journey, and so it was, but with the compensation of passing through beautiful countryside with breathtaking views. A big proportion of the journey was through mountainous country and many was the time that the long train (pulled by two steam engines) was almost nose to tail, in skirting steep curves as it circled many a hill or mini mountain. We were comfortable and happy, to sit back, listening to the music of the carriage wheels, and watch the scenery going by. We could have played card games, or otherwise amused ourselves, but there was no need - we would not have missed seeing one minute, or one mile, of this first visit to a strange land.

Mealtimes came, making a nice break. We enjoyed the wholesome fresh, country, appetising meals served by 'Boys' of the Kikuyu tribe, who were the waiters. Nice efficient young men, polite and cheerful we found them to be - liking nothing better than a little conversation, when they got the chance. This wartime service by the Kikuyu young men was their opportunity to learn a little of the English Language. Come evening, the 'Boy' would return and capably make up the beds, asking if there was anything further we required before retiring.

This must be as near to travelling on the Orient Express as could be, with better scenery laid on, all the way.

The train stopped here, there, and everywhere, as though not wishing to pass even the smallest outpost of civilization. The civilization we saw was that created by the native population. Near to, and perhaps surrounding, the little towns we came to, were signs of cultivation, with the local population doing some work in the agricultural line. The country, thick in vegetation between the towns seemed to be left to itself, what a waste.

Amongst the places we passed through, nay, stopped at, were Gilgil, Naivasha and Nairobi, before we started to come to a little less mountainous country. Then we passed through many small stations and halts, to call many of them stations would be to exaggerate, and stopping at almost every one. After all, this train was the only connection with the outside World to many of these places and their inhabitants.

Places with strange sounding names, popped up here and there. I do not remember all of them. But Konzo, Simba and Kibako were small places, yet seemed to be teeming with natives, both in the villages, and sometimes on the land, between stops. The train carried on through the night, and by reason of sleeping soundly, again to the music of the motion and the rythmic sound of the wheels, we did not see every place we passed through. There was Mauriga, Mariakoni and Raboi, before, at long last, we steamed into Mombasa.

At all the little stations and halts, we could take in a little of native life and still admire the country they lived in - even if things and life went on at a slow, slow pace- except when there was a train about, I suspect. We did not see any sign of industry throughout the journey, but then, it must, by very nature, be an agricultural heaven, though the inhabitants did not seem to be making the best of it, with all that land, doing nothing.

Nevertheless, Kenya looked, in those days, a beautiful place to live in.

It had been a thoroughly enjoyable and interesting journey, viewed from comfort we had not sampled for some long time.

In Mombasa, the hotel was good, the food was even better. We walked miles, seeing what we could, meeting people and chatting all the while. This was our first chance to see Kenyans about their daily life. The overall impression was one of colour, a standard set by the native women, who, in the main part seemed very cheerful, to the point of laughing most of the time.
Of course, there were many Westerners about, and servicemen, either on duty or, like ouselves, on leave.

Freddie soon disappeared when on these walkabouts. He always took every opportunity to satisfy his capacity for beer, and very often, in all the time we had known him, frequently exceeded that enormous capacity.

We were having a good time, relaxing and building up our reserves after that long stretch on Ops. We even sunbathed, what ? you may say, after the time in the hot desert ?. One is unavoidable, the other, a chosen pleasure. The food was always appetising and I got the reputation of being a Gannet, just because I liked my food and tucked good helpings away. In our walks we saw many interesting places, things and happenings. We made the most of an enjoyable visit, that we might not ever get the chance to repeat. The Indian Ocean, though not tempting us to bathe on account of its fearsome rollers, was a welcome breath of sea air and majesty to us.
Like all furloughs, and other such good things, leave soon came to an end. For we had three days travel yet to come. So, off to the railway station to take up our similar luxurious travelling compartment again.

There is no doubt that, of a splendid leave, the travel, by train, had been the best part of it. An experience not to be missed. So, back to Nakuru via another, never to be forgotten, rail journey, and then back to camp, and work, next day.

We flew, not necessarily together, almost every day, just mornings or afternoons, according to the schedule. More often than not, it would be in Anson aircraft - the old work-horse. Never knew an Anson to 'prang', so that life was without the usual tension.

The Anson would be equipped with three units of radio - therefore I had three pupils to look after. The pupils would have to practice tuning their receiver and transmitter, then by morse code make contact with, and pass and receive messages to and from base and other stations. At the same time, the Anson, flown by an instructor, would carry two or three trainee navigators who would get good practice on cross country flights.

The man flying the aircraft could be Johnny, or one of many others, on similar 'rest' duty to our own. When having Johnny 'drive' us, we would take great amusement in chasing game of every kind along the Rift Valley. You could say we were on Safari, seeing animals in their natural habitat - and being employed for the privilege.

At Nakuru we had batmen - 'boys', young Kikuyu tribesmen (again) almost jet black and just like the ones we had met on the train to and from Mombasa, to look after us, and clean our quarters. Their duties included looking after most of our needs, thus we had 'built in' laundry service which allowed us to be fresh and smartly turned out, all the time.

These Kikuyu lads were just as happy and helpful as any we had met. This time, photographs would get them in a 'tissy'. They liked nothing better than to join in any group ,and would,so cheerfully pose to have a photograph taken. They would be so

pleased, almost purring, and stand tall and straight to show a best impression of themselves.

Whilst at Nakuru there was little opportunity, rather, no need to leave camp, for we never saw such a thing as a Pub when making the odd trip into neigbouring Nakuru town. The camp was self contained. We had a nice ,clean, well lit Sergeants Mess with entirely separate dining area, with lots of space given to a comfortable lounge. In the evenings it was to do little but relax in comfort.
Here I made my first venture into playing bridge. Back on the squadron I had passed many an hour watching Freddie and his pals play, until reckoning I knew enough to try my own hand at the game. Thereafter I enjoyed many an evening, whenever we could get a four together, playing bridge and becoming more expert at the intricate business of bidding. I enjoyed it then, and ever since, through life.

Still, our 'RAISON d'ETRE' was to instruct, which in this case meant flying. So long as my pupils were managing alright - and they would call if stuck - I had little to do but enjoy the scenery and see the places used as turning points on our cross country travels. Glad I was not the instructing navigator, who usually sat beside the pilot. It was his job to wind up (or down) the undercarriage, by hand, quite an exhausting job.

Our three hour cross country trips (all who have flown on package holidays etc. will know that it takes a lot longer to do a three hour flight) took us round little places with picturesque names, such as Maralal, Lake Rudolf (no red nosed reindeer) and Rumuruti, then back to Nakuru. Other routes took us via Eldoret and round Mount Kilimanjaro which stands 5896ft. above sea level. On the first trip, it was quite interesting to look down into the extinct volcano, but the number of times we used Kilimanjaro as a turning point, dampened the interest.

Things continued along much the same pattern, until mid-May 1943, when as a whole unit, 70 O.T.U. moved to the Middle East. Where to ? Of all places, it was to be Shandur, by the Suez Canal, where we three had started life on 223 squadron, so long ago. Before leaving Nakuru, Johnny, Freddie and I were detailed to make what turned out to be a fruitless search (taking four hours) for a Turkish crew, who had gone missing in a Baltimore, on our old route, Gold Coast to Western Desert. They must have been well away from the intended track, for we made a long search on the route to Juba, Malakal and Wadi Seidna, where our crew was again collared for special duty. This time it was to look for a Valencia aircraft which had force landed. We found the crew, pointed them in the direction of El Obeid (for they were only a few short miles from that little base) - Radiod El Obeid to pick them up, and ourselves landed back at Wadi Seidna. We had therefore, had two night stops at Wadi Seidna and next morning flew toEl Obeid to pick up the Valencia crew. By the time we had got them loaded aboard and taken them to Wadi Seidna we had to make another night stop.

By this time we were on our own. The rest of our 70 O.T.U. outfit were already at Shandur. For some necessary mechanical attention to the Anson we were now stuck at Wadi Seidna, and got a couple of days off. It was hot, very hot - in the 100s of degrees. We did little more than lay about, drinking plenty of liquid - and taking salt pills. We showered often, for comfort and to cool us down, then just lay on our beds, covered by mosquito nets. Once again, I was called Gannet, because, despite the heat, I could still tuck away a good meal - despite what they all said, I needed my food, for I was very slight of build and light of weight.

Early in June we carried on our travels, flying via Wadi Halfa and Luxor, to rejoin the unit at Shandur. There we resumed flying training in much the same pattern we had followed in Kenya.

A couple of days leave saw Johnny and myself hitching to sample life in Cairo again - the place was becoming quite familiar to us. But we never got used to, nor liked, 'the tormenting, dirty little Arabs, the shoe-shine boys, who would slash liquid black polish across our feet if we didn't agree to have a shoe-shine, for a few Piastres. The idea being that we then had to have a shoe-shine, just to clean the mess up.

Then back to Baltimores and Blenheims - the Ansons had vanished. During this time, at his command, I had one or two interviews with the Group Captain, Station Commander, being recommended for a commission.

More happy evenings playing bridge - with a bottle of Stella beer within reach. By this time Shandur had improved in accomodation an facilities. The Sergeants Mess was now O.K. and we were in billets, not tents. Life went on as normal in a training establishment - that means just a little more 'bull' than we got on the squadron. Even so, most of it by-passed we instructors, who still retained certain priviledges.

Mail arrived from home, first for some time, and I was happy to hear from Hilda again. Things sort of warmed up in the brief contact we could pursue by aerograph.

There was Sport at Shandur now. Cricket - my favourite, football and Hockey, all very informal and on unmarked 'Bundoo' surfaces. One had to admire Freddie (having made allowances for his drinking). He would, many times, be drunk to the point of incapability, yet turn out and play his favourite game, Hockey - and sweat out all the beer to emerge after a game, as fit and sober as any of us.

Working life, on this so-called rest, became a little boring, solely by the repetition of duty which was, more often than not, two to three hours flying per day, with little more to do than

keep an eye on pupils who, barring an odd snag here and there, seemed to be progressing well enough to be left alone.

Three hours flying does not sound like hard work, but with pre-flight briefing, the exercise itself, plus checking its results, seemed to consume most of the day.

A conversation in the Mess, one evening, reminded me of my Father, 'Pa', as all the children called him. He was accompanied by my Grandfather, when they were looking for a house in which my Father could set up home, (He was about to marry my Mother).
"That's the house" says Grandad, "Look at all those rooms, and those attics". "Fill 'em up lad, fill'em up". And he did ! - I have five sisters and two brothers. Think my Father worked nights.

I got another 48hr. pass and went, on my own, to Alexandria. Alexandria was much preferred to Cairo - it was a much cleaner place, few, if any, disreputable beggars, no shoe-shine pesterers and there was much more class about the place and particularly, its inhabitants. Lots of high class Egyptions live there, French too, and certainly, the rich went on holiday there. Don't remember much of that leave, except that I was able to go to the Fleet Club, with almost a welcome. Certainly none of the hostility that there had been by the Navy types, at the time of the Greece and Crete disasters. A thing we had often done, when on leave, was to have a hair-cut and then, sit in the chair to have hot towels wrapped round faces, to soak out all the sand dust - then end up with a facial masage. Going to the usual hairdresser, that's what I did now. A bit of enjoyable luxury.

Never, never should I have included that harmless little grumble about instructional flying. It had tempted fate. Only a few days after returning from Alexandria, I recieved A POSTING.
It was a terrific shock. I was to join 178 Squadron. That meant on 'OPS' again. The sad part of it was, I was to go alone !.

It was an individual posting.

Never in this World had I contemplated flying on Ops without the trust and companionship, built up over a long period, with Johnny and Freddie. Cannot express my real feelings, but was shattered and lifeless, delayed shock, I guess.

SAD MOMENTS.

This must have been the first time since leaving U.K. shores in December 1941, that I thought of home in any sort of homesick way. I was not alone in being a little struck dumb. Johnny and Freddie could say no more than I. The thoughts of all three of us were milling round in the brain, and we were more than stunned that such a thing should have happened.

The arrival of my posting split up a team of buddies - and there is no better way of becoming so closely knit together, than to have survived a tour of fifty operations together, and having spent a couple of years in each others company. Indeed it was more than just that. We had also lived in one tent or another, bereft of any comfort or benefits of civilisation, just we three.

Not unnaturally, perhaps, I suffered the greater shock since mine was the first posting. But the event brought home to Johnny and Freddie that the semi-safe days of instructing were drawing to a close. They could well expect some similar news any day now.

The spell with 70 Operational Training Unit, even though putting in a fair amount of flying, almost daily, had been the first time that we could put roots down and to some degree, consider ourselves at home.

A community of friends was to disappear and I would feel in much the same way, as when a long time ago, I left home, bound for Padgate and the first taste of life in the R.A.F.

Do these paragraphs explain why, when without any delay I packed my bags, put on a cheerful 'cheerio' to friends and acquaintances, gave a sad and wordless handshake to Johnny and Freddie, and made my exit from a life of trusty company.

178 SQUADRON, ON 'OPS' AGAIN.

I got a lift in a Halifax aircraft, from Cairo West - the very same military airport where I had first landed in the Middle East - to Tocra, Benghazi, on the 18th. November 1943.

Tocra was the airbase from which the renowned 'Ploesti' raid of more than a year ago, departed. The Ploesti attack was flown by Americans in B24 (Liberators). Given much publicity, it was both heroic and disastrous, suffering terrible losses and achieving little. To some degree it was recklessly planned. Even had everything gone right, which it didn't, the aircraft would have been at the extreme limit of their range, which is asking for trouble.

The story of this American raid on Romania's Oil Fields is well written in the book "Ploesti", by James Duggan & Carrol Stewart, published by Random House, N.Y.

By coincidence, my new squadron were also equipped with 'Liberators' (Yankee B24). My thoughts were 'let there be no similar fate'.

178 Squadron was a cosmopolitan gathering of crew nationalities. The personnel were a really mixed lot, made up of Australians, New Zealanders, South Africans and English. South Africans were in the majority. By the time I had been there awhile I could 'Ya Man' with the best of them. To tell the truth I found the South Africans hard to get on with - they were not very friendly and kept themselves to themselves.

Of course, being a Wireless Operator/Air Gunner I needed no practice before Ops, such as circs and bumps, as a pilot would have to. My first taste of flying in a Liberator was to be detailed on a trip with three of the squadron's aircraft, to lay mines in Salonica harbour. This, my very first in 'heavies' turned out to be a round trip of nine hours, across the Mediterranean Sea. Compared to my previous Ops of a maximum of two and a half hours, in daylight, ploughing away in darkness, all that nine hours, seemed like ages and ages to me. I was glad to get back to base.

At debriefing, tired out and hardly able to keep my eyes open, I was approached by the squadron Padre, with what appeared to be a cup of tea (well, it was an enamel mug). In the exhausted, parched state, I could have murdered a cup of tea, and drunk it straight down. It was NOT tea, it was RUM. It nearly choked me to death, and I could have murdered the Padre ! instead.

Mine laying, as it has to be, was a 'low level' job and as diversion, Halifax aircraft from another squadron made a simultaneous attack on the nearby railway.
This was supposed to keep some heads down. However, the diversion did not stop the crump, crump, that became nasty black puffs of wicked, red centered cloud, all round us - nor the 20mm. and 40mm. curving lines of the light ack ack converging upon us. It had crossed my mind that when there is so much 'tracer' to see, then, as the proportion of tracer shells to others, would be about one in six, then there was an awful lot of metal coming our way.

The squadron moved base to El Adem.
El Adem was a much better base with a much larger landing area and better facilities. Facilities means equipment, not beds, sheets, easy chairs and bacon and eggs. Conditions for the crews was every bit as rough as it had been in the Desert Campaign, some time past.

Life on the squadron was somewhat impersonal, but then, in the given living conditions, there had not been, so far, any opportunity to get to know many of the crews. We did not have a Sergeants Mess, merely a marquee which served as dining area. This gave no chance of sitting around, chatting together.

Consequently, for my next 'Op' I found myself crewed up with South Africans whom I had never seen before. Add to that, there was no slot for me in my trade as Wireless Operator. Therefore, I flew with total strangers as waist or beam gunner.

