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A WIRELESS/AIR-GUNNER'S STORY

When World War 11 started in September 1939 I was fifteen and still at school. My preferred reading for some years had been the exploits of the First World War airmen and so my main concern during the first few 'phoney' war years was that it would all be over before I had a chance to be involved. It was a time of unreality.

Much to the surprise of all concerned, I gained a reasonable Junior Certificate in the November of 1939 examinations and wanted to attempt the Leaving Certificate. But these were still depression years and there was no possibility of my continuing at school so I looked for work and after some eight months of fruitless search finally landed a job as Office Boy with a firm of agricultural machinary merchants. My wages were 17/6 or $1.75 per week and at that I probably was over-paid for my heart was never in my work of filling ink-wells, running messages and checking invoices.

My real interest still centered on the airforce and I was gratified t o discover that an aircrew pre-enlistment scheme had been established which one could join when aged seventeen, though call-up would not come until one reached eighteen years. I was accepted into that scheme on 5th February, 1941 and embarked on the study of the celebrated '21 Books' at evening classes held in the old Perth Boy's School in James Street.

I turned eighteen on 29th November, 1941 and after a medical examination lasting a day and a half was enlisted for flying duties in the R.A.A.F. on 1st December, 1941. My call-up for training came in the same month.

When at last the long awaited day arrived I, together with a group of my fellow recruits set off on a troop-train to cross the Nullabor and start our training at No.4 Initial Training School at Victor Harbour in South Australia. We were still in civilian garb when we got there and were met by the I.T.S. band at the railway station and marched through the town to the camp. Marching was not then, and never really ever became, my forte. I suspect most of my companions shared that view. Nevertheless, that first march was a portend of things to come.

It was one of the peculiarities of the airforce that all prospective aircrew members started as Aircraftsmen Second Class; a rank below which it was not possible to go. It meant that we were at everyone's beck and call which no doubt was good experience for at least one learned what it was like to be at the bottom of the pecking order. We also learned that someone had to do the menial jobs like cleaning the toilets and peeling potatoes. At I.T.S. it was us. That did not greatly worry me but I certainly resented being shouted at by bullying corporals and such.

I was shocked to find how finicky the airforce could be about what I took to be trivia. Things like how one folded one's blankets and arranged one's toilet gear, for example. Only much later did I appreciate that doing it right and having everything in good order could be of vital importance when under stress.

Another matter that I thought ridiculous at the time, but which I later grew to appreciate, was the service's insistence on absolute correctness of dress. Before going on leave we were

paraded and inspected. The slightest irregularity in dress or person meant that one returned to barracks and righted the matter, or one did not go on leave and was confined to barracks instead which usually meant peeling spuds or picking up rubbish. It was a tough procedure, but we all learned to take pride in ourselves and in the service we represented. I think that has stayed with us for the rest of our lives. Certainly it has in my case.

The I.T.S. course lasted about eight weeks, as I remember, and was very intensive indeed . We had a lot more Maths and Physics and were taught by outstanding teachers. In addition we had more morse code practice, small arms drill, unarmed combat, physical conditioning, route marches, parade ground drill, airforce law, guard duties, aircraft recognition, lectures on health and hygiene, first aid and so on and on. We also got lots of needles and dental treatment and we became very fit indeed.

During my time at I.T.S. we started to get W.A.A.A.F.s or Women's Australian Auxiliary Airforce girls on the station and I well remember the station commander at a full station parade laying down the law that there would be no fraternization between the airmen and the girls. What a vain hope! He might as well have forbidden the sun to rise.

There was a immediate transformation when the women arrived. The airforce was much the better for their presence and I believe every airman looks back with great admiration and affection for our girl colleagues. I certainly do.

I got through the course successfully and was then ready to proceed to the next stage of training.

