Flying Officer David Elwyn Walters

Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve

1940-46

Preface

This is an attempt to tell as much as possible of the story of my father's service in the Royal Air Force between 1940 when he enlisted and the date of his discharge after the Second World War in 1946; his journey through the ranks from enlisted man to commissioned officer and from "Blighty" to Africa, the Middle and Far East and back again. While it tries to tell of a more memorable time in his life, rather than the story of his whole life, it's fair to say that the period of his service during the war and after was probably the most important part.

Many of the details of everyday life are now forgotten, gone to the grave with those who lived through those momentous events but some of the tales are retold here, albeit with some minor unintentional changes, omissions or even additions; that all depends upon my own memory and how much of the stories my father chose to remember and some of the letters that were somehow saved.

He was just an ordinary bloke from an ordinary background who found himself taking part in some of the most extraordinary times in history. He didn't do anything to mark him out from the rest, just an ordinary bloke doing what had to be done as his part to end the madness of war and he survived.

If I have to dedicate this small work to anyone then obviously it has to be first to my father and mother and then to the 125,000 other ordinary blokes, brave men every last one who answered the call and nightly flew against the Nazi evil as "The Bomber Boys"; the men of RAF Bomber Command and the 55,573 who failed to return. They were all extraordinary heroes.

Brian Walters
March 2016

D E Walters. His RAF service.

David Elwyn Walters was born in Gowerton near Swansea on the 29th April 1917 and was educated at Gowerton Grammar School for Boys and Swansea Technical College. He found employment in 1934 as a Laboratory Assistant at Baldwin's Elba Steel Works in Gowerton for six years, but he was destined for other things.

When war came, Dewi as he was always known, it's Welsh for Dave, wanted to do "his bit" and even though his work as a Lab Assistant in steel manufacture was a "reserved occupation" meaning he was exempt from call-up, at the height of the Battle of Britain he joined the Royal Air Force and immediately volunteered for an aircrew role and on 8th August 1940 attended RAF Uxbridge, however he wasn't recommended for aircrew at that time, but his application for aircrew duties remained on file for future reference.

Following medical checks and kit issue his basic "square-bashing" training was at RAF Hednesford, Staffordshire. It was here that the first major decision of his RAF service was made. Since most of the intake said they wanted to be in "Mech" trades rather than "Riggers", it was decided that in order to split the intake more equally they should stream the men according to their previous civilian experience and qualifications. Dewi, when asked said that he had been a laboratory technician in the Gowerton Steel Works and that he had completed an engineering course at Swansea Technical College. "Good" replied the Sergeant, "Engines" and that was it, in those two words his destiny was sealed.

His service record shows that on 23rd December 1940 his trade was upgraded from an Aircraft Hand (ACH) to a Flight Mechanic (Engines) at the rank of Aircraftsman second class (AC2) or "AC Plonk", sometimes known as "Erks". On 6th January 1941 Dewi was probably employed in the first line inspection and servicing of the aircraft engines and some "on the job learning" at his next posting to Nº 5 Bombing and Gunnery School at RAF Jurby on the Isle of Man while waiting for the next technical course to start.

Dewi started his initial technical training at Nº 7 School of Technical Training based at RAF Innsworth, now known as Imjin Barracks (named after the Battle of Imjin River in April 1951 during the Korean War) in Gloucestershire on 29th August 1941 where he learned the finer points of maintaining aero engines used by the RAF, his trade was upgraded from Flight Mechanic (Engines) to Fitter grade 2 (Engines) in October 1941. This initial period of trade training was followed by a three months posting to Nº 7 Air Gunnery School at RAF Stormy Down near Porthcawl on the South Wales coast on the 14th November 1941, once again servicing and maintaining the engines of the aircraft in use there. On the 29th December, while Dewi was stationed at Stormy Down, a Spitfire MkI (L1038) on a training flight from RAF Hawarden in North Wales ran short of fuel and made an emergency wheels up landing. The pilot, American J.D. Mause survived the landing but the Spitfire was written off. At least it might have provided an opportunity to take a look at or even "blag" a Rolls-Royce Merlin engine, his engine training up to this point had been on radial engines, such the Bristol power plants as fitted to the Beaufighter, Blenheim and the Halifax MkIII, as he said in one of his later letters "In-line engines were a mystery" to him at that time. Being very much a "Let me see how that works" type of man, he probably gained some limited knowledge of aircraft weaponry too which might stand him in good stead in the future. Flight Engineers were also expected to act as stand-by air gunners if it became necessary.

Stormy Down wasn't a particularly successful location for an airfield, it was high up on the coast and the wind would and still does whistle straight off the Atlantic and funnel up the Bristol Channel. In winter it's quite bleak and not at all what could be called welcoming. The grass airstrip was found to be unstable due to the underlying chalk collapsing in the rain, and it rains a lot. It was deemed to be unsuitable as a runway and RAF flying ceased in 1944. It was tried as a location for an Air Training Corps gliding school and for a time in the 1970s a civilian gliding club. There were also plans at some

time to re-activate the 25 yard rifle ranges for use by Territorial forces, but in the end nothing came of it.

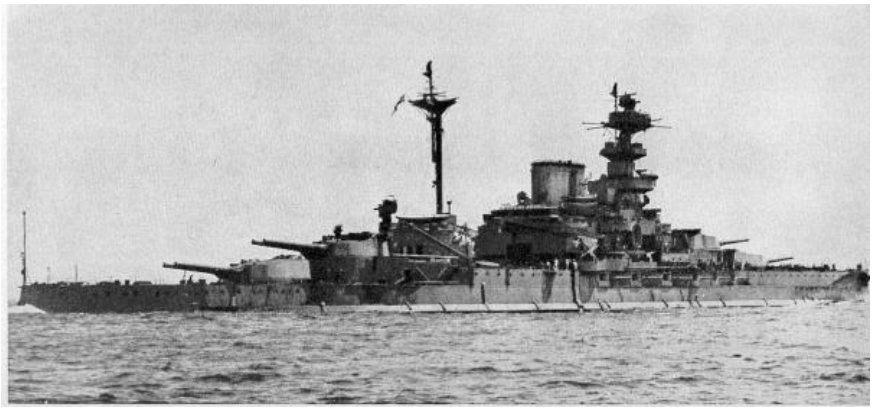
Large scale training of Flight Engineers didn't really get underway until later in 1942, by which time Dewi had been posted overseas to the Middle East on 14th February 1942. As a Fitter grade 2 (Engines) (F2(E)) and with the rank of Aircraftsman second class (AC2) Dewi was posted to RAF Khartoum in Sudan, Africa on 2nd April 1942 after six weeks sea journey on a troopship, first there was the usual issue of tropical kit and inoculations which all happened at the centre at Blackpool prior to his departure then join the ship at the very heavily bombed Liverpool docks. He was to sail south on one of the ships of convoy WS16A. This was one of the fast convoys known as "Winston Specials" from either Liverpool or Glasgow, departing from Oversay, just off the isle of Islay, West Scotland and the convoy's formation point on 17th February 1942.