Looking on the bright side, there was plenty of room to move about in the beam gun position, and better still, I would be manning twin, belt fed, point five machine guns.
Off we went to Crete and bombed shipping in Suda Bay, another round trip of seven hours - I was getting used to it.

The thing that nattered me most was - no regular crew - perhaps that is how life goes on in a heavy bomber squadron. Either that or gunners are just bods to fill the aircraft.

The next Op was again with a different South African crew. This time we were to be the diversion. The aircraft was loaded with hundreds of small anti-personnel bombs. So it was our turn to keep 'heads down', whilst somebody else did the mine laying in St.Georges channel, Greece. We had bombed, on target, then were caught by searchlights, ending up being 'Coned'. That is to say, several searchlights were fixed upon us. It was blinding and frightening. There we were, lit up, for all to see. Any prowling fighter would easily finish us off. Luck, perhaps, no fighter appeared in the five minutes that it took the pilot, by weaving, climbing, diving and twisting to get out of those revealing lights, which told the anti-aircraft guns and everything else, just where we were. Our Captain had done well to get out of it, he changed course, lost height and set off back to base, now four hours away.

Two days later one of our aircraft was required to go to Cairo to collect a new pilot for the squadron. I was asked, rather detailed, to go as wireless operator. Hooray, I had done no operating for ages, and enjoyed the opportunity to keep my hand in. We landed at Heliopolis, with time to leave the airfield. We all walked round for a while, then sat outside a pavement cafe, to watch the World go by, over a cup of coffee.

Later in the day, we took off and set course for Celloni - a satellite landing ground of Foggia (Italy), because, meanwhile the squadron was moving there. The weather was very bad and we had to divert and land at Luqa, Malta. We were stuck in Malta for three days, which made a nice change and rest, for the Island was no longer under siege. On the contrary, the Island was now well provisioned, armed and on the offensive. We had a few civilised meals during our wanderings around Valetta.
Then the weather cleared and we had an uneventful flight back to Celloni (pronounced Chellonee).

After a couple of days we were on our way back to El Adem, from where, still as beam gunner, I took part in another Op. This time to bomb Genoa, on the West Coast of Northern Italy. All the way, there and back we flew just off the coast and passing between the Island of Elba and the mainland. We were spitted at by the enemy ack ack all the way up and down, though none of it was too serious.

By this time I was settling down and getting to know a few people on the squadron, during the base move to Cellone. We seemed to have been flitting about somewhat, but this was to be our new base, much nearer for us to attack Hiler's occupied Europe.

'Dusty' Rhodes (anybody named Miller or Rhodes was automatically nicknamed 'Dusty' in the R.A.F.) was a chap I came across. and was I glad to see him, for I had known him previously on some other station. He was a Sergeant Wop/Ag like myself. For the

sake of friendly company - that, to me, was vital, I was able to get myself allotted to the same crew as 'Dusty', even though this meant remaining as beam gunner.

This was now the middle of Winter in Northern Italy, and Italian Winters can be severe. The weather was bad, but worst was the incessant rain, making mud and puddles everywhere. We lived in tents. I remember some of us sitting down to a meal in the mess which was just a larger tent, at trestle tables and sat on long 'school' forms. Water was over our ankles and there was mud, mud, everywhere. Thank goodness our living tents were on higher ground, though still decidedly damp.

By reason of the weather, the mix of nationalities and being busy on Ops, there was little or no social life. I never left the confines of the squadron camp, and to my knowledge neither did anyone else, guess there was nowhere to go anyway. In fact the only times I did leave the camp was for long distance flights, noted subsequently.

COMMISSIONING.

Surprise, surprise. I was called to the Adjutant's tent and told that my commission had come through, and that I was to proceed to Cairo to get kitted out etc. It was amazing how easy it was to get airlifts here and there, just like catching a bus. With no trouble at all and without having to wait any time, I got a lift in a Dakota of transport command, and was flown via Bari and Marble Arch to Cairo West, on two week's leave. Two weeks was the norm for kitting out, when newly commissioned.

The first thing I did in Cairo was to visit a tailors and get myself fitted out with a new set of Khaki shorts and Bush Jacket, complete with Pilot Officer's epaulets - for it was still pleasantly warm in Cairo and I had only full battledress kit with

me. Then, with the 'rank' was able to book in at the Officer's Club. This was, in effect, an hotel and a good one at that. It was run by a Housekeeper and Chef with plenty of staff. I was shown to a most comfortable room, then to the dining room, where breakfast was set for me. It seemed that meals were available any old time - for which I was grateful. Tariff was ever so reasonable - subsidised, no doubt. It really was a splendid place and the staff were very helpful, being ready to suggest the right places to go for 'kit'. They will have seen lots of young, budding Officers before.

Other guests in the place were on the same chase as myself - getting kitted out.

Right away, I was lucky to meet there, an old friend, a navigator, ex 223 squadron like myself, he too on commissioning leave. We ganged up, going round Cairo together. Between pavement coffees we called in tailors and outfitters together. Then ambled back to the Club, for a beer in the well appointed bar, before lunch - followed by the traditional siesta. Then we met up again for further trips round the shops.

It seemed to me that tailors in Cairo could put their U.K. counterparts to shame. They certainly had all the necessary materials, badges buttons and what have you, right on the spot. And the time taken to make up any garment, was unbelievably quick.

We took the opportunity to enjoy ourselves in between doing an ordinary bit of shopping. Here and there, to watch the girls go by, we sat in pavement cafes, over a Stella beer and relaxed after much chasing about. On another day we would pick Groppi's, for a cake and coffee. Then having got pretty well everything except 'Best Blues', we found the right tailor and were measured up.

In three or four days our Best Blues were ready. We collected them, then hurried back to the Club to change. So, smartly

dressed, and for the very devil of it, we almost paraded through the streets of Cairo to the Shepheards Hotel - packed with 'scrambled egg' as usual, sat and had a Stella beer, so that hereafter we would be able to say we had been there.

Next day, after a leisurely breakfast, we remembered that it was customary to send photographs home. Neither of us fancied having photographs taken, in fact we did not like the idea at all.
So, to give ourselves 'dutch courage', we walked around, found a nice pavement bar where we could sit and chat, all the time supping Stella beer, until we felt like posing.

Then we found an approved photographer, sat on forms and leered at the camera. The photographs came out well. All we had to do now was return to the Officer's Club , write a short letter to post with the photographs, home to the U.K.

All good things come to an early end. It was time to get back to Foggia. Via another bus-like air trip, I was soon there and moved from the Sergeants Mess to the Officer's Mess. Saw no difference. Conditions in either were much the same.
It was 'back to work' right away. Still as beam gunner I did another couple of Ops.

Then, no doubt because I had been doing the job temporarily, came the news that I was to travel again, to Cairo. I was being sent to No.1 Middle East Central Gunnery School, on a Gunnery Leader's Course.

GUNNERY LEADER'S COURSE.

More passenger travel was soon arranged and I was flown via the usual route to the Middle East. This time I ended up at Ballah which was in the Delta area to the South of Cairo.

This was the home of No.1 Central Gunnery School.
Almost the first people I saw were three pilots who had been with 223 squadron at the same time as myself. Wonder of Wonders, Johnny Price, the old faithful Johnny, with whom I had flown that first tour of Ops, was there. We had quite a reunion chat. Shortly after my departure from 70 O.T.U. at Shandur, Johnny had recieved his posting. He was not going on Ops again, but as a staff pilot to this unit, lucky fellow.

Who says 'There is no promotion this side of the ocean' - all three of my friends were now Flight Sergeants, - it had taken time, and probably now only to give them a little seniority over the various bods sent there to do the course.

It so happened that I could see little of Johnny, he being in the Sergeants Mess, with myself in the Officers Mess. That was not the only obstacle - the course was so technical that I spent all my spare time, and evenings, swotting, and saw little or nothing of life outside the lectures, practical exercises and air firing. Days were split between lectures and different air firing exercises. Sometimes I was flown by Johnny, and peculiar enough, on the very same Baltimore, AG909 that we had flown in, on Ops, so long ago. AG909 had obviously been retired to stud. In fact, I learned that after the African campaign, Baltimores were superseded by Bostons, now available in growing numbers.

A few days later, Gerry Relton (another ex 223 man) was doing the flying, taking me for more air firing. In the upper gun turret, I was firing at a drogue, towed by another aircraft, when suddenly I could see something repeatedly spraying across my vision. I stopped firing and then could see that bits were missing from the tailplane. Calling Gerry on the intercom "Don't look now Gerry, I've just shot pieces off your starboard tailplane". He replied "Don't be silly Bert, I'm a Yorkshireman too". Quite what counties of birth had to do with it, your guess is as good as mine. However, I convinced Gerry that all was not as it should be, so we cut the exercise short (which probably cost me 'hits' on the target) and landed back at base.

Whilst things were being sorted out at dispersal, Gerry and I were chatting. He gave me news of Freddie Hazel, our old navigator. He had been repatriated to New Zealand, having been required to do just the one tour of Operations. So, he would be back home now.

There were more than curious glances at the aircraft and in my direction from the ground staff and others in the vacinity, as soon as it was realised that there had been a mishap to bring us in so early. Had the damage done been my fault, there is no doubt that I would have been for the high jump. After investigation, it turned out that the interrupter mechanism had sheared off and the guns had been able to fire when they should not. I heard no more about it.

Many different air-firing exercises were arranged, the most interesting being the day when two Spitfires made dummy attacks and the camera gun operated by me would record my success at 'shooting them down' ! There was still much more in the way of theory, midst the lectures.

All the air firing had been assessed as it took place. Now came the crunch. The final examination, which was all theory.

I knew my stuff because I had both swotted hard and at the same time enjoyed it, by having something of a 'knack' for the subject. I passed with flying colours, in fact gaining the highest marks ever attained in the establishment.

Once again, it proved easier to hitch a thousand miles by air than ever it had been to hitch a mere hundred in the U.K. and I was soon back with the squadron in Cellone.
I returned in the official capacity of squadron gunnery leader. All this seemed to entail was to draw up the nightly gunners flying Ops roster, where I did not shirk to include my own name. There was some necessary talking to gunners, expounding the theory I had learned, and stress on keeping the guns and ammunition feeds in good order. The guns were maintained and ammunitioned by ground staff armourers, but the gunners were still responsible for checking them.

One of my latter Ops was to lay mines in the river Danube. Imagine a thundering great Liberator, with a wing span of 110ft., floating down the Danube at fifty feet, in bright moonlight. It must have been quite a sight to see from the ground. The moon was so bright that we in the aircraft could see everything as in daylight, and almost as if we had been running along the river banks. The river was very wide along the stretch that we attacked. We could see the occasional barge and even larger craft, moored at the sides. In spite of the conditions, we got away light, with only some spasmodic bursts of 20mm. and 40mm. shells disturbing the end of our run. Mines away ! We turned, climbing to a safe height as course was set for Italy. Guess that was one of the easiest Ops we had had, in terms of enemy reaction to our presence.

It was well into April 1944, now. Though things went on much as usual, by this time of the year, the weather (which had been an eternal thorn in our sides) had improved. Things were drying up

and it was somewhat warmer. When the weather improves, everyone is that much brighter, especially when tents and contents are dry. Ops came round, were executed and forgotten.

SHOT DOWN.

Due, no doubt to a shortage of gunners, I put my own name on the duty Ops roster, three nights on the trot.

It proved to be my undoing.
The first of the three was flown with another strange crew and turned out to be an uneventful trip. Then I was able to resume flying with Sgt. Molineaux and my friend Sgt. 'Dusty' Rhodes. The first mission of the two flown with this crew, was nothing much to write home about.

Target for the third night was the marshalling yards at Bucharest (Romania) and all the squadron's serviceable aircraft were to go. Molineaux was the pilot, 'Dusty' the wireless operator, a navigator/bomb aimer, flight engineer, a mid upper gunner, a tail gunner and myself looking after both Port and Starboard beam gun positions.

We took off from Cellone at 2020hours, climbing over the Adriatic Sea, setting course, in one straight line, for Bucharest.

This track took us, climbing at a safe height to cross the DINARIC ALPS, which are Yugoslavia's backbone, then levelling out and on towards the 'target for today'.

All went well until we arrived just short of the target. On the first bombing run, the bombs hung-up and we had to go round again. On the second, tense, run up to target, with Bomb-aimer calling for 'Bomb doors open' followed by the usual 'left a bit' and so on. 'No good' he says 'bombs haven't dropped'. Off we went round again to make another run-in from the same direction which gave

the bomb aimer points to lay-off by. Captain asked me to check the bomb release gear, in the bomb bay. This entailed walking up and down a narrow cat-walk in the middle of the bomb bay. With bomb bay doors open there was next to nothing between me and the lights, fires, searchlights and ack ack of an angry Bucharest. Savage amusement ! and not one to be recommended for enjoyment. In the dark, somewhat like a blind man, my fingers ran over the release mechanisms and found nothing untoward. 'All O.K. in the bomb bay, as far as I can see', I called. On this our third run - up to target, flying more or less straight and level, we had all the ack ack to ourselves, and ONLY TWO BOMBS were dropped. Round again ! This time it was getting really hot. Then, 'bombs away' yelled the bomb aimer. Bomb doors were closedand we made to 'get out of it', banking onto a course for base.

There were sighs of relief all round. Next thing it was discovered that we still had one bomb on board and it was decided to try and get rid of it (because it had been fused).

Away went the reluctant last bomb. It was a bad thing really. the bomb hit the ground, exploded, and would form a marker on our track, useful to any fighter looking for us.

When we had got our breath back, 'Dusty' called me on intercom, "How did you like that, Bert". "I didn't go much on it" I replied. No more was said. Nobody needed to say anything, we were all on our toes scannimg the night sky. This because, even more than normally, we were at risk. As tail-end charlie, not only had we already had all the ack ack to ourselves, but were prey to any night fighter chasing the raiders away. The rest of our squadron were long gone, some way back to base.

We had left the target ,say twenty minutes or half an hour behind - when, suddenly, all hell broke loose and 20mm. cannon shells riddled the whole aircraft. From my position daylight appeared everywhere. It wasn't daylight, but the night sky. There were

holes all over the aircraft, with a nasty smell of cordite and crashes of minor explosions - and worse, fire!

I will never forget the thought that flashed across my mind, as shells passed either side of me, 'Don't shoot my parachute' which lay a yard or more away from me.

The order to 'ABANDON AIRCRAFT' was given and I left by the port beam aperture, with guns still in position, a thing they say you cannot do. The guns, mounted, would have hindered aanybody heavier than myself.

To jump ahead for a moment:- I was told afterwards, by a Romanian Air Force Officer that it had been a Junkers 88 night fighter that had shot us down. The Junkers 88 had obviously attacked our blind-spot, the unguarded, unarmed, underside of our Liberator, or, as Winston Churchill would say, 'our soft under -belly'

ROMANIA.

By this time the 'Lib' was in a spiralling dive.
I counted, eight, nine, ten, and pulled the 'rip cord'. No such thing, it's a large D shaped handle.
Nothing happened.
I had the sense to lift the chute cover off the central pin and then the parachute opened. Either I had dropped a fair way, or my harness straps were slack. More like a bit of both. When the parachute fully opened, there was an enormous jerk, taken between my legs. The pain was terrific, making me feel sick, so much so that I had to spit out the piece of chocolate which had been in my mouth all through the previous happenings. I could have done with that small piece of chocolate later.

How peaceful and quiet. No engines, no cannon shells, no slip stream, just peace and quiet, - all on my own in the middle of nowhere. We had been flying at 11,000ft. and it seemed that my

descent was taking a long time. What would it be ? Ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour ?

Found myself quite expert at manoeuvering the chute so that I was facing the direction of motion, then, later on, side slipping (by pulling on the cords) to steer well away from what looked like trees, still way below.

I could see the 'Lib', burning on the ground, at least two miles to my right.

Then doing only the things once told to do (there had been no dummy-runs), I relaxed and let my knees go slightly bent. Still couldn't tell exactly how far below terra firma was, but at that very moment, landed and sagged on to my back. A good landing. I twisted the quick release, banged it, and was free of the chute.