Towards the end of I.T.S. it was necessary to sort out the recruits into the various categories of pilot, navigator

or wireless/air-gunner. The process was an interesting one in that as far as I know no one was forced into any particular category. We had, ofcourse, all been closely observed during our training so far, and those who had completed the course then went before a Board consisting of the C.O. and other senior officers and instructors. There our efforts were commented upon and we were asked to nominate our preferred aircrew category. Most, including myself, opted for pilot. After all it was very much a pilot's airforce and hopefully still is. In my own case they gave me the alternatives: I could either wait for an unspecified time until there was space at flying school, or I could go straight on as a Wireless/Air-gunner. They also mentioned that there was an urgent need for air-gunners. These were dark days indeed for Australia. The British Far-Eastern Fleet had been virtually wiped out by Japanese air-power. Singapore had fallen and our northern cities and towns were being bombed. There was a strong belief abroad that invasion was imminent. Personal preferences and ambitions seemed irrelevant. I accepted their suggestion and went straight on for wireless/air-gunner training. I rather think I was conned, but I certainly bear no grudge about that. After all I am still here, which seems to indicate that the decision was not wholly incorrect.

On April 30th, 1942, which was just seven days before the decisive Battle of the Coral Sea, my fellow recruits and I who were to be wireless/air-gunners arrived at No.1 W.A.G.S. (Wireless/Air-Gunner's School) at Ballarat to commence our radio training as 25 Course of the Empire Air Training Scheme.

At Ballarat the discipline was not quite as precise as it had been at I.T.S. though it was still fairly rigid and the course of training crowded and intense, with many hours spent sending and receiving Morse code and learning the theory and practice of radio transmission and reception as well as a great deal of physical conditioning, unarmed combat, aircraft recognition, first-aid and the use and abuse of parachutes. It was here too, that we had our first taste of flying.

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No.1 W.A.G.S. was a purpose built station not far from town and in a rich farming district. Americal troops had started arriving in Australia at Christmas 1941 and there was a sizeable U.S.Army camp across the road from our aerodrome. As trainee wireless operators we flew in the back seat of Wackets which were single engined low winged monoplanes designed and built in Australia.

My first flight was memorable for me in that we had been airborne for only a few minutes when an oil pipeline in the engine fractured and we had to land in a farmers's paddock. With the typical hospitality of country women the farmer's wife brought us hot scones and tea while we waited for people to come from the station and repair the aircraft. This they did and the pilot took off successfully and flew back to base. I was not allowed to go with him and suffered the indignity of riding back to the station in full flying kit on the back of a truck.

After six months at Ballarat, during which time we amassed the grand total of 20 hours in the air, most of us graduated as wireless operators and were sent off to the next stage of our training. In my case that was to No.3 B.A.G.S. (Bombing and Gunnery School) at West Sale in Victoria where we gained another five hours of flying experience.

Our purpose at B.A.G.S. was to learn the arts of air-to-air and air-to-ground gunnery and we trained on Fairey Battles, which were a nice looking aircraft, but which had proved hopelessly inadequate against the Luftwaffe in France and so were used for training purposes only. The other machines we trained on were a collection of ancient Hawker Demons. These were fabric covered bi-planes with what seemed an enormous in-line engine. Behind this power-plant sat the pilot in an open cockpit and behind him again and also in a open cockpit was the gunner. He did not sit as there was no seat. There was, however a primitive contraption called a Scarfe ring upon which was installed a Vickers G.O.(gas operated) machine gun. Towards the tail of the aircraft a bar went through the fuselage and on this bar were hung three weights on either side, presumably to balance the out-sized engine which made the machine nose heavy.

Between the wars the Hawker Demon was a well-regarded aeroplane, but when we used them they were well past their prime. Every morning a line of these venerable old ladies would be wheeled out and attempts made to get them to go. Usually these efforts proved fruitless and most were wheeled back into the hanger, no doubt for further coaxing.

Nevertheless, once in the air the Hawker Demon was a exhilerating experience. The gunnery exercises were either to formate on another aircraft which was streaming a drogue and fire off a pan or two of ammo from the G.O.gun in the general direction of the target drogue or to do air to ground firing practice.

Air to ground required us to swoop low over a target which was about 20 feet square and blast away at it. People

on the ground counted the number of hits and it was rumoured that we had to get 2% hits in order to qualify. I never heard of anyone failing to qualify.