However, the troopship which Dewi was to sail for Africa on, HMT Strathaird was unable to join the convoy at Oversay as the other vessels did, because at the first attempt to sail the ship managed about thirty yards from the quayside before the tugs had to push her back again. Not a particularly auspicious start to his overseas adventure. She sailed a day late due to a burst joint in a steam pipe in the engine room. Once it was repaired, and being one of the faster ships in the convoy she was able to catch up with and join the rest of the convoy four days later out in the Atlantic. Strathaird was escorted from just outside the Mersey by the Cruiser HMS Newcastle and the destroyer HMS Paladin.

The convoy consisting of well over twenty ships, mostly troopships with some 45,000 troops on board and some cargo vessels was escorted by Royal Navy warships of Force "H", the Gibraltar defence fleet consisting of one "Queen Elizabeth class" battleship, the 33,000 ton HMS Malaya, 3 aircraft carriers, HMS Eagle, HMS Formidable (on passage to Colombo, Ceylon) and HMS Argus (detached from the convoy at Gibraltar with 15 Spitfire fighter aircraft for the reinforcement of Malta), 2 cruisers, HMS Hermione and Newcastle, and up to about 16 destroyers at various times.

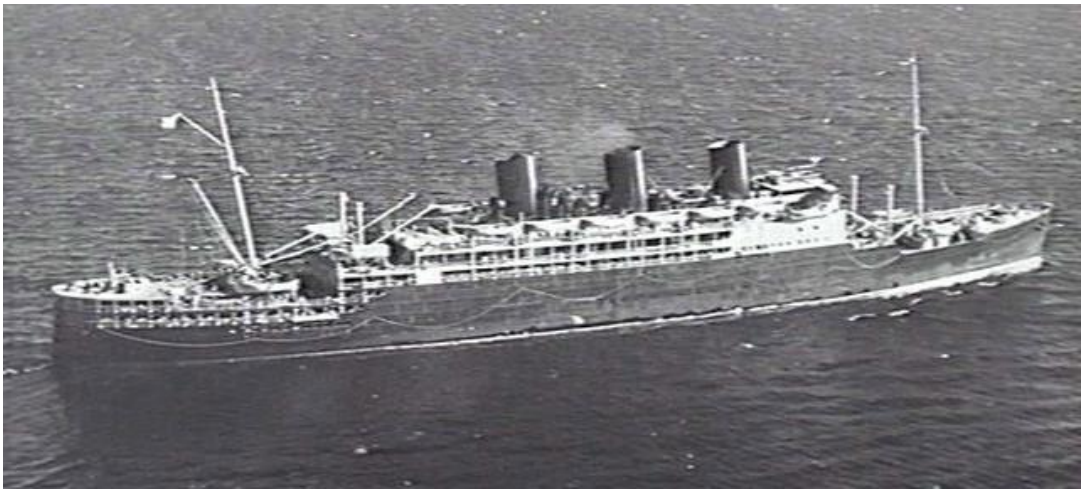
HMS Eagle led by HMS Malaya

Force "H" had been recalled from Gibraltar to the North Atlantic because intelligence reports to the Admiralty had suggested that a German battle group including battlecruisers Scharnhorst and Gneisenau then at Brest, were preparing to sail and about to breakout into the Atlantic.



HMS Malaya

The conditions on the voyage weren't exactly up to the expected usual P&O standard, even though the ship was a converted P&O liner, with 4,700 troops and 200 crew on board space was at a premium. It took a number of days for most of the troops to "find their sea legs", unfortunately those few days were in the North Atlantic with the usual mid-February North Atlantic weather. His diary speaks of the ship rolling like a barrel, an indication of just how uncomfortable the conditions on board could become.



HMT Strathaird

The convoy's route would have been around the north and then down the west of Ireland and then south in the Atlantic Ocean following a zig-zag course to avoid any U-Boats arriving at Freetown in Sierra Leone on March 1st to replenish their fresh water as well as refuelling before continuing south. Dewi was glad to see the back of Freetown after a week and the convoy departed on the morning of Friday 6th and continuing south to Capetown where some of the ships were detached. Rounding the Cape of Good Hope and past Cape Town the convoy then entered the Indian Ocean. The convoy would have been under Royal Navy escort to guard against the threat from German U-boats and surface raiders all the way to Bombay. There was also a threat from Japanese submarines operating in the Indian Ocean. Continuing north to the next stop at Durban.

The convoy arrived in Durban in the morning of Saturday 21st March, and unlike the stop at Freetown the troops were allowed some shore leave that afternoon. The residents of Durban were very welcoming towards the troops arriving on the convoys, in fact Dewi and 2 of his mates were "adopted" by as his diary records "a nice old lady" who insisted that she should take them for supper on two evenings and

even gave them some books to take with them. Durban, at the time seemed to be a pleasant change from the war in Europe, a seemingly almost party atmosphere and no blackout. That was soon to change. On June 11th, following 3 suspected Japanese submarine attacks on merchant vessels in the area east of the Cape, a blackout was ordered along that stretch of coast.

At Durban Dewi and the troops heading to African deployments changed ships onto the new "Mauretania" for passage into the Red Sea and onwards to Port Suez while the rest of the convoy proceeded under escort to India. Conditions on board this new ship were even worse than on the Strathaird, so bad in fact that about 50 men, including our hero walked off the ship. There was a precedent for this action, a similar situation had developed in January on convoy WS14 at Durban when 187 men walked off the "HMT City of Canterbury" complaining about the conditions; bugs, cockroaches, lice and other vermin including rats. The overall result of that protest was 28 Courts-Martial for the Army personnel and some sentences of up to two years hard labour, although all sentences but one were later suspended. Owing to some confusion over whether or not an actual order had been given to the RAF personnel as had been given to the Army to board the ship, Court-Martial proceedings could not be started against them. Maybe references to that incident might have influenced the decision by the men to go back aboard. At least the food made up for the rest of the bad conditions.