Gathering the chute was a bigger job than I had thought, but soon made a bundle of it and carried it to the end of the field I had landed in.

Running by the field was a dirt and chippings lane - it was no more than a lane, but with ditches either side. Like a mother hen covering its chicks, I bundled the chute into the ditch (by instinct) and covered it with sods of grass.

Whist floating down to earth, I saw what must be our aircraft hit the deck, with a nasty explosion and resulting ball of fire. I estimated that I would be at least two, probably three miles from it, by the time I reached the ground.

So I set off to walk, in what I judged to be a Westerly direction. that was the direction in which I would have to cover many miles and even negotiate the river Danube (worry about that when I come to it), if I was to make it back to base via Yugoslavia.

I soon found that flying boots were not intended for walking.

This was the 6th. May 1944, No, it was now 2a.m. on the 7th. May. The weather was kind to me, little wind, no rain, some moonlight by this time and reasonably warm for that early hour of the morning.

I was urging myself on, to 'get away from the scene of the crime', that is, I wanted to be a long way from the crashed aircraft and those of the enemy searching for me. After a couple of miles slow progress, I sat on a stone and took stock of the situation.

Analysing my feelings at the time, I had to conclude:- I felt serene, most unconcerned at what some may term a predicament and quietly determined to look after myself and find a way back to friendly territory or Italy and base. Given the unpopulated quiet countryside I found myself in, peacefulness obscured everything else. At the same time, I realised that there could be some element of contrast to the catastrophic happenings of an hour or so ago, to make me feel like this. Nevertheless, here I was, all in one piece, unscathed, but on my own. I was quite content to rely upon myself. The very worst that could happen was to be made a prisoner of War - something I intended to avoid, if at all possible.
On the debit side, I had only what I stood up in. We had not been equipped as the Bomber Command chaps operating from the U.K..
I had no escape kit, no aids to moving around in a strange country, no maps, no emergency rations and no money of the country we had been overflying.

So, it was up to Bert, on his own.

To check, I went through every pocket and found nothing but a handkerchief. At least there was nothing that would give information away. My Movado watch - purchased in Alexandria some years ago - was still functioning. I looked upon it as company.

Now I could do with that mouthful of chocolate I had had to spit out - and a cup of hot tea would go down well. I would have to make do without. So, on my feet again, to trudge along the lane, where soon I came to a junction. The more important looking of the two roads before me, headed in the direction I wanted to go. I turned half right and continued Westwards.

It took a long time to cover the next two or three miles, by which time dawn was breaking. At least 'sun-up' confirmed that I was indeed heading due West. I was now on the qui-vive, not wanting to be seen, and ready to dive into the ditch should anything or anyone appear.

Within half an hour of sunrise, I heard something and made straight for the ditch. Then I could make out the clop, clop, of a walking horse. Sure enough, over the slight rise, behind me, came horse, cart and farmer, or farm labourer, whatever he was. I crouched down, but was able to see through the long grass on the verge and watch horse and cart progress, come opposite me, and carry on, the way I had been going. The cart was, in build, very much like a toy cart I had had when a youngster, that is, with a flat base, then bars sloping out and up to a strong rail round the top - I called it a hay cart.

I wonder if that farmer would have felt uncomfortable if he had known that I was watching him, in an otherwise quiet and peaceful country morning. Until then I had been content and at peace with myself. That farmer had spoilt my night.

However, waiting until the cart was out of sight and sound, I emerged from the ditch, brushed myself down and continued to make progress, if slowly and carefully, listening all the time for any warning noises.

Alternately, I trudged along and rested awhile, without even a drink - I had passed no stream, or water of any kind. I spotted

the farmer, the same farmer who had passed me earlier, in his cart. He was hoeing, in a field to my right, busy and facing away from the road. By crouching and keeping my head below the level of the hedgerow, I passed that field and the farmer never noticed.

Some time or other I would have to cross the Danube river, it was wide and subject to currents. I had seen it, at close quarters only a few nights ago. And I was no swimmer. Put it from my mind and carried on. Right now, I needed food and drink, but didn't get any.

Nobody had escaped from Romania and there was no underground or resistance movement to help me. There didn't seem to be anything likely to be of help - just an odd cottage, a long way away, across the fields.

It occured to me that, in the miles covered, I had not seen a single live animal. No sheep, no cows or even any animal in any of the fields I had passed and could see , for miles around. The road was a reasonable second class road, though not fully metalled and I began to wonder why I had not come upon some sign of civilisation, a village perhaps. Though taking frequent rests, I had covered some miles. Towards the end of the day I was beginning to feel awfully tired. Worse, I was terribly thirsty and could have tucked into a good meal.

There was a small area where the verge widened, permitting me to distance myself from the road. Up against the hedges, out of sight, I lay down to spend the night. In spite of being very tired, it was a case of forty winks here and forty winks there, for my mind was on the lookout, and concerned with what to do next. And so passed a miserable, cheerless night.

CAPTURED.

The old brainbox got to work next morning and I decided that I was going to get nowhere without some help, food and, above all, drink.
I had now gone two days without a drop to wet my whistle with.
I resumed my walking with every intention of accosting the next living soul I should meet.

I came to a field, part ploughed, part grassed, which dipped in the nearest corner which was surrounded by a clump of trees and a hedge. Not far in from that corner, was a farmer, sat enjoying his morning 'cuppa'. Through a gap in the hedge I approached him. As soon as he saw me, he stood up and made a command to his dog. I made signs that I required a drink. The farmer motioned me to sit down, then gave me a small bowl of goat's milk. It was foul, but I got it down. He made another command to his dog, then turned and wandered off to the corner of the field and disappeared behind the hedges.

Any time that I so much as moved a finger, the dog was ready to go for me - obviously he had been told to guard me.

In very few minutes rifles were poked through the hedge, accompanied by nasty sounding shouts. Then an army soldier, rifle pointing at me, appeared behind me, to be followed by three others, also with rifles pointing at me.

I stood up and raised my arms, in surrender. I was searched, then prodded in the back to shouts of 'Mama Lui', which I was told months later, was an abreviated Romanian curse.

How those soldiers came to be there I will never know. There had been no sign of life or building and certainly no telephone wires. No matter, I was repeatedly prodded (not kindly) with the sharp end of rifles and marched back the way I had come.

Half an hour before that regrettable decision to seek aid, I had watched a hundred or more Flying Fortresses heading in the direction of Bucharest. It perhaps upset me a little to see friends and allies so near yet so far. Oh, I could have done with a lift. Sadly, I saw two of them, one after the other, shot down by fighters - somebody else like myself. Yes, there were some parachutes.

In spite of being awkwardly shod and walking with some difficulty in flying boots, I was rifle prodded to maintain a much better pace than I had managed on my own. I sat down, once, in defiance and took my flying boots off for five minutes. Then up and off again. It must have been eight o'clock in the morning when I was arrested. From there on it was a long and tiring footslog, back the way I had come. Past the original farmer, still in his field. Then past the junction in the lanes, where I had forked right on the morning before, rather night. Then, in a little while, down a little hill to signs of habitation. (so I had been walking in the right direction - away from trouble).

It was a village we were approaching. Quite a picturesque village, not dissimilar to a small village in the U.K. yet emanating a sense of poverty. The villagers, mostly women, children and a few old men were gathered in the main street. They must have had Indian Tom Toms to have got the news so fast. Still with an armed guard either side of me and a further one behind, I was marched through the centre of the village.

From being shot down, right until now, I had no idea if Romanians would be friendly or otherwise. Treatment, so far, had been of the otherwise variety. I secretly hoped that the guards would protect me, should the villagers prove to be hostile. All I got were stares from solemn faces.

And so, to the local jail. It was just a set-back cottage on the left as we approached the centre of the village which seemed to

have just the one main street. In the very small garden was an outbuilding, being twin cells, bricked sides and rear. The fronts of the two cells were closed only by strong looking iron barred doors - otherwise open to the elements.
Occupying one of the cells was our flight engineer, who had made for the burning Liberator as soon as he landed. There he had been captured and brought to this place, two days before.

I did get to know the name of the village at the time, but have long since forgotten.
I was roughly interrogated (after all, the Sergeant in charge was only a peasant in uniform) - giving only my name and number.
Then we got onto something that must have been personal to the Sergeant. 'Where is your parachute' he demanded in pigdin Romanian English. I refused to say. Wereupon the Sergeant's colour rose, I thought he was going to have an apoplectic fit, and struck me across the face with the back of his hand, several times.

No way could I see the parachute being worth that kind of treatment and told vaguely, where I had hidden it.

This time I was to have a lift. A horse and old haycart (similar to the original farmer's cart) were brought. The Sergeant, two armed guards, the driver and myself, went back over my long walk. Having seen the place twice, I had no difficulty pointing out the ditch. After a little searching around, one of the guards gathered up my parachute in triumph, climbed back in the haycart with his find. The chute would, I have no doubt, be made into garments by the Sergeant's wife.

The entourage then made a steady pace back to the village. This time, there were only a few glum looks from cottage doorways.
I was shoved straight into the vacant cell and the iron barred door was securely locked behind me. Throughout, the Sergeant had been very hostile to me, and even now, I received nothing to eat and drink.

The cell was entirely empty but for a single wooden bench, which was to serve as a bed, with only one doubtful looking blanket. Later in the evening, when the Sergeant was evidently missing, his elder daughter brought me water and a small bowl of thin, watery cornmeal porridge, called MAMALIGA.

It seems that, at the same time each evening, Sergeant was missing (had he gone for his pint of beer ?) and the daughter brought the usual bowl of mamaliga and a hunk of black bread. If that is what the peasant population lived on, then they must be very poor people indeed.

On my third day's stay in this local jail, there came, with Sgt's permission, a very smart, tall, well dressed young lady, to talk with me. With an armed guard, I was allowed out into the very small, unkempt garden to speak with her. The lady spoke perfect English. She chatted, but to get me into conversation, she had chosen the the wrong questions, such as "where do you come from ?" This perhaps unnecessarily, put me on my guard. In my innocence, I suspected she was trying to get information - when, all the time, she was only after a bit of male company. I gathered that the lady, say about thirty or thirty five years old, was the village squire's wife and lived in luxury in a large house on the fringe of the village. Her husband, an army major was serving on the Russian Front. (Nobody comes back from the Russian Front).
She got to the point, eventually. ' Will I give my parole and stay with her ? '

No doubt, I could have lived on the fat of the land, in every comfort. I got the impression that there would be the best of food, drink, and company day and night. Never had I been in a situation like this, and my mind raced with thoughts and doubts. What was a lovely young woman like this doing short of a man. Were there German Officers in the background. Was I likely to be compromised and give information away.

I did not want to do anything I should not do, and did not think it quite right to give one's parole unless that could not be avoided.

So, I refused her advances and told her that I was honour-bound not to give my parole. (Have kicked myself, ever since)

The lady came again, the following day and made the same request - she was a trier. My answer was still the same, I would not give my parole, and sent her on her way, probably somewhat thwarted.

Time passed, with every day in the local jail much the same. Both the flight engineer and myself were allowed out of the cells at different times, during the afternoons for half an hour or so, well guarded. Seven o'clock in the evening brought the same black bread and bowl of mamaliga.

Seven days on, the old hay cart appeared again. Then we two prisoners, with two armed guards and a driver were pulled by one tired looking, old horse (hope he got more to eat than we did) all the way to the nearest rail-head which turned out to be at Turnu Severin. Setting off early in the morning, the journey took until well into the afternoon.

Though we were forbidden to talk and repeatedly prodded with rifles for so doing, I learned on this hay cart trip, from the flight engineer, that our pilot had been killed in the fighter attack. Engineer and the other crew members had jumped via the open bomb doors. Except for himself, who was out first, the others may have opened their parachutes too early, or, because of the aircraft's steep angle of descent, their chutes caught in the bomb bay and they were carried down to their deaths with the plunging, fiery aircraft. How horrible.

As the hay cart made its way I could not help thinking that, just as on my lonely walk, seven or eight days ago, the countryside

(excepting the lack of farm animals) very much resembled English countryside, so pleasant and green was it.

We arrived at the railway staion - all very European looking - crowded with a few civilians and many more service personnel, both army and airforce.

TRAVEL ON ROMANIAN RAILWAYS.

Closely guarded, we were herded through the crowds to a waiting train. The carriages reminded me of English trains, pre war stuff, being very similar, even to the corridors. Troops, standing with their kit filled the corridors, just the same as at home. We were taken into one compartment, not segregated and with the guards at either end, occupied the whole of one seat (backs to engine). The opposite seat was fully occupied by German and Romanian troops, five of them in all. Nothing was said, but we got many a stare.

In all this time, since leaving the village jail, we had no refreshment, but then the guards did not get any either. It was not a long journey. From what I could see - which was not much - the railway line fairly closely followed the river Danube, where there was occasional river traffic, barges and the like.
Some of the passengers fished out sandwiches from somewhere and started eating. There was no stopping and starting of the tain as did happen in war torn England, A steady pace was maintained until stopping at Turnu Magureli, a much bigger and busier station.

We were closely guarded out of the staion, with myself marched along the roadway to a group of old buildings. Old buildings they may have been, but it was into a smart office that I was pushed. A senior ranking Romanian Officer was sat at his desk and I stood before him. This was an interrogation. Whatever he asked, and he spoke good English, all he got was my name, rank and number.

I was there some time, peppered with questions which recieved the same set answers from me.

In the end, the Officer became a little exasperated and then commanded me to 'Drop your trousers'. There was a smart woman present, wife or secretary, so that I refused to comply. Thereupon the Romanian Officer bellowed out orders and my guards returned, took me some distance away and locked me up in a small cell, about the size of a telephone box. There I stayed, standing,
The place was too small to sit down, and I was left for several hours. Sometime after dark, I was let out of the kiosk-like cell and marched a mile or so, to a guarded compound, in which was one long single story building.

It was occupied by what I presumed to be other prisoners and all of them American. This was obviously a 'clearing house'. The building, entirely empty except for prisoners, had no furniture, seats or anything, but was crowded with bods. Water was available, but that was all. Nobody spoke. We were all wary, wondering just who we were standing next to. I did not see our flight engineer, and indeed did not see him again.
Most of we occupants of the building, leaned against the walls, or, where there was just enough space, sat on the concrete floor with backs to the wall - thus spending a miserable night not knowing what was in store for us, next.

In the morning, about twenty prisoners, myself amongst them, were bundled onto the back of a lorry, with armed guards, sitting on the sides at each of the four corners. No provision had been made to feed us. We had no idea where we were being taken.
It seemed a longer journey by road, than the rail journey of the previous day. Since we were travelling roughly in a direction North East, I guessed it was Bucharest, as we entered the outskirts of a big city.

Bucharest it was. This much was confirmed by one of the guards. I was the only one of the party to be dropped off at what surely must have been a school building. I learned later that indeed it was known as 'Santa Ecaterina School' and was right in the centre of Bucharest. ' Bucuresti', the guard had said, in his native tongue. Marched through a small courtyard and through a quite imposing main entrance, I was handed over to armed guards inside the building. Taken upstairs, two flights, the guards pointed me to the one vacant bed in an otherwise fully occupied room.

PRISON CAMP.

It was not so much a prison camp, more a large school building converted to this use, with only one small courtyard. The whole surrounded by a tall fence and miles and miles of barbed wire.

It soon became apparent that all the inmates of the room, into which I had been ushered, were American Air Force Officers with myself the only Britisher among them. I soon found, too, that all the other rooms were almost filled with Americans, and still I was the only Englishman.

There is a certain reticence when servicemen of different nationalities are suddenly thrown together, as strangers. It was a day or more before conversation came my way, and I had been similarly silent until I was satisfied that the chaps were indeed Yanks, and prisoners of war, like myself.

Our room contained about eighteen occupied beds, spaced only a couple of feet apart.

