

Ernest Francis Biddiscombe

Born 21/12/1920 at South Ascot, Berkshire, England

I migrated to Western Australia in 1923 and was brought up on a wheat farm at Welbungin (Mount Marshall Shire, WA); attended the local one-teacher primary school on the neighbouring farm, after two years of correspondence lessons at home. With the aid of a scholarship, was able to go to Northam High School. During 1938-1941 inclusive, obtained a B.Sc (Agric.) degree at University of WA.

Enlistment in RAAF aircrew was a wish to do my bit (as did my father Ernest in WWI) and not a reaction to receiving a white feather! After call-up in April '42 my training bases in WA were Clontarf (No. 28 Course) and Cunderdin (Tiger Moth piloting). In NSW there was Deniliquin (Wirraway piloting) and after a re-mustering, navigation at Cootamundra. Schools at Port Pirie, S.A. and Nhill, Vic. took me through bombing, gunnery and astro-navigation.

Then came the exciting part of training – off to Canada under the Empire Air Training Scheme – “overseas to see the world!” That included navigation courses in Edmonton, Alberta and on Prince Edward Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. They trained us long and hard in U.K. also: 9 months at four RAF Bomber Command Stations before a posting to Active Service on Lancasters. This was No. 467 Squadron (nominally a RAAF unit) at Waddington, Lincolnshire.

The final 6 months of the war brought up 31 missions over enemy territory with many a scare and near-miss from injury. One had to worry, yet immerse thought and care in non-stop navigation duties, to protect seven crewmates not least oneself among them! Great good luck rode with us as well. The toughest part was to learn that pals in your Squadron or others had not returned.

Victory in Europe and repatriation could not come quickly enough for us – we knew the war was over because we simply stopped flying! An Officer's Commission recognised my effort.

Back in civvies street my career lay in Agricultural Research with CSIRO till retirement in 1984. First in Division of Plant Industry, it was related to physiology and ecology of sown and natural pastures. I worked at Canberra plus field strips to Central Western NSW during this 20-year period, managing to find time also for a young family and (external) studies for Honours and M.Sc (Agric.) with UWA. Also during the Canberra sojourn, I took Sabbatical leave, spending 6 months with a research group at Rothamsted, Herts., England plus brief visits to Universities in Canada and USA.

The next phase was back in WA where for 8 years my research consisted of more pasture work then for the last ten years setting up challenging experiments with tree-planting on saline soils in three different rainfall zones on the Hotham valley, south-west of WA. In July 1984 as a Principal

Research Officer, I finished my connection with CSIRO at the Floreat Park Laboratories where it had been a satisfying return to an agricultural scene I had liked so much.

With my wife I have enjoyed much travelling over the years – Britain, Europe, New Zealand, Canada and also many crossings of Australia by all means of transport. The first 14 years of retirement were spent on a small acreage on the Central Coast of NSW, then back to WA where we now live at Coogee and enjoy overlooking Cockburn Sound with all its shipping activities, changing ocean colours and wonderful sunsets.