HMT Mauretania II

As a fast ship, the Mauretania sailed from Durban on the 23rd without escort, up through the 260 mile wide Mozambique Channel between East Africa and the island of Madagascar and on towards the Gulf of Aden arriving on Sunday 29th. On the following day they passed through the 12 mile wide Bab el Mandeb straits between Perim Island and Eritrea and entered the Red Sea heading for Port Suez. Dewi and his mates decided to sleep on deck for the journey to keep themselves and their kit free of the bugs.

Madagascar was at the time controlled by the Vichy-French and the allies were concerned that they were about to cede control to Japan, or at least allow Japanese naval vessels to use the port facilities which could threaten convoys moving along the African coast to and from the Middle and Far East as well as a large part of the Indian Ocean. The Empire of Japan had previously formed an alliance with Nazi Germany with the signing of the Tripartite Pact of September 1940, and they became "full partners" in the axis forces following the attack on Pearl Harbour on 7th December 1941 when on 11th December Germany declared war on the United States of America.

The Battle of Madagascar to capture the port of Diego Suarez at the north end of the island opened with "*Operation Ironclad"* on the 5th May 1942 and "*Operation Streamline Jane"* was launched to capture the whole of the island in September. By the 6th November 1942 fighting ceased and an armistice was granted, thereby securing that part of the route along the East African coast. The coast of East Africa consisted of a number of countries, some like South Africa and Kenya as Commonwealth countries were under British control, some were ostensibly neutral such as Mozambique which was under Portuguese control and others including German East Africa, modern day Tanzania and Italian Somaliland which were decidedly unfriendly.

The Mauretania docked at Port Suez on Thursday 2nd April, the day his Middle East posting became active, and the RAF personnel were taken by train to the RAF Middle East Pool at Kasfareet camp Ismailia. On the 7th Dewi was informed he was to be posted to RAF Khartoum and on the 21st he left Kasfareet for the railhead at Cairo. Departing from Cairo at about 8.00 pm, as night fell he glimpsed the Pyramids in the distance. On the morning of the 22nd he had arrived at El-Shillal (probably now known as Nag Hammadi) where he left the "comfort" of the train through the fertile Nile flood plain and changed to the "comfort" of the Nile steamer "Thebes" for the journey up river to Wadi-Halfa.

The Nile Steamer "Thebes"

Dewi arrived at Wadi-Halfa on the morning of the 25th and left again in the late afternoon by train for Khartoum. This part of the journey would be even more uncomfortable than earlier days; 36 hours through the desert in carriages which were little more than cattle trucks. Apart from being tedious it would have been a pretty uncomfortable journey across the desert by rail and through Atbara, often thought of as "the Clapham junction of the Sudan". He finally arrived in Khartoum at six in the morning of the 27th April.

The history of World War Two in Africa is usually directed towards North Africa and the Western Desert, but there were a number of other areas of hostility in the Middle East and although Khartoum was a long way from the war zone on the Mediterranean coastal area, it is however very close to Abyssinia, modern day Ethiopia in East Africa. The Italian dictator Benito Mussolini had already seized Abyssinia in 1936 as a part of his "New Roman Empire", and as such he presented a very real threat to British interests not only in Sudan but the Horn of Africa, British Somaliland, now Somalia and passage through the Bab el Mandeb straits into the Red Sea from the Gulf of Aden and up to the Gulf of Suez and most importantly, the Suez Canal. This was, as Churchill saw it a definite threat to communication with the "British Empire"; India and beyond and he was determined that the Suez Canal should remain under British control, even convincing the Americans of the threat. Khartoum is less than 300 miles

from the Abyssinia border and just 600 miles from the capital, Addis Ababa. The British military presence at a number of bases in the Sudan was primarily there to protect those British interests.

By the time Dewi arrived in the Sudan, on the North African coastal areas the British and Commonwealth Desert Army troops, Mussolini and Rommel's Italian forces and Afrika Korps had been locking horns and chasing each-other to and fro across the Western Desert since 10th June 1940; Benghazi had changed hands five times by the end. At about nine-forty on the evening of 23rd October 1942, some 1000 miles north of Khartoum at a little railway halt about 220 miles inside Egypt and 65 or so miles from Alexandria the final battle for North Africa was opened with a massive artillery barrage by General Bernard Montgomery and the 8th Army with the second Battle of El Alamein. The battle lasted some 12 days by which time the Nazi forces were finally forced to retreat back along the coast for the last time. On the 8th November 1942 "*Operation Torch"* was launched landing British and American troops at Algiers and Oran in Algeria and Casablanca in French Morocco. By 13th May 1943 the Allied forces having fought their way through to Tunis from both the east and west, all axis military activity in North Africa had ceased.

During his service in Khartoum he was working as station ground crew on second and third line maintenance in one of the airscrew (propeller) repair workshops rather than being attached to any particular squadron or out on the flight line. In the workshop he was accompanied by four other Welshmen which could cause some confusion should anybody walk in and shout "Hey, Taff!" His personal record of service shows that he was hospitalised on two occasions; the first time on 13th July 1942 for two weeks at Nº 59 General Hospital at Gebeit, Sudan not for any war injury, but according to family stories, for the treatment and removal of a verruca; a particularly painful wart-like growth on the sole of the foot which prevented him from walking properly, and the second time, on 9th October 1942 for a further two weeks at a British Military Hospital because the first treatment for the verruca seemed to have been somewhat less than successful. By the time Dewi left Khartoum he had accumulated a number of good conduct awards and been promoted to Leading Aircraftsman (LAC).

While Dewi was in Sudan he re-applied for an aircrew position, and on 28th December 1942 his letters tell that he was delighted to have been recommended for aircrew training as a Flight Engineer to commence when the duration of his posting in Khartoum was complete. He gladly left Africa in September 1943, looking forward to getting into the real war and as he said in his diary "Doing something useful" in the war in Europe and no doubt vowing never, ever again would he return to the hot and stinking land of sand and flies, even the Arabs say that "When Allah made the Sudan he laughed", although according to his letters, there were one or two Corporals he would have liked to meet again once he'd "got his three up" in other words when he was wearing the three stripes of a Sergeant on his arm.