Even when fully accepted as a bona fide flyer like themselves, I found them to be rather unusually quiet for Americans. They were, for the main part, content to sit on their beds and stay there, until the end of the war. There were exceptions. Though at the opposite end of the room, I got to know well and eventually became quite friendly with two chaps. One was of Polish descent and his surname Oshenko, which was the name I called him by, ever since. The other young fellow, called Herc by everybody else also was more outgoing. His real name was Carl Rosberg and he was a New Yorker, still addressed as Herc, by me. Oshenko was tall and well built - he'd weigh about fourteen stones and had a round, pink and cheerful face. If you would say Oshenko was a little chubby, Herc was just the opposite, being tall and thin with a

narrow face and pointed nose. He and I became really close together, conversed about any and everything that happened and, later, got together in many activities.

My first job was to reconnoitre this erstwhile school building. It was a rectangular building with the long side (with windows) parallel to a minor road, beyond which was a small public park. The park was little used as such, and mainly of grass and shrubs. The whole of it was spoilt by a zig zag air raid shelter trench, dug right in the centre. Almost all the rooms in the 'school' had windows overlooking the road and park.

The opposite wall was a blank bricked wall which backed onto small back gardens of a row of terrace houses, which were set back about a hundred yards. One end of the building, approached through the courtyard, via which I had arrived, housed the fairly imposing entrance. Again, the opposite end was a blank wall. To this day I have no knowledge of what lay beyond it. Some room windows overlooked the courtyard, so that windows were on two sides of the building, only. There were three floors above ground and a sizeable basement below ground level. The whole building, with courtyard, stood in its own grounds, again rectangular and certainly not large.

The courtyard, shale, was the only open space, say 30 by 20 yards, into which new arrivals were driven, as was the occasional lorry. The lorries which did occasionaly arrive were delivering items for storage in the basement, and a couple of such times were loads of recovered parachutes.

The whole of the camp area was well patrolled and guarded. Guards, all of them armed with rifles, patrolled the perimeter fence, not more than fifteen yards between each guard. In addition, there were two guards standing at the outer gate to the courtyard, with two more standing either side of the main entrance to the building. Again, there were armed guards inside the

building, at least two to each floor, usually patrolling the corridors. In the main part, the guards were men of middle age, but none the less antagonistic for that. They may have been instructed not to speak to prisoners, certainly there was not the least friendliness and no amount of trying could get them to converse at all.
Oshenko was the only one to break the deadlock (not yet awhile) - and it took him a long time. The secret of his success was language. By merely listening, he found that his native Polish language was not unlike Romanian, as spoken by these peasant soldiers. Gradually, over a long period, he was able to converse with those few of the guards who would talk at all.
This paid dividends later on.
As a new arrival I was, even at this late stage, taken for further interrogation. This was conducted quite reasonably, but with the innuendo that if I did not fully answer the questions put to me, then I would not be allowed to fill in Red Cross forms, which would inform my family of my whereabouts and let them know I was still alive and well. Naturally I gave only the set answers.
The two interrogating Officers were both Romanian, one Army and the other, Air Force. To this time I had seen no-one but Romanian army or air force personnel about the place and assumed from that, that we were being held by Romania, not the Germans.

Back to the rooms, where all the beds were similar, iron bedsteads, each with a straw filled palliasse. One dark coloured blanket to each bed, but no pillow. Off our room was entry to the ablutions.
It could not be called the bathroom because there was no bath, just a line of four wash basins fixed to the wall, cold water only, and opposite were four 'hole-in-the-floor-loos', also in line, and not in cubicles - just open to all and sundry.
Slightly risen 'foot-prints' were designed to line-up 'customers' in the crouched position

Now we attempted to look out of the windows and were immediately amazed to see the outside guards aim rifles at us, for doing so. This was the beginning of a game. Our heads would pop up and down.
Each time heads were visible, rifles would be raised and aimed, by which time we had ducked again. I walked along (could not rush, the interior guards would have stopped me) to the other rooms and organised the inmates to take up the same guard-baiting. Then, heads were popping up and down at different spots at the windows all along our floor. The guards gave up. We had established the right to look out of windows. Savage amusement it was, but kept us busy awhile and had the desired effect, in the end.

If we moved about quietly and singly we had noted that movement between rooms was possible. Now we tried it between different floors. So long as no more than two of us went together we were not stopped. Movement to some degree, was thus established. However, not one of us could approach within yards inside of the main door - two guards were there and would stand no nonsense.

Among my room mates, the ice was gradually broken and we all got to know where everyone came from. The Yanks came from all over the United States, from East to West, from North to South - and the latter you could pick out anywhere with that unmistakeable Southern Drawl.

There were odd groups of pally Officers but none more so than Oshenko, Herc and myself. We were inseparable whenever there was anything going on, or anything to do.

The prison was without anything to occupy the inmates. We had no books or games. No cards and absolutely nothing with which to amuse ourselves. In those, pretty miserable cicumstances, morale was remarkably good. Food didn't help the situation.

Food was almost non-existant. At a bell signal we would all troop down to the basement 'dining room' and be served a mug of ersatz coffee and one small hunk of rough, dry, black bread - cut from what I would describe as a cob or farmhouse loaf.
That was breakfast.
No lunch.
In the evening, the same drill would apply for a small bowl of watery soup which was disguised by a sprinkling of red pepper, together with another hunk of black bread.

After three weeks on that diet of nothing much, I found myself weak enough to use the stair bannister for support when climbing the stairs after a 'meal'.

The guards, middle aged farmer's boys, or peasants, were not very clean and would, if chance permitted, occasionally rest their weary legs by sitting on any bed which was unoccupied, near a doorway. In no time at all, the bed occupant would find that he was lousy. Yes, everybody was lousy by the time we had been there a few weeks.
Lice were really tough, clinging parasites - they can nip like a pair of pincers. The only way to get rid of them was to pick them off, one at a time, then kill them by crushing between one's two thumb nails. A prisoner may thus rid himself and his bed of the pests, only to have another prisoner pay a friendly visit, for a chat, sit on the bed and re-infest it. Many is the time I have shouted to such a friend 'Don't sit down, I've just cleared it'.

If all that were not horrible enough, there is a more serious side to it. Lice can start an epidemic of typhus. That is why we made repeated representation to the camp authority to do something about the problem.
Then, one day there appeared in the courtyard a peculiar piece of machinery. It was a portable oven, in the shape of a great big metal box, on wheels.

By rooms we were to strip naked, then all our clothes were fed into this oven and heated.
The heat was supposed to kill the lice. Either the clothes were not heated enough, or for long enough, and the returned items probably had a fresh batch of newly hatched lice eggs. We were no better off for the exercise.

In any case, the originators of the torment - the guards - did not recieve similar treatment and the problem remained until, for me, I had my first bath since leaving Italy, at the home of Coca and Martin Horovitz - in the hidden future.

All we could do in prison was to have a stand-up 'sponge down', in cold water - and that without a change of clean undies etc. Without soap, the best our shirt, vest and underpants got was a rinse in cold water, that is all.

With borrowed needle and thread, I set to. I cut up the legging part of my flying boots, to find many a layer of pure white silk in small and almost triangular pieces. With these pieces sewn together, I very cleverly made exact copies of my underpants and so had a change. There was a snag. There always is ! Each pair was made up of so many pieces, with so many seams, that they became ideal homes for lice, and defeated the object of the exercise.

Talking with the guards was still prohibited, and we did not get far trying. But my friend Oshenko was doing well. He found one or two guards who would talk to him when nobody else was about, and because he spoke their language, to some proficiency, he was then able to get snippets of news.

Herc did his bit by getting hold of some large sheets of paper. Then the three of us would get our heads together and sort out the news gathered, collate it, as affecting the various theatres of war. When the three of us were happy with the result, I would use

my skills, learned as layout artist in Lewis's advertising department and draw up, with pencil, a newspaper-like sheet of news items, with headings and sub-headings.

This news sheet we produced once a week, with all the information gathered, and stuck it on a door in the corridor, outside our room, for all to read. The authorities never objected, or was it, never noticed.

A ROYAL AIR FORCE COMPANION.

From time to time a lorry would drive into the courtyard and unload a few more prisoners. It seemed always that they were Americans, who were attacking targets in Romania, by daylight. All were fit, that is, uninjured. This caused me to think :- 'What happens to any crew who are wounded or have broken the odd limb on landing ?' We prisoners never got any news of such unfortunates. The prison was now becoming fully occupied, apart from two rooms on the lower floor.

Then, surprisingly, and on his own, was delivered a prisoner in R.A.F.uniform. It was two days before I came across him in the prison. Having been a lone Englishman amongst so many Americans, I was not unnaturally quite moved to greet him. He, like myself, had been shot down whilst on a night raid. Right away, I could place him as a Yorkshireman - the speech being responsible for that. His name was Doug Calvert and he came from Halifax - only eight or ten miles from my own home. Doug was about the same age as myself and similar in height. But there the likeness ended. He would weigh at least three more stones than me and had a round face to go with it.
Now, we two represented the R.A.F. in Romania and remained throughout, the only two R.A.F. Officers held in the country.
Of course, Doug's 'bedspace' was not in the same room, or even floor as myself, but we constantly kept in touch.

All we prisoners were made well aware of who was in charge.
A grotesque Romanian Colonel, about six feet two inches tall, with circumference to match, by that I mean he measured six feet two inches round the waist. He had an enormous pot belly.
He spoke no English, yet spent much of his time bellowing at us, generally without much effect. He was a very bad and quick tempered man, who would be as nasty to his own guardsmen as he was to us. I am aware that discipline in some foreign armies is vastly different from what is the norm in Western services.
This man used to fly into a terrible rage, going red in the face and strike his guards across the face, as often as not, when addressing them.
By this time, end of June, only one senior German Officer had visited the camp. He had a look round, inside and out, but did not stay very long. This confirmed our own thoughts that we were to be held by Romania, not Germany. Though this was a good thing, really, we were unfortunate in having fallen into the hands of such a beast as fat Colonel.

There was, however, a Romanian Air Force Officer, who, speaking good English, would pretend to be friendly and insinuate himself around the various rooms. He would claim, in several instances, to be the one who had shot each and everyone of the prisoners down, as a means of getting into conversation. We treated him with contempt and kept out of his way as much as we could.

One of the Americans in my room must have felt more homesick than most and would several times a day, sing :-

A man without a woman
is like a ship without a sail
is like a boat without a rudder
or a horse without a tail
but if there's one thing worse
in the whole universe
oh, it's a woman
without a man.

I had never heard that song before, but heard it too often now.

Occasionally, a number of prisoners - usually one room at a time - would be allowed out into the courtyard, there to take fresh air and exercise. Some strolled around, some jumped up and down. I did what the Yanks call calusthenics, taking these very few opportunities trying to keep fit.

BAITING THE COLONEL.

One day, when looking out of our open window, which was directly above the main entrance, though two floors up, I watched a lorry being driven into the courtyard and right up to the entrance. The lorry was filled with recovered parachutes, obviously to be stored somewhere in the building.
Guards were everywhere in the yard and fat Colonel was fussing around. The lorry was stationary, right below our window. Nobody was looking up. It was too good a chance to miss. With help from others, I got a screwed up ball of paper, well alight, and let it float down onto the lorry-load. This more in an attempt to annoy, but at the same time hoping that it would set fire to the load.

Alas, the little ball of fire was spotted, only just in time to save the chutes. The Colonel almost blew up, as usual going red in the face and shouting at all and sundry. By the time he came storming into the building, our room had been emptied. We scattered, in ones and twos, to other rooms and poor old Colonel was never able to find the culprit.

An American Air Force Colonel was the latest arrival and by reason of his rank, became our senior Officer in charge. In no time at all, he became rather unpopular. He cooperated too much with the Rumanian Colonel and many times forbade we prisoners to do this, that, and the other. He just did not support us against camp authority. The first thing he should have done was to make a real noise about food, or the lack of it. He did nothing on our behalf. After some weeks of this, most of the Americans vowed to

report him for collaboration. I doubted that when the time came, they would remember, in the excitement of freedom.

However, knowing the type of man he was, we did not involve him in anything that a few of us were doing - and did not even let him know from whence came the news that our weekly sheet disseminated.

It is as well that I should record here :- I found out afterwards, during my stay in Romania, and from an authoritative source, that the Romanian Colonel in charge of the camp, was allocated adequate funds with which to comply with the Geneva Convention. This should have enabled him to feed us properly and also to make small cash payments, in lieu of pay, to the Officers. He did none of these things. As the Colonel in charge, he lived the life of a crook, an evil crook. He observed none of the conventions and proceeded to line his own pocket with that which should have fed us. That kind of thing must be where he got his giant paunch from.

HEALTH SCARE.

One of the American prisoners, with first-aid background, had for some time, been acting as the camp 'doctor' and administered to minor ailments. Fortunately I kept fit and well, though losing weight and I had been slim to start with, when freed I weighed less than eight stones. Now one of the prisoners became ill. In a short time he became very ill. He was taken away to some hospital where he would get the proper care - we hoped. Our 'Doc' got the official information that the man was suffering from diptheria. Because of this 'Doc' tried his very best to get something with which to immunise and protect the rest of the prisoners. Little or nothing was forthcoming, but he did manage to get a bottle of iodine and a small paintbrush. I had no idea what use iodine could be to us. However, by rooms, in turn we all lined up to have 'Doc' paint our throats with the iodine. That was the only immunisation we could get. Either it was helpful, or we were just lucky. There were no further cases of the infection

Several times while we were held, the air-raid siren would sound (just like ours in the U.K.) and the Americans would make a bee-line for the basement and shelter. Not so, Doug and I.
We would get onto the roof to see what was going on. Approaching, high in the sky we could see a very large formation of Flying Fortresses (American B17s) heading for some target around Bucharest. We could see stragglers being attacked by fighters.
We cheered the Yanks on, and wished them luck.

PLANNING TO ESCAPE.

By this time, it was July, Herc, myself and two others whom we had persuaded to join and help us, set about the problem of escaping.
Discussion came first. We concluded that with the many guards inside and out, the only way to get out would be to tunnel.
To find a safe and secret spot to start tunnelling from would be the big problem. After much reconnaissance we found we could get into a portion of the building which had been sealed off.

A bit of amateur lock-picking started us off. Picking the lock was a difficulty on its own, but had to be done whilst the corridor guard was not looking, more racing hearts ! The large room we entered had been a small theatre. From underneath the stage, via some narrow stairs we got to an unused part of the basement. Further, took us to a little sub-basement cellar. That all sounds easy. We returned to our rooms, after the exploration, breathing heavily from excitement, fear and the activity.

From the sub-basement we would only have to tunnel about fifteen yards to the gardens of the row of terrace houses at the back of the prison.

During the day, when not being missed, the four of us, in turn, would evade the guards and make way to the sub-basement, fastening the top door behind us. We had just one two pound hammer and one chisel between us. We took turns and tried not to make much

noise. It took a long time and many shifts of work before we managed to remove large blocks of stone, from the very thick wall. Eventually we had an aperture about a yard square, and a pile of rubble and great pieces of stone behind us. Then we came to solid concrete, which was much harder to make progress against.

All this was preliminary work, to have a tunnel of any use, it would be necessary to do something in the line of researching possible routes, and be less obviously taken for Americans and British. We knew also, that there was no known organisation to assist us. These problems still had to be overcome.

Now we began to get rumours of the Allied Landings in France - so long after it happened - . Oshenko really came into his own, chatting up guards, and wonder of wonders ! He managed to get, from one of the guards, a newspaper. The newspaper was a couple of days old, but it contained news we had not had before. Oshenko translated. Then, with our heads together we sorted out 'copy' for our news-sheet. The tunnel was suspended. We were full time checking information and producing the news-sheet on a daily basis. What would we have given for a radio and the B.B.C. World Service. Our information was scanty and of German source which we did not really trust.

Oshenko came up with a tatty newspaper every other day and we were able to follow up news, for the news-sheet. The whole camp was agog, and eagerly discussing the information given.

RED CROSS PARCELS.

Food, one bite, twice a day, was a starvation diet. All the prisoners were losing weight, indeed, looking like starved prisoners. At the end of July the very first (and it turned out, only) Red Cross parcels arrived. Our senior Officer took charge. Here, he proceeded to our satisfaction, by appointing a small committee, whose job it was to share out items from the parcels according to the specific needs of individual prisoners.