My most vivid memory of the Hawker Demon was the wind. It was very strong. In order to fire the gun it was necessary to stand up in the slip-stream. When you did so the rush of wind would nearly tear the goggles off your head and if you opened your mouth it would blow your cheek into a balloon shape. Also when one stood up to fire the gun the breeze would hit your body and be deflected down the back of the pilot's neck which naturally did not please him.

After about a month we must have got our 2% hits for we were all issued with our A.G. brevet which was a half wing badge which at least labelled us as aircrew. Not that anyone outside the brotherhood knew or cared, I suppose, but it was important to us and for that matter still is.

Having completed our training which had taken about nine months in all, we were sent home on embarkation leave.

I arrived at No.5 Embarkation Depot which was the old Fremantle Technical College at the corner of South Terrace and Essex Street on 27th November 1942, or two days before my nineteenth birthday. The Fremantle embarkation depot stays in my memory as being the only place I was ever stolen from by a sneak-thief. In my experience that sort of thing simply was not done among my comrades.

With leave completed I was one of a party of airmen taken on board a Royal Navy ship, "H.M.S.Engadine" at Fremantle for a voyage to Melbourne whence we arrived on New Year's Day 1943

and two weeks later left for overseas on board a U.S.Navy transport the "America" which was a cruise ship converted into a troopship.

We crossed the Pacific without incident calling at Wellington briefly and again further on somewhere in the Pacific to pick up American marines who had been wounded on Guadalcanal and were being repatriated home. They were badly knocked about and for the first time they brought home to me what warfare was really all about.

After landing at San Fransisco we were taken by train across the United States to a U.S.Army base called Myles Standish which was not far from Boston. It was a great journey and the American people could not have been more friendly and hospitable. Our draft was commanded by a permanent R.A.F. officer who many years later when I was the principal of a large Senior High School joined my staff. He often regaled me with stories of the difficulties he had while in charge of Australian airmen in America. We became firm friends and remained so until he died. I never told him that he had once been my C.O. It somehow did now seem relevant. Life plays some strange tricks.

Following several very pleasant weeks in New England, we were taken to New York where we boarded the "Queen Elizabeth". or Mary. The "Queens" sailed independently across the Atlantic relying on their speed to out-run any lurking u-boats. On our crossing, the vessel was packed to capacity with Canadian soldiers and one wonders at the horror that would have resulted had she been sunk.

In the Western approaches to Britain we were escorted by a magnificent white Sunderland flying boat. I had heard of this legendary aircraft but had never before seen one. It gave

us a great sense of security to have its company. I think we all felt we were in safe hands.

We landed at Greenough on the Clyde and immediately entrained for the overnight journey to No.11 Personal Reception Depot at Bournemouth on the south coast of England. There had been much propaganda in Australia about the hard time Britain was having with bombings and shortages of food and on that first night I fully expected our train would be straffed and bombed. Nothing happened, of course, and when morning came and we found ourselves travelling through London and the lovely picture book country of the south of England it was a revelation to discover that other than around the railway stations and dock areas there was very little evidence of bomb damage. And we were never short of food.

Bournemouth then as now, was a popular sea-side resort. The threat of invasion from across the channel had receded when we were there, but there was still plenty of evidence of how seriously the invasion threat had been taken. There were many gun emplacements, barbed wire entanglements and mined areas on the beaches which were still very much 'no-go' areas.

We were billeted in a variety of privately operated boarding houses and were kept busy marching from place to place around the town for many lectures, medical examinations and the like and we were given leave which enabled us to explore some of the surrounding towns and villages and even travelled as far afield as London which was where I was when the Luftwaffe straffed Bournemouth albeit with very little result though rumour had it that one or two Australian airmen had been killed in the attack.

Apparently the R.A.F. did not consider us be combat ready and I rather think they were right. After all, despite my new Air-gunner's badge, I had fired only 670 rounds from an aeroplane and knew nothing of gun turrets and the like. So I, together with others of my ilk, was sent off for further training at various R.A.F.Schools and for an introduction to the operation of a primitive form of radar which was known as S.E. equipment. Radar was improved enormously later in the war and became an essential weapon in the war against the u-boats.