During his time in the Sudan, especially after the final defeat of the Afrika Korps in Tunisia Dewi felt that he was not only wasting his time but the country's resources too and like so many other young men of the time he thought he should really be having a crack directly at Hitler, his letters show that he was certainly eager for the opportunity. While he was stationed in Khartoum he often wondered, even worried whether the war would be over before he could do his bit in the European theatre of operations.

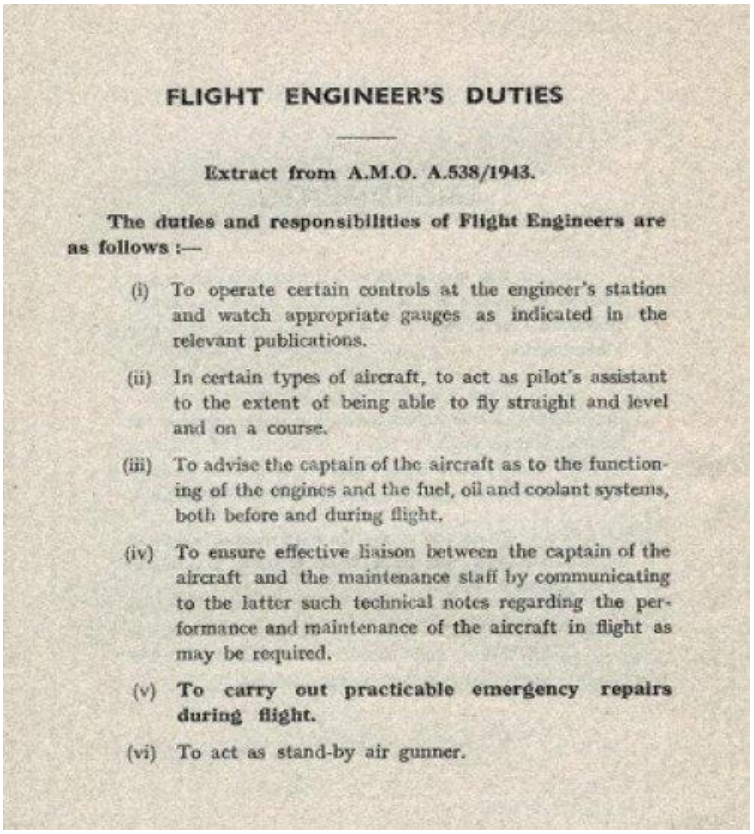
Dewi always considered himself lucky, he always said so in his letters home and throughout his adventures on the "Dark Continent" he always seemed to be close enough to the action to be able to say "I was there" and far enough away to be out of harm's way. For his service in the Sudan at that time he was authorised to wear the "Africa Star" medal ribbon on his uniform jacket.

Sadly, his beloved mother passed away shortly before he arrived home from Africa.

Back to Blighty

Dewi was aware that Flight Engineers were trained at the station which in his letters he called "St.A" for the benefit of the censor but following some home leave he was posted to Nº 63 Operational Training Unit (OTU) at RAF Honiley in Warwickshire instead. This was a night fighter training unit where he filled in time until on 16th December 1943 he commenced his aircrew training at Nº 4 School of Technical Training (4SofTT) at RAF St. Athan near Cardiff in South Wales to undertake initial training as a Flight Engineer on the Halifax bomber. Training courses at St. Athan were not specific to a particular aircraft type but there were opportunities to become familiar with other four engine types such as the Lancaster, Liberator and Sunderland. This training course was successfully completed and he passed out on 29th January 1944. He was awarded his flight engineer's brevet and instantly became 1284157 Sergeant Walters, D. E. RAFVR.

Upon completion of basic and advanced technical Flight Engineer training he was posted to 1652 Heavy Conversion Unit (HCU) at Marston Moor, also known as "41 Base" in Yorkshire to undertake flying and battle training. The training involved learning and handling the Halifax MkIII bomber's systems including engines, electrical, fuel, pneumatic and hydraulic systems, bombing techniques, fighter affiliation, asymmetric landings with one or two engines shut down and other emergency drills. The aircrew training at Marston Moor would also have included such delights as dinghy and 'Mae West' inflatable life jacket drills in some very cold water, escape and evasion exercises, training and practice with the standard aircrew personal weapon the Webley .38 revolver, practice parachute landings from a tower and no doubt somewhere along the line the niceties of a twenty mile route march at the nearby RAF Acaster Malbis airfield. I remember a strange sort of side stroke method of swimming he had which he reckoned he learned in the RAF.



FLIGHT ENGINEER'S DUTIES

Extract from A.M.O. A.538/1943.

The duties and responsibilities of Flight Engineers are as follows :—

(i) To operate certain controls at the engineer's station and watch appropriate gauges as indicated in the relevant publications.

(ii) In certain types of aircraft, to act as pilot's assistant to the extent of being able to fly straight and level and on a course.

(iii) To advise the captain of the aircraft as to the functioning of the engines and the fuel, oil and coolant systems, both before and during flight.

(iv) To ensure effective liaison between the captain of the aircraft and the maintenance staff by communicating to the latter such technical notes regarding the performance and maintenance of the aircraft in flight as may be required.

(v) **To carry out practicable emergency repairs during flight.**

(vi) To act as stand-by air gunner.

After 48 hours or so flying time over the four months of the course he qualified as a Flight Engineer on 2nd June 1944.

It was here at Marston Moor that he was crewed up with the men with whom he would be posted to his operational station; the men with whom he would go to war in the hostile skies over occupied Europe and Hitler's Third Reich.

The Halifax.

The Halifax, built by Handley-Page initially as a twin engine bomber built to meet the Air Ministry specification P.13/36 and was fitted with the Rolls-Royce Vulture engines; the same engines that were fitted to the ill-fated Avro Manchester, and consequently it too lacked the performance expected of it. The Halifax was almost immediately redesigned with four Merlin engines and later upgraded with Bristol Hercules radial engines, and while it not always used for incursions deep into Germany, it did fly many very hazardous operations, including mine-laying at the entrances to German sea ports and estuaries (codenamed "Gardening") and some were operated by the RAF based at RAF Tempsford on behalf of the Special Operations Executive (SOE) for dropping supplies to the resistance and inserting agents into occupied France by parachute. The SOE special version had the nose gun and mid-upper gun turret removed and faired over, modifications were also made to the fuel venting and engine exhaust shrouding to reduce noise and the red glow which might have been seen and heard from the ground.