I was given a pair of boots - beautiful U.S. Army Issue, to replace my uncomfortable, cut about, flying boots. It was a particularly good choice, and they would come in handy, very soon. In addition a carton of two hundred cigarettes was handed to me. Other prisoners were given items of clothing that they were most in need of and everybody was very happy with the distribution. Before the coming of such luxury items, anyone with a cigarette would pass it round, for all to have a puff, in turn. Otherwise we had done without, accepting the privation easily.

There was nothing of real food in the parcels, but tit-bits, such as cookies - as the Yanks call biscuits - and some sweets which were handed round. Thus each prisoner's shortages was thankfully releived.
This great occasion, added to the news of the Second Front was a great morale booster.

All this had an effect upon us. We were getting 'cocky'.
With the few words of the Romanian language that we had picked up, we would taunt the guards and even slightly frighten them, with tales of what could happen to them after the War. Our favourite phrase, which the guards could understand was:-
RAZBOI TERMINA, ROMANESTI SOLDAT CAPUT, accompanied by a hand drawn across the throat, as illustration.

I believe all this helped a little. A few more guards were willing to talk to Oshenko, answer his questions and occasionally cough up a newspaper. So that we were gathering yet more and more information, which was transformed into the news-sheet.

In the evenings, there being neither lights nor blackout, Herc and I would discuss the War situation, as it would affect Romania.

THE WAR SITUATION IN ROMANIA.

These are our views on the state of war in the area that would most affect we prisoners.
We were getting snippets of news and much more in the way of rumours. From all that we could find out, Russia was advancing well on the Romanian front and the war was getting ever nearer to Romania.

What would Romania do ?

It seemed to us that there were many options. It was just a case of trying to guess what would be done in the coming months.

The Germans, backed by hundreds of thousands of Romanian troops, were suffering heavy casualties on the front.
(hence the oft quoted saying 'nobody comes back from the Russian front'). If no alteration in strategy took place, the war on that front would progress, certainly into Romanian territory, with fierce fighting all the way, resulting in destruction of the cities, Bucharest in particular, and the laying waste of the countryside.

Of course, all educated Romanians still held the belief that Britain or the United States (or both) would come to their aid. This was a mistaken belief, because the Allies were fully committed elsewhere, and logistics would not permit another campaign so far from supply bases.

Romania could make a last stand on its North East borders. Next option would be to throw in its lot with the Allies and help fight Germany out of the Balkans.

If such a thing could be arranged, even with Ion Antonescu as puppet dictator-in-charge, to say nothing of General Gerstenberg's presence commanding the defences at Ploesti - an Armistice with Russia would be the soft option. Such a cease fire and some agreement with Russia would save Romania from destruction.

Oshenko, Herc and myself, at the centre of the available news, could only guess at what might happen. It seemed that our fates were in the balance.

Just once, a Romanian civilian was permitted to 'set up shop'. 'Shop' is an exaggeration. It was a small canteen-cum-shop, housed on two trestle tables, arranged in the area where we had our 'meals' in the basement. The chap did not have much to sell and we prisoners had little or nothing to buy with. It ended up as an old fashioned bartering station.

Being in dire need, I agreed an exchange value against my 9ct. gold signet ring. For that I got a pair of ersatz socks, a crude razor with one blade, a tooth brush and a whole loaf of black bread - the same sort of stuff we were given at 'meal' times. The loaf was the best thing. By careful self rationing, it lasted me two days, by which time it was hard and dry.

Life went on, much as usual, with the occasional news of advances made by the Allies, in France.

Add to that, there was some excitement amongst us at the thought that the Russians were not far away from Romania's border. This seems to have had an effect upon our Obese Romanian Colonel.

He caused a small crate of eggs to be delivered to the prison kitchen. There were nowhere near enough eggs to go round at the rate of one per man. Nobody seemed to know what to do.
I took charge. By getting hold of some doubtful looking flour, certainly not white flour, I mixed at the rate of fifty-fifty, then proceeded over one hot ring, to make omelettes, one for each and everyone. That treat of a meal was voted a great success by all.

APPROACH OF THE RUSSIANS.

We got news, via Oshenko, of course, that the Russians were very near to entering Romania, from the North East. Following right away was news that they had crossed the border.
Two rumours were rife.
First was that the Germans were going to withdraw from Romania.
The second sounded more serious. All prisoners would be transferred to Germany.

GETTING OUT.

I was disturbed at the thought of being transferred to Germany. Doug Calvert and myself decided, somehow, to get out of prison. The tunnel had not yet broken through the concrete - we had been otherwise occupied. It would have to be a case of walking out of the front gate.

Air raids were frequent. I had noticed that the guards, just like the Americans, tended to get their heads down when a raid was in progress. In addition, because of the war situation just described, discipline was becoming slack.

In one of the unwatchful periods, during a daylight raid, Doug Calvert and myself just walked out through the main entrance and the, now unguarded, gate. We turned to the right and right again

at the first available turn. We only got a mile or so before being arrested by armed Romanian soldiers, who marched us back to prison. In daylight, without any forward planning, we didn't have much chance. That escapade finished off Doug's enthusiasm.

The following night, in darkness and during another raid, alone, I got past the one guard who had not sheltered and scampered across the road, into the Park and straight down into the slit trench, out of sight. It has to be said that, in the state of flux that existed, the Romanians probably did not know what to do with us.

Alone, in this part of the trench, I took a peep round the first bend. There was only one civilian in that section. The air raid was still on, which was good cover. So I approached this man and talked to him quietly. He sounded friendly and helpful.
When the all-clear sounded, he asked me to stay put, whilst he went for help. Very shortly another man worked his way along the zig zag and spoke to me, in French. Now that the raid was over and all quiet and dark, ' will I go with him, he would take me to the home of friends.' I had nothing to lose, decided to trust him and set off. (if not friendly and to be trusted he could have brought soldiers with him).

We walked together, mainly through the back streets of Bucharest. The prison building had been West or South West of the city. Now we worked our way, round the city, to an Eastern suberb and ended up at the home of his friends. They became my friends. Friends for life.

MARTIN AND COCA HOROVITZ.

It was to the home (a flat) of Mr and Mrs Martin Horovitz that I had been guided. The immediate welcome I received was almost indescribable. Despite risking their lives to help and hide me, Coca and Martin appeared ever so pleased to welcome me to their home.

They were a Jewish couple, living in a first floor flat. Martin was an Advocat, or, in English, a lawyer. Martin had the stature to go with his profession, was of average height, nicely built, and with a receding hair line. His bold forehead concealed a lot of brain, for I soon knew him to be a very astute and clever man. Coca, his wife, was a pretty, slim, lady, who seemed the more concerned to help me. Both of them were in their very early thirties, if that.

The object was to keep me out of German hands.

Coca and Martin were sticking their necks out, not least by sheltering an enemy, but, as Jews, their position could have the most serious consequences. Jews in Romania were not quite as nastily treated, as in Germany or other satellite states, for example, they were not forced to wear the distinctive yellow armbands. Nevertheless, many Jews in Romania had suffered, with many more being killed or executed for just being Jewish.

It was decided that I would stay with Coca and Martin, in their home. We talked, well into the early hours of the following day, and got to know something about each other. They were both very interested to know where my home was, and about my family. Then Coca fitted me up with a pair of Martin's pyjamas, and I had a bath. That was two novelties in one ! It was a HOT BATH, the first since leaving Italy - and a welcome opportunity to rid

myself of lice. The bath, then clad in a pair of clean, fresh pyjamas was a luxury I had not known for many months.

Generally smartened up and feeling more like myself, I emerged from the bathroom, joined Coca and Martin in their living room and exclaimed, in that well worn phrase, "If only my Mother could see me now". Coca remembers that remark to this day.
She had taken it literally, and thought it a plea. Thereafter, until it happened, many years hence - she was so keen to meet my Mother.

Martin used one room of the flat as his office. Clients would call in the office frequently. Martin must have been in some state of excitement at having me in the flat, with them.
Several times, during the days following, he would bring a client in to see me. Martin would know what he was doing, and know all about his clients. But I did not like this being shown to others outside the family - I thought my security was being risked.

During the following evenings, that is, when Martin was free from his work, we talked incessantly. Often it fell to discussing the war. Their view was that this was not Romania's war, therefore it was doubly distressing to be involved and to suffer its hardships and horrors. Many, many thousands of Romanians had perished on the Russian front, with forty thousand more, defending The Crimea.

In one of our many talks, Martin told me how he had lost his only, and younger brother. His brother, only twenty years old at the time, together with his young wife, were made to dig there own grave, then shot in the head and thrown into the grave - just for being Jewish. This took place on the 31st.October 1941. A month later, an eye witness came to Martin with this horrible news, and told that the murderer had been a Romanian Officer, who had also the blood of thousands of other Jews, on his hands.

'Coca' is an affectionate nickname, the only name I know her by. Coca's Christened name is Etty, which name I have never heard used in all the 49 years that I have known her - she is still Coca to me and to all my family.

Coca and Martin were graduates of The University of Bucharest, both of them successful lawyers by individual right. Martin was also a part-time journalist, whilst Coca taught French.

From Martin's experience in journalism he has been able to be of great help to me.

Linguists, they both know six languages :- Romanian, German, French, Yiddish, some Hebrew and a little English. Soon after they were admitted into the United States of America in 1957 (this is years hence, of course) they very soon became proficient, nay fluent, in the English language (or American, if you prefer).

For the Horovitzes - Jews in a German occupied country - it was a double act of courage to hide me at their home in Bucharest.
I lived, in hiding, with them for many days, was fed and shielded from German soldiers as well as from pro-German neighbours and collaborators.

Russia had lost millions of troops in successfully defending Stalingrad, Moscow and other vital cities, but still had endless millions more, now making advances against the Germans - Germans who were shored-up by the fit, and not so fit, Romanians who were sent to that terrible war.

Coca and Martin told me how Romania was such a rich agricultural country, with grain, pigs, cattle and sheep, reared in their thousands. Romania had been the 'bread basket' of Eastern Europe. All this livestock, totalling millions, had been pillaged by the Germans, and transported away to feed Germany's armies all over Europe. The land was still good (I had noticed its rich colour), but there was little incentive to produce, because whatever was produced was immediately commandeered by the Germans.

So, I had the answer to that which had been puzzling me since my attempts to 'walk home', when first shot down. I had seen no livestock anywhere.

Air raids were frequent, usually at night, probably R.A.F.
Coca and Martin were in the habit of going to a nearby shelter, which served the flats and surroundings. I declined, it seemed wiser to keep out of sight at this stage.

Just the once, however, in a heavy raid, they persuaded me to go with them. I should have known better. It was a large shelter with 'railway waiting room' seats all the way round the walls and with back- to- back seats along the middle. It was packed with civilians and both German and Romanian troops.

We walked in, myself between Coca in the lead and Martin bringing up the rear, right to the farthest corner. There was little room to spare, which made it less obvious for Coca to sit on my knee in an attempt to hide me. A German Guard was on duty, no doubt looking for anyone who should not be there.
There was I in R.A.F. battledress !

The guard arrived at the end of our row and as he approached I could hear, nay, feel Coca's heart beating rapidly - guess mine was pounding at an even faster rate. We three could feel the suspense. The guard took a cursory glance up our row, then turned and walked back to the entrance. Phew ! We were the last to leave the shelter and made our way back to the safety of the flat.

In this couple of weeks with Coca and Martin I was not aware of any rationing - certainly no ration books - and though many material things were in very short supply, during all that time I was fed adequately, if not luxuriously. To me, after prison life, the food was good.

THE ROMANIAN COUP D'ETAT.

We were sat up late, talking as usual.

Then at midnight, this the 23rd. August 1944

King Michael of Romania announced on the Radio :-

"Romanians, in this most difficult hour of our history, I have decided, in full understanding with my people, that there is only one way to save the country from total catastrophe; our withdrawal from the alliance with the Axis powers and the immediate cessation of the war with the United Nations.

A new government of national unity has been formed. The United Nations have guaranteed the country's independence and non-interference in our national affairs. The new government means the beginning of a new era in which the rights of all citizens will be respected. All War Prisoners will be set free".

This was excitement indeed. We talked until very late before retiring for the night, or rather, in the early hours next day.

As I learned later from the higher echelons of Bucharest's educated high society:-

The King's calm announcement on the radio had followed some agonising events in the Palace. Ion Antonescu had been confronted there by the King and loyal Generals. Antonescu, in spite of much argument, would not agree to an armistice and was, at a signal from the King, arrested by Senior and Loyal Romanian Officers.

King Michael, acting with wisdom beyond his years (he was the same age as myself), had pulled off a great achievement.

That was not all.
Hitler's top General in Romania, General Gerstenberg, who was responsible for the defences at Ploesti, was also called to the Palace. Gerstenberg was not only confronted by King Michael, but also by a group of high ranking Romanian Officers.
Between them, a compromise was reached, whereby Gerstenberg agreed to observe Bucharest as an open city, in return, he would be allowed to retreat with his entourage and troops, via certain laid down routes, out of Romania.

It so happened that the Russians had long since decided that Bucharest itself was not worth fighting for, and apart from a city occupying force, passed South of Bucharest, in a circular pincer movement, to cut off the retreating Germans, West and North of the city.

In the King's announcement 'The rights and liberties of all citizens will be respected and prisoners set free' meant that I could now consider myself free and would take every advantage of such freedom to move about the city as I liked, subject to looking after my own neck.

There were still Germans about, but as soon as Russian troops took station in the roads, streets, and at every road junction in Bucharest, I came out of hiding and moved freely around the city.

Even whilst these events were taking shape, following King Michael's broadcast, educated Romanians still thought that now, more than ever before, was the time that British and American forces would arrive to help them. They feared being occupied by Russia alone - without some protecting presence of pro-Romanian Western Allies.

All this talk was pie-in-the-sky, for by that time the Western Allies had agreed a 'non interference pact' with Russia, concerning Romania.

News of events in Bucharest reached Berlin. Hitler reacted in typical fashion. He ordered the bombing of Bucharest. It seems that Germany had no aircraft available at Popesti (Bucharest airport) with which to comply with Hitler's orders. However, there were Junkers 88s and Stuka dive bombers at Mizil, a German Air Base, North East of Bucharest.

HITLER'S WRATH HITS BUCHAREST.

The Junkers and Stukas were repeatedly bombed-up and made continuous round trips, from Mizil to Bucharest, indiscriminately bombing the city, round the clock.

The Germans controlled the sirens, which made for complete chaos. The 'all clear' would sound and then the bombs would fall. The 'air raid warning' would sound as the bombers flew off for another load. All parts of Bucharest suffered. The Palace was severely damaged, as were civic buildings and housing. This continual reign of terror went on, without halt, for some days and nights. There were dead and injured in the streets. Those going to help the injured were themselves killed or injured.

Add to all this. Some Germans were still around and were not giving up easily. Fighting was commonplace and chaos ruled.

As the main force of Russians to garrison the city arrived, the remaining Germans began a disorderly retreat, but the bombing carried on for a while.

Even as the last German aircraft were leaving Romania. they circled Bucharest before setting course in retreat.
In the streets, at the time, I personally saw two ME109s fly low over the city, lobbing out hand grenades, which fell anywhere in the city centre.

THE ROMANIAN MONARCHY.

Ferdinand was King of Romania from 1914 until 1927. His escort was Marie of Romania, related to England's Queen Victoria and helped to bring Romania into the Allied camp in World War One. They were succeeded by their grandson Michael, under a Regency. Carol had had to renounce the throne. But in 1930 Carol proclaimed himself King and deposed his son Michael. Carol then imposed a personal dictatorship in 1938, but was himself ousted by Ion Antonescu in 1940. Antonescu became the German puppet, giving free unopposed occupation to the Germans. Antonescu did not last very long, being arrested by King Michael in 1944.
Once again, at the age of 24 Michael became King - until forced to abdicate by the communist controlled government in 1947.
In exile, Michael married Princess Anne of Bourbon Parma.
At the time of writing, King Michael, after a few years spent in England and in France, now lives in Geneva, Switzerland. One of his daughters, H.R.H. the Princess Helen of Romania lives in County Durham, in the North of England.

RUSSIA OCCUPIES ROMANIA.