These R.A.F. training courses were conducted in a variety of places like Hooton Park, and Carew Cheriton and we flew in Oxfords, Ansons and Bothas. This last was a high winged monoplane which I understand was built to Air Ministry specifications for use as a torpedo bomber but which was underpowered and relegated to training duties.

This training took place at various times between my arrival at Bournemouth in March 1943 and early August of that year when I was posted to No.4 C.T.U. or Operational Training Unit at Alness near Invergordon in north eastern Scotland for training on Sunderland flying boats.

At that time the Sunderland was the largest war plane in service. To me it seemed enormous with an incredibly cavernous interior. It was also very much a boat when not in the air and we had a whole new language of nautical terms to learn and seamanship skills to master.

We crewed up at Alness and I became part of a mixed crew of R.A.A.F, R.A.F. members and we had a Canadian air-gunner. Our skipper was an Australian as were the First pilot and the Navigator. Two of the Wireless operator/gunners were Australians as was another gunner. The rest of the crew consisting of another

Wireless Operator and two flight engineers were British.

We spent two months at O.T.U. and flew a total of 41 hours on Sunderlands including 5½hours of night flying which was my first experience of flying after dark.

The aircraft used at the O.T.U. were somewhat lacking in reliability being machines considered no longer suitable for operational use and of the ten flying exercises we attempted at Alness my log book shows that four were aborted due to bad weather or aircraft failure.

However, we did manage to get as far afield as Sullom Voe in the Shetlands which was significant for me as my mother and her family had migrated to Australia from those bleak storm wracked islands and I was to serve there briefly later on. No doubt many Australian airmen serving in Britain were visiting the home of their forebears for the first time as I was.

Early in October 1943 my crew and I with our skipper, Flying Officer Neil McKeough, were posted to 461 Squadron at Pembroke Dock in South Wales. At Alness we had as our mentor Flight Lieutenant Fred Manger, a well known identity on 461 Squadron, and upon our arrival we were checked out by Squadron Leader Tom Egerton, another well known personality on 461 as well as on 10 Squadron, our sister Australian Sunderland squadron from which 461 had been formed some eighteen months previously.

At that time on 461 squadron the captain who had trained with a particular crew at O.T.U. did not retain that position when he returned to the squadron, hence when we arrived at Pembroke Dock we acquired a new captain, Flying Officer Dick Lucas. We flew with him until he finished his operational tour in July

1944. Our first pilot, Flying Officer Dick Prentice, then became our captain and we remained with him until we too finished our tour in April 1945.

When we joined the squadron we spent the first few weeks on local training flights before undertaking our first anti-submarine patrol into the Bay of Biscay on 24th October 1943. That proved to be an uneventful thirteen and a half hour patrol partly in daylight and partly at night.

The year 1943 and the first part of 1944 were eventful times in the squadron's history. In 1943, for example, our aircraft had sunk three u-boats and attacked four others though not without cost to themselves. The record shows that in that year we lost nine aircraft and had another six damaged mostly by flights of Junkers, JU 88s in the Bay of Biscay. The record also shows that though flying alone our Sunderlands were not easy targets for enemy fighters and some outstanding air battles were fought by 461 squadron crews.

In the case of our particular crew however, we seemed to have a charmed life. While all this mayhem was going on around us, we went about our business quite unhindered.

In January 1944 our patrol area which commonly was across the Bay of Biscay was suddenly shifted further west into the Atlantic. We were on patrol several hundred miles west of Galway Bay in Ireland when Joe Simonds reported from the nose-turret a u-boat on the surface - I was in the tail turret at the time. When first airborne we had tested the bomb release circuit and found that the button on the captain's control column which usually released the depth charges was not operating, though the one on the First Pilot's was still functioning. The Captain and

First Pilot arranged between them a system whereby when the Captain gave the signal the First Pilot would drop the depth charges. There were no bomb-sights for low level bombing in those days. The accuracy of the attack depended entirely on the skill and judgement of the captain.