The Halifax was also deployed as a glider tug and as ECM (Electronic Warfare and Counter Measures) aircraft for 100 Group RAF. They were also used by Coastal Command in an anti-submarine warfare role as well as for meteorological and reconnaissance duties.

Halifax bombers were also included in the numbers when the call from the Air Ministry was for "Maximum Effort", or in other words a 1000 plus bomber raid, after all Bomber Command wasn't able to put 1000 Lancasters over a target at any time, for the first 1000 bomber raid on Cologne, 131 Halifaxes were dispatched plus aircraft and crews also taken from Operational Conversion Units (OCUs). Three Halifaxes were lost on the raid.

The first operation for the Halifax, listed by the Bomber-command website was on 10/11th March 1941 when 6 Halifax MkI aircraft of 35 Squadron were sent to Le Havre, one was lost. The last listed war-time operation for the aircraft was to Wangerooge on 25th April 1945. Of course, following the fall of the Third Reich on May 7th 1945 and VE Day on the 8th, the Halifax was, as were other bomber types tasked with bomb disposal over the North Sea. Immediately the hostilities were over, many of the Halifax "B" aircraft were hurriedly converted to Halifax "C" in the first instance by removing the guns and fairing over the mid-upper and tail gun turrets and the squadrons transferred to RAF Transport Command along with their aircrews.

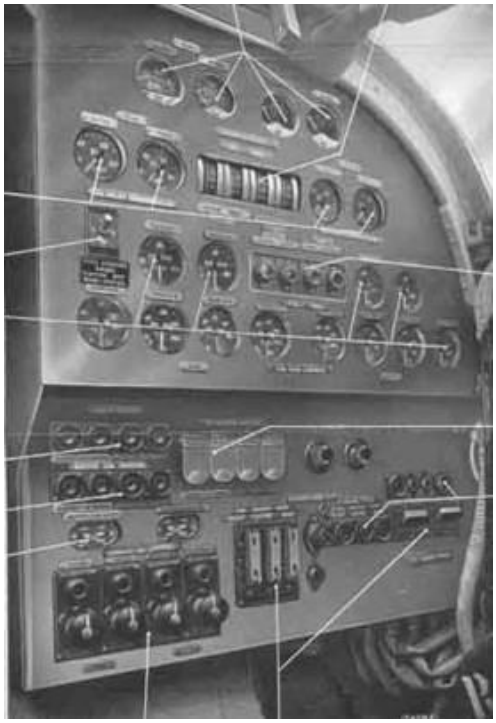
Of the 6,178 Halifax aircraft built in numerous variants, the "B" MkIII (2,091 built) and the "B" MkVI became the mainstay variants of the Halifax versions between 1943 and 1945. The MkIII was fitted with the 1,650 horse power Bristol Hercules XVI sleeve valve radial engines and was identifiable from the earlier types because of the large "barn-door" style tail-fins instead of the smaller "D" shaped pointed profile fins which improved the lateral stability.

Early versions of the Halifax did have a forward gun turret, although that was removed and replaced with the "Perspex" clear plastic nose fairing on the MkIII onwards, and the bomb aimer was given a single forward firing machine gun to play with. Earlier versions of the mid-upper turret had two machine guns, but following modification, it was later fitted with the Boulton-Paul 4 gun turret. The rear gunner's turret had four Browning .303 machine guns. Some later Halifax variants were fitted with "50 calibre" machine guns which had a greater hitting power than the .303 guns.

The maximum bomb load of the MkIII Halifax was 14,500 lb in three bays, one in the fuselage and one each side in the wings between the fuselage and the inboard engines, but because of the design of the three bomb bays, the maximum bomb size was the 2,000 lb standard bomb, although the first 8,000 lb high capacity bomb was dropped by a Halifax MkII of 76 Squadron on Essen on the night of 10/11th April 1942.

The Halifax, along with other heavy bomber types were beginning to be fitted with the "GEE" radio navigation aid in mid-1942 and on 23rd April 1942 a Halifax successfully performed the first flight test

of the H2S ground mapping radar bombing system. By 1st January 1943 twelve Halifaxes and twelve Short Stirlings had been fitted with H2S and by mid-1943, large scale deployment of the system was well underway. H2S required a small rotating radar dish antenna to be installed in a streamlined "blister" fairing on the underside of the fuselage just aft of the bomb bay doors.



MkIII Halifax Flight Engineer's panel

Later modifications to the Halifax "C" airframe included a large fairing arrangement over the fuselage bomb bay to increase the cargo carrying capability. The first Halifax derived commercial aircraft was the Halton, and by 1948 the Handley-Page Hastings, also a derivative of the Halifax was entering service with RAF Transport Command.

During war-time operations the Halifax flew some 82,773 sorties and dropped a total of 224,207 tons of bombs. The Halifax remained in service with various air forces until 1961. None remain in an airworthy condition but there are two "complete" examples on static display; one in Trenton, Ontario in Canada and the other at the Yorkshire Air Museum at Elvington near York and one or two in a partial or in a "conserved as recovered" condition in various locations, mainly in Canada and also at the RAF Museum at Hendon. The YAM Halifax has been fitted with the similar Hastings wings because Halifax wings in an acceptable condition weren't available while it was being rebuilt.

Yorkshire Air Museum's Halifax NP-F "Friday the Thirteenth"

The reconstructed Halifax MkIII at the Yorkshire Air Museum is presented to honour on the port side NP-F (F - Freddie) of 158 Squadron with the nose art of "Friday the Thirteenth", the aircraft which against all the odds successfully completed an incredible 128 operational sorties over enemy territory and on the starboard side H7-N, an aircraft of 346 "Guyenne" (French) Squadron based at RAF Elvington following 77 Squadron's relocation to Full Sutton in the middle of May 1944.

Aircrew and 76 Squadron.

76 Squadron was based at Holme-on-Spalding Moor in Yorkshire and was equipped with the Halifax B MkIII four engine heavy bomber. Dewi arrived there in the middle of June 1944, shortly after D-Day on 6th June and after a few flights for the crew to become familiar with the surrounding area both by day and by night his first operational sortie came on the night of 22nd June '44 to attack railway yards at Laon in France.