The Germans were now gone. Russians took their place - in even greater numbers. Russians were our Allies, so I felt safe enough to walk about anywhere in the city, to see 'what goes on'.

A friend of Martin let him know that America was flying in, many Flying Fortresses to Popesti, to evacuate all the prisoners.

I said my goodbyes to Coca and Martin and made my way quickly as I could, to the airport.

At Popesti were hundreds of Americans - ex P.O.W.s, both Officers and enlisted men. I saw only two British sergeants, whom I did not know, then there was Doug Calvert and myself, the only two British Officers.

Fortunately I had arrived before the evacuating aircraft - I did not want to miss my lift home. All the ex prisoners crowded round the sides of the main runway, myself and Doug sitting on the grass (quite a warm day), eating a slice of water melon.

VOLUNTEERING TO STAY IN ROMANIA.

Doug Calvert and I were naturally happy at the prospect of going home, and were patiently waiting for our flight.

Then, from almost nowhere, appeared a British Army Captain, who turned out to be an Agent, a member of S.O.E. at that. He came up to us and without any preamble asked:-

"Will you stay in Romania with me and help with Radio ?".

We were young and keen. Keen to help the war effort.
Immediately we replied "Yes", and that's all there was to it.

This chappie introduced himself as Captain Porter, and took us with him, back to Bucharest by car. The Capt. obviously knew a nucleous of very pro-British Romanians and had arranged to stay with a couple he knew from pre-war days.

Captain Porter introduced me to Sylvia and Mircea Placa, who had kindly invited me to stay with them in their home. Doug was put up with a White Russian couple, refugees from the 1917 Russian Revolution and who had lived in Romania ever since. They would be very worried as to what may happen to them when the Russians were in full control of Romania. Doug could be some 'insurance' for them.

That first evening with my new hosts was one long round of animated conversation. Sylvia was a young, lively English lady who had married Mircea (Romanian) some time before the war started and had set up home, in this country, with him. Mircea had been, for years, the radio announcer at Radio Bucharest. An example of his capability and devotion to duty was shown when the Germans took overall control in Romania. The Germans raided the Broadcasting Station. During the ensuing scuffles, Mircea Placa calmly proceeded with his announcement until physically removed.

All this I learned as we chatted the evening away. Both Sylvia and Mircea were friendly and easy to get on with.

Doug and I met Capt. Porter (promoted Major, a little later) early next morning. He had been captured by Romanian soldiers, a few hours after being parachuted into the country. From then, until the Coup, had been held under 'house arrest' with others.
He was a light weight of slim build and standing barely five feet eight inches tall. He packed a lot in a little space. A clever man, Porter had spent time in Romania before the war, knew the country and spoke the language. All this was probably the reason why he had been selected for service with S.O.E., and parachuted into the country at this time.

For some time, we knew not his christian name, but one chance remark let it slip. His name was Ivor Porter.

His duty now was to acquaint his network with detail of what was going on in Romania, after the Coup D'Etat.

BEING PRESENTED TO KING MICHAEL OF ROMANIA

AT THE PALACE.

The night following the evacuation of American ex Prisoners, that is, during the hours of darkness, a Romanian civilian, probably of high standing and known to Major Porter, guided the Major and myself to the King's residence.

We walked through the unlit streets of Bucharest, then eventually up Calea Victoriei, wherein lies the Palace. To me this was a rather thrilling and exciting journey, not only because we were going to see the King but because everything about the journey had the air of a clandestine adventure. My heart was racing a little.

We arrived, safe and sound.

Entering the Palace, we were shown into a splendid and spacious room, though dimly lit on account of the state of flux prevailing in the capital city.

We waited only a few moments before King Michael entered the room, walked towards us and spoke to Major Porter.
Knowing little of Romania's Monarchy at the time, I was amazed to see how very young looking the King was. An upright young man.
The two of them talked awhile, then I was introduced. The King shook hands with me, wished me good luck and before leaving us, authorised me to draw sufficient funds from the National Bank, with which to re-equip myself and to be subsistence during my stay in the country.

That momentous occasion over, the three of us made our way back to our temporary homes, again walking through the dark and eerie streets without seeing a single soul about.

Next morning, accompanied by the unknown Romanian civilian (never did get to know just who he was), I was taken to the National Bank. This was an imposing building, as good as anything in the U.K., in fact its architecture of the very best I have seen. I was introduced to the senior official on duty, who, in turn introduced me to the counter staff, with a word of instruction. The young ladies behind the counter were all wrapped in smiles of greeting, very tidily uniformed and pretty, everyone of them. At the time I was amazed that there were no other customers in the Bank - times were hard and the Lei (unit of currency) worth almost nothing. I received and signed for, an enormous amount of Lei in paper money. Should I need further, I was invited to call again. I had a chat with the cashier girls, who seemed quite excited at meeting their first Englishman. It all ended up with my being invited to a guided tour (on foot) of the local countryside, in the company of some of the staff of the bank, including the girls. Time passed. It became mid-day. It must have been a half day or holiday, for the bank closed and a number of us set off on the walk. The countryside was pretty and interesting, but not more so than the company I was in. Conversation was difficult, I could not speak Romanian, but got along with the little French, remembered from high school days. The young ladies from the bank took it in turn to walk with me, sometimes hand in hand. It was a delightful walk, down what I can only describe as, a glen. We followed the course of a little stream for quite a while, then through semi wooded countryside in an afternoon of equally good weather. By a circular route, we made our way back to the city centre and with some regrets all round, but with happy smiles and cheerful goodbyes, left the entourage and made my way back to the home of Sylvia and Mircea Placa.

Mircea was very good and extraordinarily patient with me in his efforts to teach me French, which was the only language I would be able to converse in, with any success, since all educated Romanians spoke French as a second language, and I would never master Romanian.

Whenever we had a spare hour together, Mircea and I would retire to a quiet corner of the sitting room, to continue my 'crash course'. Very soon - helped no doubt by my long forgotten but grounding of schoolday French, I was making progress enough to talk with the few Romanians I had met by this time.

As time went by, and after many hours of hard work, Mircea had me quite proficient and able to hold even a political discussion in French - though he very often corrected my grammar.

ATTEMPTS TO ESTABLISH RADIO CONTACT.

Major Porter, Doug and I were taken to some Army or Air Force barracks by Romanian Officers. There in a basement room, a Telefunken Radio set-up was put at our disposal. Porter was not able to brief us on what frequency band we should be searching for contact. Neither Doug nor myself (operating as gunners recently) had 'worked' Central Mediterranian radio stations and knew not the likely frequencies. After a lengthy period of scanning the ether unsuccessfully, we had to give it up as a bad job.

That was not a good start. But without knowing both frequency and the call-sign to listen for, the result was not surprising.

After a couple of days the Major appeared with a 'pack set'. This, by its limited frequency bands, gave us some idea where to search for contact. Communication was eventually established with Malta on the night frequency of 4575 K/cs. It was essential to 'down aerial' and move quickly after every broadcast, because the Russians were more than likely, trying to trace us.

A Romanian civilian arrived and took over the radio operating on the pack set. I placed him as Romanian because he spoke the language as a native and because he knew many of the local people we came across. Yet, by his knowledge of the pack set and his ability to pass the first message given to him, in no time at all, I suspected, nay knew, that he was one of Major Porter's S.O.E. chaps. He handled all the traffic henceforth.

Meantime, I was really getting to know my hosts and they to know all about myself. Mircea made us all agree that, to polish my French, - all our conversation from here on, must be in French only. There is no better way to become really proficient in a language than to have to manage in that language alone.

All in a matter of weeks (days, in fact) remarkable events to change the way of life, have happened in Romania.
That refers only to the things that the population of the country (and particularly, those in the Capital) could see, hear on the radio, or be made aware of by other means.

I looked back on all that had taken place, even since I got out of prison.

After the Coup then, despite King Michael's announcement that "A new government of National Unity has been formed" there were still Germans about the city - and in their place would come Russians. Despite the King's efforts there could be no real stability.

Rule, law and order were in limbo, like everything else. Fear and apprehension were responsible for keeping the streets quiet.

More important was the intrigue affecting the ever changing political situation. German occupation had been followed by King Michael back in charge - but for how long ? The King himself, again the figurehead, solely as a result of intrigue.

Much more manoeuvring in high places on the three sides of the German, Romanian and Russian triangle, was happening all the time.

Not only did this manoeuvring happen in the make-up of King Michael's new government, it also happened in German circles.
Antonescu was under arrest.
Gerstenberg was slinking back to Germany.
Other German 'big wigs' still in Romania were caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.
There was discussion and argument before it was agreed that German dignitaries could be held for exchange with similar placed Romanians in Berlin.

In the midst of all this, on August 25th. the German Ambassador in Bucharest - Manfred von Killinger - committed suicide.

What could one read into such happenings ? Was it the beginning of the end for top Germans ?

With Russia eternally pounding at their heels, Germany and its top bods in the area, were tasting real defeat at both ends of the continent - from Normandy to the Black Sea.

To rub it all in, puppet Antonescu and others were finally handed over to the Russians.

LIVING IN RUSSIAN OCCUPIED ROMANIA.

With time on my hands, I did not forget Coca and Martin, and very often wended my way across Bucharest, on foot, to visit their flat at 18 Colonel Poenara Bordea Street, to say hello and have a chat.

On one of these visits, Coca agreed to come with me to choose material for a new 'best blue' uniform that it was essential for me to have. I must make myself presentable and smart again.

We went to the one departmental store that I knew of - The Galleries Laffayette. The Air Force Blue material was available, if in a slightly paler shade than R.A.F. blue. It was, in fact, the standard Romanian Air Force Blue.

There was a problem. There always is. How to copy an R.A.F. style tunic ? With help in the shape of pencil and paper, I made a sketch of a tunic, the resulting drawing being the best I could do from memory. I was then measured and the job was put in hand. In only two or three days my new uniform was ready. A new shirt, tie, socks and a few handkerchiefs completed the transformation, when I had found a suitable side-cap to go with it. There was only one drawback - all the brass buttons were Romanian service buttons, but would have to do. I also purchased an 'off the peg' civvy suit. Even the best I could get was ersatz from top to bottom.

By this time I was quite used to numbers of Russian soldiers, all carrying rifles, who were patrolling the streets everywhere, with several, sort of standing guard, at every road junction. Romanians were afraid of them, but I took it as a matter of course and was not in the least disturbed, even when occasionally stopped by them.

I was pleased to be introduced to one Dan Homosescu, a well off eligible batchelor of high society. He knew everybody who was anybody in the whole city of Bucharest. He, such a nice fellow, befriended me, and as opportunity presented, introduced me, in turn, to many people, friends of his, in the city.
Dan was an odd inch shorter than myself, but well made, with a well fed look, and was a man of humour. He went out of his way to look after me and to entertain me royally.

I well remember his first treat. He took me to some posh club where we sat and chatted, in French, until the dish he had ordered

arrived. We had fresh caviar, from the Black Sea, heaped on buttered biscuits and taken with sips of tsuica, a liqueur plum brandy (a national drink), which I found very powerful.

Dan Homosescu's brother had, earlier in the war, flown to Cairo in a stolen aircraft, in an attempt to get the Allies to intervene in Romania.

Most days I would meet Dan, mid morning, and he would take me little walks around the city - to broaden my knowledge of Bucharest. Dan must have organised his walks with a purpose, because we usually ended up at the home of one or another of his friends, for a late morning bite of Caviar, always taken with tsuica. He took me along Calea Victoriei, far enough to see the bomb damage to the King's Palace.
On another occasion it was to see Boulevard Bratianu. The word Boulevard conjures up to me, a magnificient, wide and beautiful avenue - and so it was. The road was wide, with majestic buildings either side. Where the road widened, here and there, into a mini-square, were rows of leafy, flowering trees.

Russian soldiers were everywhere, as usual. To have so many troops patrolling the city continuously, it was evident that Russia had no shortage of man power. A good number of the soldiers, perhaps even a majority, were mongolians, round faced and severe looking. I did not notice much interference with ordinary life and movement.

In curfew hours - dusk to dawn - it was a different story. It was forbidden to be outside in the hours of darkness. No Romanians tried it. One lady, to whom Dan had introduced me, was the owner of a small pre-war car, in shape not unlike the old Austin Seven, though a little larger. She did not have petrol to use it, in any case was frightened to drive around the city because of the Russian presence. She asked me to use it and look after it for her.

I thanked her and drove away. Petrol was obtained with some conniving and assistance from a Romanian Officer I knew well enough. Thereafter, I used the car whenever requiring to move far, and was often stopped by the Russian junction patrols, but had little trouble in establishing that I was 'Angleski Soldat'.

The first time I was out with the car in curfew hours of darkness was different altogether. I was stopped at the first junction. Rifles were pointed threateningly at me, with Russian jabbering asking who I was and where going. Guess work on my part. "Angleski Soldat", said I, and repeated it for good measure. Though it looked to have the makings of a nasty situation, they got the message and allowed me to proceed.

Young, and perhaps without vivid imagination, though ever sticking up for myself and Britain, I continued to drive around in darkness if I had far to go. I was stopped often but Angleski Soldat continued to be a good passport.

Dan Homosecu had introduced me to many families and hostesses. I say hostesses because, even in this time of occupation and uncertainty, the high society life of parties, every evening, still carried on from home to home, in rotation. They were all large and well appointed homes. I was invited to all the parties.

Guests would arrive before dark and stay until after the next day was light, thus avoiding the curfew. Staying the night usually meant sleeping on the floor anywhere, by the time activity was flagging.

Dan introduced me to another smart lady, of the 'set'. She must have been thirty five years old, pretty and bedecked with expensive jewelry. I think Dan thought she would be good for me. Yes, I did sleep with her, but fully clothed and laying on the floor, in company with others. We got on well together, talking

through much of the night. Yet I did not see further of the lady until much later in my stay in Romania. Will remember her as Vivi.

In the course of these regular parties, I had become aquainted with a beautiful young lady, by the name of Viorica Iliescu. She was slim, neat and friendly. Viorica would be no more than nineteen years old, very sophisticated and well educated. I think she saw to it that I was invited to every party she attended. The two of us would sit or stand, as circumstances dictated, apart from the crush and chat away in French, (you did a good job, Mircea), Yes I had much to thank Mircea Placa for, or I could not have circulated and conversed at all without the French he taught me.

One night, as the party drew to a close, but still in the hours of darkness, I volunteered to drive Viorica home. I had thought it better than laying on the floor for a few hours.

We duly set off in the little car - still curfew time - and were stopped by a Russian road block at the end of Boulevard Bratianu. Poor Viorica shrunk, cringing, right into the far corner of the seat, trying to become invisible. (All Romanian women expected to be raped by Russians). I recieved the usual threatening jabber with rifles at the ready. By now my reply was practiced. - "Ya Anglesky Soldat". The penny dropped that I was indeed English and I was allowed to proceed.

The experience had so unnerved Viorica that she said, and meant, 'never again'. Thereafter we stayed at parties until after light, but none of this stopped me using the car when ever I fancied.

The food at parties, wherever held, was both sumptuous and plentiful. Caviar was usually the hors-d'oeuvre. In war torn Romania can you imagine sitting down to a main course of SUCKLING PIG, with all the trimmings ? I can, and did ! I knew, however, that the educated rich in Bucharest lived a life as different as

chalk and cheese, from the frugal existance of the ignorant peasants in the hinterland.

An R.A.F. Wing Commander was flown in - via Popesti - to set up a British Military Commission in Bucharest. It became obvious that, sooner or later, instructions would come for me to be sent home.

There was one duty I wished to perform before leaving Romania. I set about arranging a journey to the little village where I had been shot down, way back in early May. I persuaded my friend, a Romanian Major to act as guide, and then procured more petrol for the round trip of about two hundred miles. Doug Calvert had bought a good camera and I required photographs to be taken, so got him to go with us.

Nobody travelled. Nobody left the comparitive safety of the city of Bucharest. Nobody dared to.

Yours truly, however, had a job to do and was not going to be put off by anything. The three of us, then, set off early next morning in 'my' car. To hell with the consequencies!