At that time Admiral Doenitz had ordered his u-boats to remain on the surface and fight it out if attacked by aircraft and had armed his vessels with an array of cannon and machine guns for that purpose.

We ran the depth charges out and in the face of heavy box-barrage from the u-boat Dick Lucas made a masterly attack and dropped six depth-charges - all of which missed by a long way. We did a tight turn to port and came in again this time dropping our two remaining depth-charges one on either side of the conning-tower. They exploded in great spouts of water and foam, but seemed to have no effect on the u-boat. We circled and watched. Suddenly the vessel exploded. Apparently our attack had damaged her batteries which emitted a highly explosive mixture which ignited and blew her apart. We flew over where she had gone down and saw bodies, alive and dead in the water. We dropped them a rubber dinghy which did not inlate as it was supposed to. By the time we left the scene all the bodies had slipped beneath the waves and only debris remained.

The submarine was U571 and the commander's name was Lissow. The sinking took place at 52.41N, 14-27W and there were no survivors.

There was concern in official quarters that our attack could presage a change in u-boat tactics and all the crew were

sent up to London where we were each questioned relentlessly and urged to recall even the most seemingly trivial detail of the u-boat and the action. Our Captain was awarded a D.F.C. and the front gunner a D.F.M. but we were censured for dropping a dinghy to the enemy on the grounds that we might have sustained damage and the dinghy had been provided for our own use and not for the enemy. Personally, I thought then, and I still think, that even though it was a spontaneous gesture we did the right thing and I hope that at least the sub-mariners knew that we had tried to help them.

Shortly afterwards in March we attacked a submerged submarine using a newly invented radio listening device but with indeterminate results.

I flew 61 sorties during my tour of eighteen months with the squadron and my log book records that we returned to base with engine trouble on ten occasions and were recalled or diverted due to bad weather five times. Other than that I was involved in remarkably little drama.

I cannot say that I particularly enjoyed my time on the squadron, but on the other hand I did not find it particularly traumatic either. The battle of tactics between the u-boats and our naval and airforces was constantly changing and was always of interest. I found the many technical innovations that we were involved with quite fascinating.

fThere were very rapid technical advances in many fields but perhaps one of the most significant for us was the development in radar. Its value as a navigational aid was illustrated when we were on transit from Pembrode Dock to Sullom Voe . Our route took us over the western isles and then through the Caledonian

Ship Canal that runs through the Scottish Highlands from Oban in the west to the Moray Firth in the east. We were part of a detachment that was to operate out of Sullom Voe and were heavily loaded with depth-charges, ammunition, ground staff personal and their equipment. Part way through the canal where the highlands are particularly rugged, the waterway makes a series of sharp bends. We had an engine malfunction and could not make height, the weather had deteriorated and we were in heavy mist that severly limited visability. The narrowness of the passage prevented us turning around so we had no option other than to press on. Fortunately, the radar was functioning perfectly and we were able to thread our way through quite safely. Without its aid however, we would have been in some difficulty;.

When the u-boats started using snorkels thus presenting an almost invisible target to the naked eye our operations would have been pointless without radar and it was always a comfort to be able to home on a radar beacon from many miles out to sea.

Our stay in the Shetlands was uncomfortable, unproductive and thankfully brief. The weather was appaling and the base the most dreary place imaginable. Most of our time was spent huddled around a stove in the Nissan hut that was our quarters. Our patrols were mostly along the Norweigan coast north almost to the Artic Circle. Though the Luftwaffe was reputed to have fighter bases at various places along the coast we saw nothing of them though we did lose a crew while we were there but whether to fighters or not we did not know. They set off towards their patrol area and were not heard from again.

I was glad to return to Pembroke Dock when we were relieved after a few weeks.