A Halifax 'B' MkIII of 76 Squadron RAF

He was crewed up with Flt/Sgt T G "Jock" Neill and the bulk of the tour appeared to be either in support of the allied advance around Caen and Falaise in Normandy during the period immediately after the D-Day landings or operations against the V1 and V2 weapon storage and launching sites, the so-called "ski sites" in Northern France as an ongoing part of "*Operation Crossbow"*; the destruction of the Nazi "vengeance" weapons programme, although one raid on Mont Candon (Mimoyecques) was discovered after the liberation of France to have been the site for Hitler's V3 'supergun' weapon. The site was finally destroyed in July 1944 by the famous 617 "Dambusters" Squadron who dropped a number of the Barnes Wallis designed 5 ton "Tallboy" bombs on it causing much irreparable damage to the underground installations. At the time it was thought to have been part of a site just for launching the V2 rocket powered missile, the domed roof of the V2 assembly and launching bunker of La Coupole is not very far away. Other targets at this time included railway marshalling yards as part of the "*Operation Overlord"* attacks to disrupt German communications and railway installations and also fuel dumps hidden in the forests of northern France.

In August 76 Squadron was released from supporting Overlord and they returned to attacking industrial targets in the Ruhr, known to the crews as "Happy Valley", although the Operations Record Books show that they did return to attacking targets in and around the battle areas of Northern France. It was during the raid on Russelsheim to attack the Opel vehicle factory on the 12th August '44 that his Halifax "MP-B" (LW637) was hit by flak towards the rear of the fuselage and they were forced to make a crash landing damaged at Woodbridge emergency aerodrome in Suffolk. The pilot, Sgt Neill was injured, as were two other crew members, Sgt Causton and Sgt Levy by flak shrapnel. The rear gunner, Sgt. C.W. Appleby was killed instantly by the flak shrapnel. Dewi suffered an injury to his back during the crash landing but was deemed to be "walking wounded". The injury would eventually come back to haunt him in later life and finally contribute to his relatively early death in 1970 aged just 53 years.

Sergeant Appleby is buried in a Commonwealth War Grave in his home town of Burton-upon-Trent. He was thirty nine years old, married with children. Records suggest that Flt/Sgt Neill returned to

service after hospital treatment. Sadly it appears that their injuries were so serious that Sgt Causton and Sgt Levy were unable to continue serving in the RAF.

Dewi (left) and Jock Neill
Circa mid-late 1950s. Taken at home in Cornelly

Details taken from the 76 Squadron Operations Record Book (ORB)

SUMMARY OF ATTACK ON RUSSELSHEIM (12-13/8/44)

Each of the twenty three aircraft made a successful take-off, and there were no early returns.

There were extensive gaps in the cloud over the target, but the haze and activity of the searchlights made it almost impossible to see ground detail. Due to interference, only eight of the aircraft heard the M/B's instruction to bomb the incendiary fires. The remainder bombed the PFF markings, and if the PFF were accurate, the attack should be a great success. The incendiaries appeared to be burning in a line running NW to SE in the target. Over the target fighters were active and there was also a moderate barrage of heavy flak. One of our aircraft "B" (F/S. Neill, Captain) sustained extensive damage, and the Rear Gunner of the crew was killed. The remainder of the crew received gunshot wounds, and it was only the skill of the Pilot and the determination of the entire crew, which brought the aircraft back to crash land at Woodbridge. Two of our aircraft failed to return from this mission.

Extract from "To See the Dawn Breaking - 76 Squadron Operations" by W R Chorley.

"The marshalling yards at Dijon in eastern France and a flying bomb site concealed in woods near Wemaers-Cappel occupied the squadron for the next two attacks. Then came a heavy raid by nearly 300 bombers on the Opel vehicle works at Russelsheim southwest of Frankfurt. It proved a disappointment. A thick ground haze persisted and for most of the attack instructions being broadcast by the Master Bomber were indistinct. Searchlight activity was intense and the flak gunners pumped thousands of shells high into the cones of light. Flight Sergeant Neill's aircraft was hit in the rear fuselage, killing his rear-gunner Sergeant Appleby instantly. Shrapnel from this near lethal burst wounded Neill, Causton his wireless operator and Sergeant Levy in the mid-upper turret. Displaying tremendous fortitude Neill kept control, crash-landing several pain-wracked hours later at Woodbridge."

Note. PFF: Pathfinder Force. Bombers carrying highly trained crews flying lower and ahead of the main bomber stream to accurately mark the target with coloured flares. The Master Bomber (M/B) would continue to circle the target area directing the attack by VHF radio, a technique pioneered by Guy Gibson during "Operation Chastise", the Dams raid on 16th/17th May 1943.

Sadly, I never had the chance to sit down with him and really have that "What did you do in the war Daddy?" chat, no doubt putting these notes together would have been so much easier if I had and like so many of his comrades Dewi didn't speak much of his experiences during the war, however after a pint or two he would recall some of the more humorous incidents. My mother did tell of 'bad dreams' and nightmares about either the Cologne or Essen missions. I think that had he lived into older age then he might have been able to start talking about it much as some other veterans have now found themselves able to do.

It's my guess that he preferred to remember his time in Transport Command where he could indulge his love of flying with nobody shooting at him, although his personal opinions of the organisation of Transport Command at the time might not stand over-critical scrutiny. I do remember him trying to tell me about the crash landing. Their aircraft had been hit by flak and the DR Compass, the main unit for which was usually fitted near the door, well back down the fuselage and as far away as possible from magnetic influences such as the iron and steel used in the engines and so on had been damaged and had caught fire threatening the aircraft. He was able to in his words "hack it off the wall and throw it out of the aeroplane through a shell-hole". Apparently the journey home in a damaged aircraft wasn't always as straightforward as the reports would suggest either, the pilot had been severely wounded when shrapnel ripped away much of the muscles from both calves.

When the aircraft landed it did so quite hard and ended up off the concrete after passing up and over a couple of ditches. Had they been in a Lancaster they would probably have all been killed with the wheels being driven up through the wings, but the undercarriage of the Halifax was built of sterner stuff, it survived and the aircraft was brought to a relatively safe halt.

Doubtless, the Flight Engineer was in a position to at least take some of the strain off the pilot during the homeward run, although from family stories I believe that F/Sgt Neill did land the aircraft at Woodbridge, but probably not without some assistance. Unfortunately there appears to be no further documentary evidence for these events.