Once we had left the outskirts of Bucharest behind, we were travelling on second class roads, sometimes not fully metalled. All the way we passed through rich looking cultivated land. Yet again, I noticed that there were no livestock around, anywhere, not a single living animal to be seen. We met no traffic, not even any Russian army vehicles, only the occasional Russian check point. Passage through the menacingly manned check points was a little frightening, to say the least. Each time, we were forced to get out of the car, facing many levelled rifles, and obviously expected to have some papers of authorisation. I drew attention to the R.A.F. battledress that I was wearing and repeated several times (as I had done in Bucharest) "Ya Angleski Soldat". After my convincing statement to be English, a revolver was reluctantly removed from my stomach and rifles lowered. We were allowed to

proceed. I had explained to my Romanian Major where I thought we should make for, and apart from some trouble at further road blocks which I solved with the "Ya Angleski Soldat". we ended up at the right place, without any difficulty of navigation. The Romanian Major had proved to be a good guide.

We came, this time freely, to the village jail. The wife and elder daughter of old 'Bully' Sergeant were there and became my guides to the Greek Orthodox Church in the village. The rest of my crew had been buried there, with crosses erected over the graves and with flowers on each of them. It was a beautiful church in a lovely setting. Trees and shrubs in the graveyard, all very tidily kept, were surrounded in part by an old stone wall and some fencing, which contained the church yard. 'Bully Sgt'., I was almost pleased to hear, had been sent to the Russian front, some time back.

The graves, obviously well tended, were against the boundary fence, just inside the churchyard, by the entrance. I wrote the names on squares of paper and pinned these to the correct crosses that had been erected. The lady, who was our guide on this sad occasion, knew just which one of the crew was where - a very small grave for the pilot who had been burned to ashes. Then Doug took several photographs, including a few of the picturesque Church itself. Sad to relate, I have forgotten the place name, and that of the church.

Then, duty done, we made our way back to Bucharest. We had travelled a long way and it was very late when we got back, tired and hungry, for we had had no refreshment all day.

A few days later Doug's hosts took us to the Athene Palace Hotel for a sort of special celebration meal. It was a slap up meal in a very well organised hotel, with dinner-jacketed waiters giving attentive service, the like of which I had not seen since before

the war. The occasion was rounded off with a photograph of Doug and myself taken with the hotel entrance as back drop.

I still did not forget Coca and Martin Horovitz and frequently walked the mile or two across Bucharest to be with them for a couple of hours.

Meantime, Sylvia Placa had volunteered as typist or secretary to the British Military Mission - though it did not seem that much was being done by it.

Viorica was my constant companion. She took me to her home adjoining the Fabrica de Kabrit (match factory). Viorica's father managed that state monopoly. It was a lovely home, furnished in the best tradition and with beautiful items of china, pottery and the like, with flowers abounding. The idea was that we should have afternoon tea with Viorica's parents. Viorica's mother was friendly, pleased to meet me and went out of her way to be nice. But, perhaps it was not unnatural that father and I did not hit it off together. He was pro German. No doubt this was because, from the time the Germans arrived in Bucharest they had left him alone, and in charge of the Match factory, to produce for them, one of life's necessities. With that 'atmosphere' between Viorica's father and myself, such a visit to her home was not a resounding success.

Nevertheless, some days later, Viorica's grandparents were offering me millions of Lei to marry her and take her to England with me. Lei would be worthless in a free market exchange - and without some such help, I could not see my being able to support her in the manner to which she was accustomed. Though I thought an awful lot of Viorica, I found her to be a little too prim and proper. In all the times I had escorted her home, after parties, she never once let me kiss her goodnight, and it made me wonder how frigid she really was. In any case, I had a girl friend back home and thus did not rise to the bait.

UNPLEASANT DUTY

Out of the blue I received a message from Vivi (whom I had met long since, courtesy of Dan Homosescu). She was at her home, really down in the dumps when I called. Her home did not look anywhere near as expensive as her jewelry. It so happens that I had picked up snippets of information suggesting that she was a German sympathiser or even a spy. Tearfully she now admitted that she had spied for Germany and explained that her time was up.

She expected to be arrested any time at all. Vivi pleaded with me to take her jewelry - she would rather I had them than they be confiscated after her arrest. She was not inclined to take much notice of my refusal. There was no way I could accept the gifts she offered, nor was I going to be connected, in any way, with tainted money, or what had been her reward for having acted in any anti British activity. I left her and immediately reported her whereabouts to the Wing Commander, I/C the British Military Mission.

SHOPPING.

Doug and I did a little shopping for souvenirs to take home. With Hilda in mind I got a beautiful, extra full size tablecloth which, made by hand, had taken a year to weave the cloth and a further year to exquisitely embroider in traditional Rumanian style. It was complete with twelve napkins of similar design. The set had taken first prize in the Paris exposition of 1938. It seemed that nobody in Romania had money to spare for such an item.

Embroidered Romanian blouses were the next aquisition, together with a few odds and ends.

HOMEWARD BOUND.

A few days later, it was now late November 1944, a Dakota (DC3) of transport command, flew into Popesti (Bucharest Airport) bringing supplies and official papers, plus two personnel for the Military Mission.

Doug Calvert and myself were told to be ready to leave Romania next day.

We took the Dakota crew to another party that we had been already committed to, for that which was to be the last night in Bucharest.
For them it was a rare treat and they really enjoyed it
I introduced F/O Ravalin (the Dakota capt.) to Viorica, in case he should make further trips and be able to carry a letter from me at some time, and also gave him Viorica's address.
It was an upsetting goodbye to Viorica. Then we (Doug and I) just had time to say goodbye to our hosts and friends. Myself being very sorry that it proved impossible to find Dan Homosescu in the time.

One last dash across Bucharest saw me taking leave of Coca and Martin. Goodbye then, to Major Porter and Romania.

Flying Officer Ravalin and his Dakota crew, next morning, flew Doug and I back to Italy - we landed at Bari, their base. They were a really decent bunch of chaps and returned our hospitality of the previous night by going right out of their way to look after us. At Bari they continued to mother us, found us accomodation, took us to their Officer's Mess and bought us drinks - for we had no money - other than some Lei which we left with them, for they would be going back to Bucharest very soon.

It was a cold wet Italian winter. With some pay, drawn on account, I made my way to Bari city centre to find a much needed overcoat.

All I could get was an Army Officer's trench coat - a full length khaki raincoat. Any port in a storm. This 'mac' I wore from then on, even when back on duty in England - and received some tellings off for doing so. At this late stage in the war I was not going to be cajoled into buying a new R.A.F. greatcoat when I had had no choice but to buy what I was wearing.

'Our crew' continued to be most hospitable and solicitous for our welfare, during the week we stayed at that R.A.F. base in Bari.

The next official move was a medical.
The doctors who examined us turned out not to be the best of my friends - for they pronounced us UNFIT TO FLY. Ridiculous, we had just flown from Romania. The decision meant that we could not be flown home to U.K. The alternative would be a wait for a convoy and then a slow voyage. We could have been home in a matter of a couple of days, but now it would be weeks. Certainly we would be lucky to make it home by Christmas. It was now December already.

The same crew now flew us to Naples where we had a miserable wait of two weeks in civilian accomodation. There were few service personnel about and we missed the company we could have had in an Officer's Mess.

Naples was a Royal Navy port. Having spent time walking I came across and made friends with, three R.N. Officers. They would be on duty in the next convoy that would carry us home. The four of us arranged a day out, to fill in time and decided to climb Vesuvius. This turned out to be quite some climb, but I was quite fit, if not fit enough to fly. It was quite something different to stand at the top of Vesuvius and look down into the crater that had erupted a few years previously. There was also a 'bird's eye view' of the city of Naples, the sea and ships beyond. We also judged land visible on the horizon to be Capri.

THE CONVOY FORMS.

The day came when Doug and I boarded ship at Naples. It was a small luxury cruise ship, flying the Belgian flag. We were six to a cabin, but that apart, were in no way crowded. Other passengers were from all walks of life. Men and women civilians, all three services personnel, everyone of them happy to be making way, home to U.K.

In company with a few other ships, and shepherded by Royal Navy Corvettes and an escort carrier, we sailed to Algiers. There, in two days, a large convoy had assembled. We were truly on our way home. There were many ships and many escorts, and now, three escort carriers. We did not stop at Gibraltar, but carried on, out into the Atlantic Ocean.

It was necessary for me to see the ship's doctor, for at this time, I was covered, all over my body, with nasty, enormous boils. The doctor diagnosed malnutrition and prescribed hot baths in sea water. 'Hot baths and more hot baths' he said. It was fortunate that there was only sea water for baths and it was boiling hot. After many such soakings, over a period of days, the boils began to come out and I was soon rid of the lot. Doc said that this had been the normal result of malnutrition suffered in the prison camp and despite the good food I had enjoyed in my further stay in Romania. He declared me now fit and ready for home.

The convoy crossed the Bay of Biscay in terrible seas. Most people on board were hors-de-combat, having succumbed to sea sickness. Many of the crew were down with the same malady. I made my way to the very heights of the ship and, well wrapped up against the cold and wet, looked across at the whole convoy. The Aircraft Carriers seemed to be suffering more than we were, digging their bows right under the heavy seas most of the time.

If needed, the escort carriers would have been unable to fly-off any aircraft, because of the severe weather. I just hoped that any lurking submarine would be in similar difficulty.

Food was good on board. With not very many people able to eat just now, I had a good time and fed ever so well.

I have no idea if the convoy steamed up the Irish Sea, or West of Ireland, but at the end of a long voyage we put into Gourock, Glasgow. It was late evening when we docked. It was announced over the ship's tannoy that passengers would remain on board, until morning, for customs and disembarkation.

No sooner had the announcement been made than Doug and I were summoned and escorted off the ship, by M.P.s (military police) and taken to a waiting car on the quay side. We were driven to a train, ready and waiting, in the railway station, put into a first class compartment on our own and locked in. It was a reasonably fast train, but stopped at all the main line stations. At every stop we were approached by the R.T.O. and his staff, who brought to us "wads" and mugs of tea. We learned that we were bound for Air Ministry interrogation centre, London.

Our compartment was met at Euston, London, late next day and we were whisked off to a building in St.John's Wood, overlooking the Oval cricket ground.

There I was shown into a room and sat down, facing a rather over-aged civilian across a desk. He was to interrogate me. From the start he displayed a tired, disinterested attitude to the whole thing. I told him who I was, gave my name, rank and service number. Then I gave him squadron number and location and explained that I had been shot down on the night of 6th.May, West of Bucharest. In a rather clever manner, this gentleman, if such he was, said "There had been NO enemy night fighter activity that night".

I said nothing more. After all I had been shot down by a night fighter - and have the original letter from my Squadron Commander (written to my parents) which says, and I quote "Other crews who were on the same target, at the same time, reported night fighter activity on a fairly large scale".

I could have told him about the rest of the crew, the photos I had of their graves, Major Ivor Porter and the Russians, but I gathered he was not interested. With no further word from me, the interview ended.

After that fiasco, I was taken to a canteen for a welcome meal, then issued with a rail warrant and dropped off at Kings Cross station. The machinations of authorities ! For all that priority transporting, I might as well have been dropped off at Leeds, in the first place - instead of a long journey South, followed by a long journey North, all for nothing.

HOME IN TIME FOR CHRISTMAS.

The train from Kings Cross was crowded with service personnel. None of whom I spoke to could 'place me' - I was still wearing the Romanian version of 'Best Blues' which did not now look very much like the real thing. As the train steamed into Leeds Central Station and I jumped down onto the platform, some of the family were waiting there. They had had a phone call to expect my arrival - but this was the second attempt to meet me in two days.

The Air Ministry had slipped up again. After the 'do' at St.Johns Wood, my opinion of that establishment was not very good. Waiting for me were Mum and Dad, sister Phyllis and Hilda, my girl friend of long ago. When greeting and hugging I said to Hilda 'You haven't changed a bit'. I had put up a black ! She, not allowing for myself being a little disorientated at arriving home, was very upset, for indeed, she had grown up to be a lovely young woman.

I was on 28 days recuperation leave - don't remember much of the first two days. Then I wrote to Air Ministry at Adastral House, enclosing photographs of my crew's graves in Romania and asked them to reproduce and send to the respective families.

Air Ministry (now I was in touch with the right place) were most helpful and complied with my request. Then they wrote to me asking if I would agree to my name and address being passed on to the next of kin. Of course, I agreed. From the letters received, I spent much of my leave travelling England, from South East to South West and back North, visiting parents of those who had been killed.

At each of those homes I was welcomed as a son of the family. We did not talk of the horror, but I explained the Photographs and pointed out where their sons lay buried. At least, I was able to say that the graves were tended and usually had flowers.

Between whiles I would pop off to Scarborough (oft as I could) to see Hilda and occasionally be taken for a game of snooker by her Father, Frank. He and I got on like a house on fire.

By this time, I was promoted to Flying Officer and it was into January 1945. At the end of leave, early February, came instructions to report to Catterick R.A.F. Station.

Douglas Calvert was not at Catterick, but altogether there were a dozen Officers assembled. We would be paraded every morning, and, every morning I would be told to wear R.A.F. Greatcoat.
I explained how it was that I was kitted out with an Army Trench Coat, yet the C.O. expected me to buy a new coat. This I was not going to do.

The station was otherwise happy and I played a lot of squash, ending up really fit again.

Three weeks later I was sent on short leave with instructions to report to R.A.F. Station Wigton, Cumberland.

Straight to Scarborough I went, to ask Hilda to marry me. Try as I did, no decision was forthcoming. Hilda had an American cousin also asking for her hand. He was, only now, over from U.S.A. for War service - and thus I went off to Wigton which was a navigational flying training school. Having done two tours of operations I was reluctant to fly with 'sprogs' and said so. However, I was put in charge of 'B' Flight, that was that.

One thing sticks in my memory - 'Duty Officer of the Day'. When doing that duty, I had of necessity to go round the airmen's mess and ask 'Any Complaints ?' Not being accustomed to R.A.F. life in England, and not having done the duty before, I found it a little unnerving.

Next surprise, which quite shook me, was to be wakened, on my first morning at Wigton, (in my own private room), my eyes popping out of my head, by a W.A.A.F. who brought a cup of tea, then proceeded to light the fire. This was the first W.A.A.F. I had seen since leaving England in 1941 as a sprog Sergeant !
Life at Wigton was all work and no play, often flying twice a day with no recreation except the Officers Mess of an evening. Flying ceased at weekends. There was no way I could travel to Scarborough and back on a 48hr pass. Therefore I was able to sign passes for all the other non-essential personnel on the flight and stayed to look after things on my own.

V.E. Day came and went. Then I thought more seriously about my future and the financial means of getting married. Soon followed an interview with the Station Commander, a Group Captain. I requested secondment to British Overseas Airways Corporation which was just being set up to operate after the war, as successor to Imperial Airways.

SECONDMENT TO B.O.A.C.

Letting two weeks go by without any result, I popped in to see the Group Captain every day, just to stand, salute and say 'Request secondment to B.O.A.C. Sir'. At the end of May 1945 my wish was granted and I went, right away, for interview in London. There were eight or ten Officials sat at a long table, when I was ushered in. I was questioned about my R.A.F. service and asked why I wanted to fly B.O.A.C. The answer to the last was 'to remain within a flying organisation and to secure a vocation for peace time. Having satisfactorily answered more questions, I was, there and then, 'taken on' with an immediate posting to No.1 advanced flying school at Ossington (Newark). The course started immediately with a nucleous of 'Bods' like myself, recently seconded. We were of course, still in the R.A.F.and under training. There was ground instruction to bring Radio Officers to a higher standard and quicker speed of operating, plus introduction to the new civilian 'Q' codes. We moved on to flying training on converted Lancasters, renamed Lancastrians. The result of much modification was a civil aircraft of limited passenger capacity, but with tremendous range. Passengers would be carried in eleven bunks.

Training flights took us to Rabat, Lydda and Karachi, usually long flights of between eight and twelve hours. The biggest surprise took place at the start of our first flight - NO PARACHUTES !