Not that Pembroke Dock was particularly salubrious but it was not nearly as bleak as the Shetlands. South Wales then, as now, was a fairly depressed area though the country side was pleasant. The town of Pembroke Dock had some great little pubs in some of which old crones still sat around the fire smoking their pipes. We didn't seem to have much contact with the local people but life on the station was pleasant enough.

It was a permanent R.A.F.base and when we were there was the largest flying boat base in Britain. We shared it with an R.A.F.Sunderland squadron, a Canadian Sunderland squadron and an American Catalina squadron.

As aircrew non-commisioned officers our quarters were in the undamaged part of a bombed-out hospital outside the walls of the base. We slept there but took our meals and used the bar facilities of the permanent R.A.F. Sergeants' Mess. It was always very comfortable though somewhat overcrowded, as I recall, and I doubt whether the permanent N.C.O.'s considered us temporary people to be either authentic or quite suitable.

Life was pretty relaxed on the squadron. When not required for operational or local flying or lectures, parades and the like our time was our own. There was always plenty to do and there was an active Education Centre with a reasonable library and a well equipped gymnasium as well as good sporting facilities and a theatre. Then, of course, there was the town it self and its pubs and one could easily visit the surrounding towns and villages. Another feature I found particularly pleasing was the fairly frequent familiarizatiion flights we took to various diversion bases between the Scilly Isles and the north of Scotland and west to Northern Ireland.

We seemed to have a great deal of leave - one week every six weeks, I think - and a free rail pass to wherever we wanted to go. The British people offered us wonderful hospitality and many families and organizations opened their doors to us. I rarely took advantage of their kind offers, though I did become an honorary member of the Royal Mid-Surrey Golf Club and spent a good deal of time there, but London's West End was the magnet that drew me again and again. It was a good place to be in war-time.

About two weeks after D-Day when the Allies had landed in Normandy, but before they had broken out of the beachhead with the fall of Caen, our crew was posted to Calshot where our task was to flight-test Sunderlands after major overhauls. From the air the South of England presented a remarkable sight with every road and field packed with tanks and trucks, guns and war material of all kinds, while every harbour was crowded with landing barges and war-ships of all sorts.

Calshot was an air-sea rescue base and the high speed launches of that service did patrols off the Normandy beaches. Knowing this, a couple of friends and I arranged an unofficial trip to the Normand y beaches on one of the launches. It became a memorable experience.

On the voyage across the English Channel we passed a great armada of ships loaded with troops, tanks and guns and closely attended by many warships. Some of the concrete cassions which were to become Mulberry Harbour were also being towe d across and gave rise to much speculation as to what they might be.

As we approached the Normandy coast the rumble of the

guns became a continuous thunder and we passed battleships and cruisers using their heavy armaments to pound the enemy positions inland.

Finally, we came into the temporary breakwater that had been formed by sinking a line of cargo ships bow to stern so that they sat on the sandy bottom but left their upper deck and super structure above the water-line. The navy seemed to control the invasion fleet from command posts on these sunken vessels.

Soon after we arrived off the beaches an amphibious jeep came out to meet us and we arranged to go ashore in it while the air-sea rescue launch continued on its patrol.

We were put ashore on Gold Beach near the seaside town of Arromanches. The beaches had been strongly defended and there were many mine fields. However, the army engineers had laid tapes to indicate where it was safe to go though now and again there would be an explosion as yet another mine went up.

Some British troops were still occupying fox holes and gun emplacements on the beach from where they had witnessed Bomber Command carrying out an attack on enemy positions the previous night. This clearly had greatly impressed the soldiers and our airforce uniforms brought us much unearned acclamation.

Arromanches had been very badly damaged by gunfire and bombing and red capped military police were directing a constant stream of army traffic through the town. Not wishing to distract them from their duties we kept out of their way and went shopping.

Despite what the propaganda in Britain about the welcome the liberating army was receiving in France it did not seem that the French were glad to see us. Little groups of small dark

Frenchmen stood on street corners with hatred in their eyes and watched, but said nothing. They were happy to take ~~our~~ English money in exchange for goods in their quite well stocked shops, however.