As a result of the flak burst and the crash landing, the aircraft LW637 was badly damaged but was not written off, it was recovered and repaired at the RAF Woodbridge repair facility and returned to service with 1658 HCU at RAF Ricall on 21st November 1944. Two other aircraft failed to return from the Russelsheim raid, F/O Ings' aircraft (LL578) crashed 2km north east of Hamm in Germany and Flt.Lt. Cramer's aircraft (LW695) went down near Quint, also in Germany. It was not a good night for 76 Squadron.

The crew

F/S. Neill, T.G. (Pilot/Captain) Thomas
F/S. Llewellyn, J.
Sgt. Penner, J.
Sgt. Causton, R.H. (Wireless Op)
Sgt. Levy, B.J. (Mid-upper Gunner)
Sgt. Walters, D.E. (Engineer) David Elwyn
Sgt. Appleby, C.W. (Rear Gunner) Charles William

76 Squadron Operations 22nd June to 12/13th August 1944

Date	Target	Details	Halifaxes	
			Sent	Lost
22/6/44	Laon	Railway marshalling yard, northern France	100	4
27/6/44	Mont Candon	Originally thought to be a V2 Rocket launch site. Later discovered to be the Mimoyecques V3 'supergun' site	104	0
6/7/44	St. Martin L'Hortier	V1 storage site. Destroyed whilst under construction.	314	1
6/7/44	Croixdalle	V1 Flying bomb weapon launch site		
9/7/44	Chateau Berneppe	V1 Flying bomb weapon launch site	197	1
12/7/44	Thiverny	V1 storage and supply dump.	168	0
15/7/44	Nucourt	V1 storage and supply dump.	162	1
25/7/44	Foret du Croc	V1 storage and supply dump.	160	1
28/7/44	Foret de Nieppe	V1 storage site.	159	1
30/7/44	'Battle area G'	In support of ground troops. South of Caen.	200	0
2/8/44	Foret de Nieppe	V1 storage site. Flying in S/L Harwood's crew.	10/99	0
7/8/44	'Battle area Caen'	'Totalise 3' Aborted over enemy territory ordered by the Master Bomber. All bombs brought back.	13/392	0
9/8/44	Foret de Mormal	Fuel dump	27/147	0
10/8/44	Dijon	Railway marshalling yard attacked.	16/104	0/3
12/8/44	Russelsheim	Opel vehicle factory attacked. Aircraft extensively damaged. Crash landed at Woodbridge.	23/96	2/7

Daylight raids are shown in green. Aircraft numbers shown as squadron/total Halifax aircraft deployed.

There were other types of sorties, air tests, transfers, fighter affiliation and so on. After 15 operational sorties, he completed just half of an operational tour. The crew, now decimated by injuries and the loss of their rear gunner, Dewi returned to Marston Moor for a period of advanced flying training and to await a new crew assignment.

Back to 1652 HCU. Marston Moor.

Following the crash landing there was a period of leave to recover from any physical effects and Dewi was then posted back to 1652 HCU where the flying training commenced again in early September 1944. It was there he was crewed up with 'Hoppy' Hopgood and the rest of the crew. Some of this advanced flight engineer training as his logbook shows also involved a number of exercises in the Link trainer, an early form of flight simulator which could be used for ground based basic pilot instrument flying training or as a procedures trainer.

By the end of November the training was over again and the whole crew was posted to 77 Squadron where they served out the rest of the war.

A new posting – 77 Squadron.

On 9th December 1944 Dewi arrived at 77 Squadron at Full Sutton with his new crew and after a couple of familiarisation flights, the first op with 'Hoppy' Hopgood's crew was to Munchen Gladbach on the 28th December followed by another op to Cologne two days later.

The 77 Squadron Halifax crew. Dewi is on the extreme left.

The month of January 1945 was a quiet one for Dewi and the crew with just one hour long fighter affiliation sortie and two ops; one to Magdeburg and the other to Gelsenkirchen. There was no doubt a bit of a drink-up in the Sergeant's Mess when Dewi was promoted to Flight Sergeant at the end of the month.

On the 18th February 1945 Dewi was discharged in order that he could be re-engaged and commissioned to the RAFVR with the rank of Pilot Officer on the 19th February, doubtless just a "paper exercise" as far as the day-to-day work was concerned.

The last year of the war appears with hindsight to have been somewhat "less dangerous" than the early years, with the allies steadily gaining air superiority casualty numbers were beginning to fall but searchlights and flak or anti-aircraft fire were still a major danger and of course combat flying was then and still is extremely hazardous.

Whether the squadrons were aware of it or not, the next three busy months were to be RAF Bomber Command's last hoorah of the war.

The crew

Flt.Lt E.G. Hopgood. Pilot/Captain
Flt/Sgt D.E. Walters. Flight Engineer
F/O A.J. Barrett. Navigator
F/O R.A. Rust. Air Bomber (Bomb Aimer)
Flt/Sgt G. Aitman. Wireless Operator
Sgt R. Fox. Air Gunner
Sgt D. Minchin. Air Gunner

The crew.77 Squadron. Formal photograph.
Back row left to right: E.G.Hopgood. R.A.Rust. A.J.Barrett.
Front row: G.Aitman. The two air gunners, R.Fox and D.Minchin. D.E.Walters.

77 Squadron Operations 28th December 1944 to 18th April 1945

Date	Target	Details	Halifaxes	
			Sent	Lost
28/12/44	Munchen Gladbach	Night attack on the railway marshalling yard	14/46	0
30/12/44	Cologne	Night attack on the railway marshalling yard at Cologne-Kalk	15/356	0/1
16/1/45	Magdeburg	Night attack on the railway marshalling yard	7/320	0/17
22/1/45	Gelsenkirchen	Horst Oil refinery site	14/107	0
1/2/45	Mainz	Area bombing. Despite claims, bombing was largely inaccurate	11/293	0
7/2/45	Goch	Area bombing. Probably part of the prelude to "*Operation Veritable*", the Battle of Reichswald at the northern end of the Western Wall (Siegfried Line)	19/292	1/2
13/2/45	Bohlen	Lippendorf Industrial area, Braunkohle-Benzin synthetic-oil plant Bohlen	21/326	1/1
23/2/45	Essen	Area bombing	18/297	0/1
24/2/45	Kamen	Daylight attack on the Bergkamen synthetic oil plant	20/290	0/1