During the course I had bought a car - Ford Prefect 1938 vintage, and dashed off to Scarborough whenever free for 48 hours. Petrol I had to obtain on the black market - being able to get most of what was required, so long as I paid twice the price.

In those short breaks I popped the question time and again, to Hilda, then won. We became engaged and arranged to be married when I passed Civil Aviation Operating Examinations, to be finally engaged as B.O.A.C. staff.

I passed all the practical and technical radio exams together with operating procedures, but failed the last part which was Morse Code at 25 words per minute. My leave was cancelled and I was given notice to take the test again on the Monday, two days hence.

So, a planned honeymoon had to be cancelled and a last minute 24 hour substitute arranged. I passed the necessary morse exams at the second attempt and became a Radio Officer on B.O.A.C. with Ministry of Civil Aviation Flight Radio Licence No.547.

My promotion to Flight Lieutenant came through - I was now a'two ringer', when wearing R.A.F. uniform. Meantime B.O.A.C. kitted me out with smart navy blue uniform, with wavy gold badges of rank, plus a tropical outfit. All the new 'civilian' crews then moved to Hurn (Hampshire), from where the airline would operate. We flew routes to the Middle East, Pakistan and India, plus special charter trips to various places. Then to Johannesburg and even Australia.

On the Australia route we would fly from Hurn to Lydda - Karachi - Singapore - Darwin, then Sydney. The legs Karachi to Singapore and Singapore to Darwin took seventeen long hours, sat at one small seat working radio all the time. Crews would 'slip' ie. rest, at certain stops, the length of rest being related to the frequency of services. Crews would be away for three weeks or more and be guaranteed a mere three days back home (and sleep two of them) before being required for service again.

I took my release from the R.A.F. and soon afterwards got a second 'wavy gold band' to become Radio Officer, First Class and shortly after that being appointed a supervisory R.O. This meant that I would take newly appointed R.O.s on the routes, until they were aquainted with working the ground stations proficiently.

I settled down to a routine of three weeks away and home for a few days. Hilda and I were not long in having a bungalow built, and as it so happened, it was sited two miles off the 28 runway, Hurn. Many times thereafter, when taking off on service, I would pass over our home and even see Hilda in the garden.

When going on service duty, I would be picked up from home by a B.O.A.C. mini bus - and leaving home was always a wrench. When my elder daughter was three years old, she asked "Why do you go away daddy ?". I replied "I have to go Jane, to earn your bread and butter". "Oh, don't you go Daddy, I don't like bread and butter" she cried.

Once a year, every year, I would have to travel to Air Ministry for Medical and Proficiency examinations. The proficiency exam was no trouble, but we all used to quake about the Medical, which was very stiff. All went well for six years, then, next time I went for a Medical, I was shocked to be marked 'failed'.

Absolutely shattered I returned to Hurn and saw resident Doctor Peffers (B.O.A.C. MEDICAL OFFICER). He investigated and found that my hearing for the higher frequency bands was diminished and made representation to the Medical Board that my practical operating was first class and my ability to hear signals was unimpaired. My Licence was restored - with sighs of relief all round.

Under British rule, the various races in India lived side by side without problem or trouble. When India gained independence and became self governing, after the war, trouble and strife, ascending to violence and civil war erupted between Hindus and Moslems.
One time on a flight to the Far East, and staging at Karachi, our civil aircraft (a York) was halted and passengers disembarked.

We then took the aircraft on a shuttle, taking Hindus from one area to another, and Moslems in reverse. Without seats they were packed in like cattle, to take as many as possible per trip. This was an effort to segregate the two races and bring peace to that area of India.

There was trouble of one kind or another up and down the World. Crews would endeavour to enjoy a 'slip' in Tel Aviv, only to find things a little 'dicey' with terrorist activity by the Irgun Zvai Leumi. In the then, Palestine, most police were British and they, attempting to live normal lives, would find themselves targets of the terrorists. More than once I have sat with members of that police force, having a drink in a Tel Aviv bar and a friendly chat, wondering all the time if it was a wise thing to do.

Perhaps we would have a few days 'slip' in that lovely Island of Cyprus, only to find trouble there with the EOKA headed by Archbishop Makarios. And if Nairobi (Kenya) bound, there was always the Mau Mau to liven things up.

Life on B.O.A.C. had it's compensations - I still loved flying and obtained satisfaction from my radio operating skills. Most enjoyable, of course, were the few days at home in Bournmouth, when my wife (Hilda) and I could take our two small daughters across the ferry at Sandbanks (Poole) to Shell Bay and bask on the white sands, swim in the clearest of sea water. The day would end up with fun with the children and then a picnic on the beach - Those were the days.

B.O.A.C.s aircraft progressed from the Lancastrian to the York, which was a nice aircraft in its time - though I do remember one senior Captain resigning, when it's load factor was increased to 68,000lbs. One day we were taking a York from Hurn to Johannesburg, with the usual complement of passengers. In those days, it was a fairly long, slow, night-stopping trip with many landings at Capital cities and others. More of a flag showing exercise than anything else, with Royal Mail being delivered here and there, plus passengers being dropped off and picked up at the

various stops - be it for refuelling or a night stop for aircraft, crew and passengers alike.

It so happened that we had a 'duff' engine and made an emergency landing at Malakal (not normally a port of call).

Let me explain the word 'Duff':- Duff Cooper was Minister of Information during the war. When any information he put out proved to be wrong, it was dubbed 'Duff Information' after the said Minister. As the word became more widely adopted and used, 'Duff' would refer to anything not correct. Hence another well known phrase, 'Duff Gen'.

The English are very much prone to call something by the name of a prominent person connected with it. For example, our well known Belisha Crossing was named after the government Transport Minister of the time, Hoare Belisha.

So, we had a 'duff' engine and made an emergency landing at Malakal (Southern Sudan). The single runway was short and narrow. Crop fields encroached right to the sides of the runway, and indeed, both ends of the runway. Natives, very scantily dressed, if wearing anything at all, were working, backs bent, in the fields. As we landed, passengers got a close-up view of the busy natives, with their most proud possessions swinging in the breeze, or to their own movement.

As we taxied to the 'hen hut' sized terminal building, passengers got an even closer view of the jet black Sudanese working away at their crops. The York aircraft stopped alongside the terminal building. My duties were now finished and I was asked to stand by the aircraft door to make sure that no passenger should be injured, trying to jump out before some steps could be found. I was doing just that, with a typical American tourist looking out over my shoulder. One could tell he was an American citizen by his speech, his dress, his camera equipment and other paraphernalia slung over his shoulder. He saw the nearest native, bent at his work, a 'real beauty' swinging in the breeze.

"My Gawd" says the Yank, "Don't let ma wife see thaat, she'll think A'm deeformed". All in the broadest of Southern drawl.

THE LAND OF PLENTY.

On another trip to South Africa I decided to get Hilda something that would please. So I called in one of the best Jewellers and found just what I was looking for, a diamond eternity ring, that I could afford. Currency regulations were in force at this time. I could not take enough money out of the U.K. to pay for such a present. No obstacle - no bills or receipts changed hands - but we came to a gentleman's agreement that the item would be reserved for me. In return, I would make payments, on account, each time I visited Johannesburg.

Though there was, inevitably, a trip to Middle East, or Far East, in between, other services to Jo'burg came along, so that I could fully pay for Hilda's surprise. Having got the ring, at what was to me, great expense, I did not feel like paying customs duty on it. So screwed off the base of my shaving stick, made a little round hollow, popped in the ring and screwed the base back on.

That was the only time I ever (in all the years of B.O.A.C. service) cheated customs - and Hilda got her pleasant surprise without further expense.

Living in the land of shortages, as we did in England, there was always something worthy of bringing back from abroad, if I had the necessary. So it came to pass that I visited one of the large departmental stores in Jo'burg, looking for ladies underwear. As I entered the underwear department, many lady assistants converged upon me from every direction. In South Africa a man is not allowed into a ladies wear department. As I explained that I was an Englishman, looking for something for my wife, the problem disappeared.

Well, never in my life have I had so many excited, willing helpers, female at that, in a shop. On the shopping list were Bras, French Knickers and Slips. Size ? I did not know, but looked round my posse of assistants and then pointed to one pretty lass. 'To fit that young lady' I said. And so the articles were obtained and I left the vast ladies department with an escort of smiles and good wishes.

Next, I was rostered for duty on a flight to Australia. The only thing wrong with that was that the round trip took a full month. During that month, unknown to me, Hilda had to cope with an emergency on her own. My youngest daughter Anne, had a serious bout of bronchitis, at the tender age of only nine or ten weeks old.

Still, being away had its compensations. When leaving Nairobi, Northbound, every one of the crew did likewise:- buy two pounds of butter, one hundred guinea fowl eggs, a big bunch of bananas and a whole ham. So that, in the days of rationing, my young family were fed better than most.

It should be recorded that on my very first trip to South Africa and stopping in Nairobi, I was entered in the Captain's 'black book' for being unable to tackle all of the eight courses served at dinner.

The 'York' aircraft had been a stop-gap 'knock-up' until the British aircraft industry could come along with something better. In the event, the 'York' was replaced temporarily with the Argonaut. The Argonaut was American made, our first real civil airliner, and flew on all our routes, for about a year, carrying more passengers than hitherto, on every trip.

Then came what we had really been waiting for:-
The Handley Page 'Hermes', British made at Hatfield. Things were looking up. The 'Hermes', with a nose wheel, and larger than

anything we had had up to date, was equipped with the latest in radio units. We Radio Officers no longer had to wrestle with airbourne repairs, but had slot-in racks of the various units, with spares to slot in, in case of failure. Life too was happier. terrorist troubles around the World, had settled down.

Base was moved to London Airport (known as L.A.P.). Not the Heathrow of today, but just one runway, with the necessary buildings, of temporary nature. I continued to live at Bear Cross, near Hurn. I changed the car for a pre-war Wolseley 14. The new car had its advantages. Black, with myself in navy blue uniform and peaked cap. There were not many motorists about in those days, but what there were, got out of my way quickly, thinking they were being passed by a police car.

The Airline had grown so. No longer did crews know each other as in the early days when a few ex R.A.F. types manned the routes.

This time, on service, instead of greeting friends known for a long time, I presented myself at briefing, in L.A.P.s crew room, to find that I did not know a single one of the crew I was to fly with. Not good.

In the World of civil aviation, things were still moving. About the time that pressurised aircraft were being developed - aircraft that would fly above the weather - so too, came development of V.H.F. radio. The two factors, combined, would give direct, straight line radio contact at very long range. Thus, aircraft due to come into service, would be able to have direct speech radio contact, throughout the routes flown.

Resulting from this, B.O.A.C. announced that, in four years time, specialist Radio Officers would not be carried.
My profession for life, was taking a terrible knock.

Shattered though I was at the prospect of losing my career, I decided that waiting for the fateful day was not the right thing to do - in spite of a promised £4,000 redundancy pay at the end of the day. So I resigned. I would miss a lot of friends with whom I had flown for many years, and the pleasant times we had en route when being fortunate to slip at the same place and time.

These friendships had involved our families, but we have always kept in touch, even to this day.

So I entered the retailing business, in a North Yorkshire Post Office and General Store. The work was hard, with long hours, but had an element of satisfaction in working for oneselves.

My wife and I, with two young children to be looked after, given love, amusement and junior schooling, worked very hard to build up a country business. Up at 5a.m. for the newspapers, followed by breakfast and then time to open the Post Office, having already sorted the mail. Business did not close until 6p.m. and then there was the necessary duty of accounting the Post Office business of the day.

In all this time, whilst living in the country, Summer Time brought the cricket season, and I played often as I could, both in the evening and on Saturday afternoons. The latter by kind permission of Hilda who was left to look after the business. Saturday afternoon cricket was great. Best of all was that we played in a beautiful location and on good wickets at Thorpe Perrow, near Bedale. Thorpe Perrow was the country home of Sir Leonard Ropner, the shipping magnate, who granted us those noble facilities - where Yorkshire Gentlemen used to play the lovely game.

Things were looking up, business improving, and we, the family had been there a number of years.

Then, out of the 'blue' an acquaintance came to show me an advertisement which was appearing in certain of the national press.

The advertisement was from Martin and Coca Horovitz and was seeking to contact Fl/Lt. B. (Curly) Whitley. Coca and Martin, now stranded in France, were the couple who had helped and sheltered me when I escaped from P.O.W. confinement in Bucharest, Romania. They, after years of persecution in violent communist oppression had at great risk, escaped the country of birth and home and eventually made their way to France.

It was obvious that they needed my help. In haste, I had a long chat with my bank manager in Bedale. He sorted out the legalities and means of transmitting money to Coca and Martin. In the end, his brother, also a bank manager, going on holiday to France, kindly took the funds with him and found Coca and Martin at the address I had provided - which was a refugee camp on the ouskirts of Paris.

My instructions to Coca and Martin were that they should travel to the Channel Ports and get a certain ferry to Dover, where I would meet them. The arrangements went according to plan, I was waiting just outside the customs barrier at the Port of Dover as my two very great friends appeared. What a happy, and at the same time tearfull, reunion it was. This was Mid-Summer 1957 - I had last seen my brave helpers in Bucharest in 1944, thirteen years ago.

All this in the days before motorways were ever thought of. I had driven a little Morris Eight from North Yorkshire to the edge of the White Cliffs of Dover, and was now to set out on the reverse journey. The weather was terrible. Coca and Martin had never seen such heavy and continuous rain, through which we drove all the way North, through the middle of the night.

So, Coca and Martin came to North Yorkshire and stayed with us for a couple of months. Their ambition was to settle in England.

I wrote to the Air Ministry and to The Home Office, with full facts of the case, asking that since the Romanian couple had helped me in Wartime, at risk to their own lives, we should help them, in return, and allow them to settle in this country.
I persuaded my Member of Parliament to become involved and lend weight to the application. The M.P. was useless, and did nothing. Between all these official departments, nothing was done. England would not give sanctuary.
When their holiday permit was due to expire, Coca and Martin would have to return, homeless, to France.

At this time there was continuing publicity about the case. The next thing in the chain of events was a telephone call from the famous American Broadcaster, Yale Newman. Resulting from this call, I took Coca and Martin to A.B.C. Studios in London, to meet the well known Broadcaster, in person. The three of us were interviewed before cameras, for T.V. transmission in America.
So organised was Yale Newman that he had Carl Rosberg (my old friend 'Herc' of prison days) on the other end of a telephone line from New York. Our telephone conversation was to be part of the broadcast.
Bolstered up with a tot of rough Irish whiskey, poured by Yale Newman himself, Coca, Martin and myself, spoke as required, into the cameras, all to the satisfaction of Mr.Newman.
It transpired that Coca and Martin had an Uncle in New York, and the mention of that, plus the whole story, must have been of some help to being admitted to the United States.

Not very long after leaving my family, to return to Paris, Coca and Martin were admitted to the U.S.A. After the qualifying period, they were granted U.S. citizenship and have lived at the same New York address since 1957, until this very day.
We correspond regularly.

Some years after they left us, Supermarkets began to sprout up and we realised that 'the writing was on the wall' for the General Store. I put in a lot of effort to get 'clued up' and up to date in business and industrial affairs. Following that , I was able to make a successful application to the post of Secretary of the Huddersfield Chamber of Commerce. This was indeed a busy business life, and I like to think that I built up the Chamber's standing, to be one of the more successful Focal Chambers in the land.

Our family moved to a new home in Adel, Leeds. The move proved to be good for my two daughters, who benefited from good schooling at Lawnswood Girls High School. Hilda (my wife) was able to take up her previous career as British Telecom Traffic Officer.

Coca and Martin re-crossed the Atlantic and came to stay with us again for a short spell. We had so many things to talk about - things that spanned many years of friendship and adventure. Coca got her wish to meet, and have many a chat with, my Mother. In between, we made sure that they saw something of beautiful Yorkshire.

After many years at Huddersfield, the pressure of work there, forced me to retire early, not before I had found the right man to succeed me, and he has done a tremendous job, since.

My retirement plans were made. A move to Scarborough, the place I love most, and my wife's birthplace. What with walking, playing bowls, D.I.Y. and reading, I conclude that retirement is the best job I have had. Never a dull moment and so much to do.