After some hours in and around Arromanches it was time to return to the beaches and catch a boat for home. We set off, but soon found that it was much easier to get to a battlefield than to leave it. Every landing barge captain had been given strict orders that they were not to take anyone back to England from the beaches and being Royal Navy types they were not about to disobey their orders on our behalf. Thus we had no alternative but to stay the night.

In the morning a British army captain loaded us into a jeep and continued the search for a vessel to take us home. I rather suppose we were something of an embarrassment f or the army but they were most cooperative and gave us a very interesting and extended tour of the beachhead, but even they could not get any of the landing craft skippers to take us on board.

Just when our plight was beginning to appear serious another R.A.F. air-sea rescue launch came close in-shore. Our army captain commandeered a passing amphibious truck or DUKW which took us out to the launch and the skipper straight away agreed to take us back to Southhampton.

As the senior member of our little party I expected to have to explain our unauthorized absence. In the event I doubt whether anyone even knew we had been away. Later on some of our people made officially arranged visits to the invasion beaches. I rather doubt that they saw as much of them as we did.

Some weeks later we returned to Pembroke Dock and continued with our operational tour. At that time a tour was of 800 hours flying on operations or eighteen months on the squadron.

In April 1945 my time expired and I was posted to my old O.T.U. at Alness as an instructor. There I was to become a signals briefing instructor with the task of doing the signals briefing of the crews in training and then keeping in touch with them while they were airborne through the W.A.A.F. wireless operators in the station signals cabin. It was a non-flying job and though I did not realize it then, I was never again to go on board a Sunderland and indeed would never again be a crew member in any aircraft.

While I was at Alness the war in Europe came to an end and I still remember vividly the sense of surprise I had when I realized that I had survived and probably had years and years of living ahead of me. It was a quite unexpected and very pleasant prospect.

The war in Europe ended on May 7th, 1945 and less than a month later I was in Brighton awaiting a ship for home. We embarked at Liverpool in the 'Stirling Castle' and sailed to Sydney via Panama and thence travelled to Perth by train.

We came home with a contingent of A.I.F. ex-prisoners-of-war from Germany who had been captured on Greece and Crete in 1941. They were given a tumultuous welcome by the people living along the railway line.

Within three months of the war in Europe ending I was home and on disembarkation leave. I had expected to be posted to the Pacific theatre but when I reported back to the No.5 Personal Depot in Subiaco I was sent on leave again. On September 2nd

when the war against Japan ended I was returning to Perth after a holiday in the country. I walked up William Street to Hay Street where people were dancing in the streets and generally carrying on. I was pleased for them and glad that the war was over but somehow I did not feel like dancing. I was discharged a month later.

And that pretty well sums up my service with the R.A.A.F. I joined, I trained, I went overseas, I did my tour and then instructed for a while, the war ended, I came home and was discharged. There were no delays, no trauma and it was all quite unremarkable and undistinguished.

I was never more than a civilian in uniform and had no pretentions to be otherwise. I left the R.A.A.F. with no regrets but with a great deal of respect and a deep regard for the mem I flew with and a sense of gratitude for the fate that had led me to Coastal Command and more particularly to the Sunderland flying boat. I was also grateful to the men and women who maintained our aircraft and supported us in so many ways.

I found it difficult to adjust to civilian life. As they were required to do, my firm gave me my old job back but I really had gone beyond filling inkwells and running messages. That had been bad enough at seventeen years of age; at almost twenty-two it was intolerable.

The war changed the lives of millions of people including mine. I had made up my mind that I wanted to be a teacher and when the Commonwealth Reconstruction Training Scheme was started my opportunity came. As I did not have a Leaving Certificate I could not go to Teachers' College direct but I was the first applicant to be accepted into a qualifying course for ex-servicemen which gave entrance to Teachers' College and later admission

to university. I spent the rest of my working life as a teacher and was the principal of every grade of primary and secondary school in the government system. Along the way I married and we have brought up six children of our own who in turn have produced fourteen grand children so far. It has all been very satisfactory. The 461 experience was a high point and I consider my self to be greatly privileged to have been at least a minor part of it.

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