27/2/45	Mainz	Daylight attack. Created a firestorm, but the railway installations were largely undamaged. Trains were able to restart after three days.	22/311	0/1
3/3/45	Kamen	Night attack on the Bergkamen chemicals plant	15/201	0
7/3/45	Gardening	Mine laying in Northern German waters	6/15	0/2
9/3/45	Gardening	Mine laying at Kattegat - Oslo	4/21	0
14/3/45	Homberg	Railway installations	18/127	0/2
4/4/45	Harburg	Rehania Oil plant. U/S starboard outer engine. Jettisoned bombs and returned to base early.	21/277	0/1
8/4/45	Hamburg	Night area bombing	21/263	0/3
11/4/45	Nuremberg	Oil plant	24/129	0
13/4/45	Gardening	Mine laying at Kiel Bay (Flensberg)	8/27	0
18/4/45	Heligoland	German Naval base	26/332	0/3

Daylight raids are shown in green. Aircraft numbers shown as squadron/total Halifax aircraft deployed.

During March ’45 the squadron was being re-equipped with the later Halifax MkVI, the re-equipping was complete by the end of the month. The MkVI was fitted with the more powerful 1800 horse power Bristol Hercules 100 radial engines, increased fuel capacity and H2S ground mapping radar bombing aid.

Dewi completed his tour following the Heligoland raid so he missed the last Halifax bombing mission of the war to Wangerooge, an island naval base just off the German coast and close to Wilhelmshaven. I remember him telling me of the turn and the run for home from Heligoland, the island was completely engulfed in smoke and dust and the sight of just one lone anti-aircraft gun shooting straight upwards at nothing. If it wasn’t war, it could have been almost amusing. The crew did successfully complete that final raid but Dewi’s place was taken by Warrant Officer J.S. Stephens.

He was just lucky to survive the hostilities, total war makes no distinctions. 55,573 of his Bomber Command Comrades in Arms weren’t as fortunate.

Squadron records show that there was a “Thanksgiving parade” held at the Full Sutton Station to mark Victory in Europe Day. 77 Squadron along with the other squadrons of No 4 Group Bomber Command was transferred to RAF Transport Command at 0001 hrs on the 8th May 1945. In late August 1945 77 Squadron now equipped with the Douglas DC3 Dakota was transferred to RAF Broadwell near RAF Brize Norton. It was later transferred again to India. 76 Squadron was also transferred to RAF Broadwell and then to the Far East at the same time.

Once again Dewi was posted and joined 51 Squadron at RAF Leconfield as 196830 Pilot Officer D.E. Walters RAFVR on 27th May 1945. The London Gazette (29th May 1945) lists his promotion (Seniority) date as 19th February.

Transport Command - 51 Squadron and Dewi's return to Africa.

During hostilities 51 squadron operated their Halifax bomber aircraft out of RAF Snaith as part of 4 Group Bomber Command. At the end of the war the squadron was transferred to Transport Command and relocated to RAF Leconfield. Still with their Halifaxes, rapidly converted to the "C MkIII" but soon to be re-equipped the larger Short Stirling, which as a bomber wasn't really up to the job, but as a transport aircraft it was more than capable.

The conversion to the cargo Halifax required the removal of the machine guns and fairing over the gun turrets. With the removal of the guns, there was no further need for the Air-Gunners who were withdrawn reducing the crew to five members. Later modifications to the cargo Halifax included the re-engineering of the fuselage bomb bay and an enlarged fairing fitted to the underside.

The crew and two of the ground crew. Dewi Walters was the flight engineer, third from the right. The aircraft was a Halifax III. This picture was probably taken at RAF Leconfield sometime during June 1945.The pilot Flt.Lt. A St.John Price is in the middle

The squadron like a number of others was tasked with transporting personnel and material across North Africa and on to and from India and Singapore, but first there was a small matter of bomb disposal to be addressed; dumping surplus unarmed munitions in safe areas of the North Sea.

One can only wonder what Dewi thought when he was told that he would be flying in and out of RAF Castel Benito, Tripoli in Libya, North Africa; the land of sand and flies – again.

By mid-August 1945 51 squadron had moved south to RAF Stradishall, near Cambridge and the re-equipping with the Short Stirling, now in its transport role was well underway and Dewi had been promoted on 19th August 1945 to the rank of Flying Officer. Conversion from the Halifax to the Stirling was for the Flight Engineer a relatively straightforward procedure; fitted with the same Bristol Hercules engines and most of the other systems were if not the same, very similar. Only the layout of the various

panels was different, and some say the Stirling was more logical; it was said that the controls and instruments of a Halifax were thrown in through an open window and fitted where they landed.

All attempts to add names to faces have for the most part failed, the squadron now being part of Transport Command, only the captain of the aircraft is mentioned in Squadron Records.

The aircrew are all in the back row, the other personnel are probably passengers. They were flying in converted bombers so parachutes were a necessary extra. The aircraft is also a Halifax III. Dewi is standing, second from the left. The only time that the Halifax MH-W (WAAF WINSOME) is shown in his logbook is 24th June 1945, listed as "Continental X country".

The Stirling was the mainstay of the squadron until March 1946 when they started to receive the Avro York, a large cargo carrying derivative of the iconic wartime bomber the Lancaster. The civilian passenger version of the Lancaster became the "Lancastrian", but later some civilian airlines started to use the York too.

During the hostilities the Stirling had already found its natural role as a troop transport, paratroop carrier and glider tug, particularly during the D-Day invasion and the Battle for Normandy, *Operation Market Garden* and the final crossing of the Rhine by airborne troops. It had a cavernous fuselage, ideal for cargo carrying and in safe airspace there was no need for the air gunners. The crew was therefore reduced to five members.

The MkV transport variant of the Stirling had the forward machine gun turret removed and the nose section in front of the cockpit extended with large cargo doors fitted instead. The rear turret was also removed and faired over.

The crew and others, this time in front of a Short Stirling MkV. Dewi is second from the right. This was probably taken just before the crew and passengers flew out to RAF Castel Benito, now Tripoli Airport in Libya where they were flying the trans-North Africa/Middle East transport route (Castel Benito – Lydda – Shaibah – Mauripur and back).

Many of the "family stories" involved aircrew "high-jinx" in and around Cambridge, stories of my mother being an 'honourary member' of the crew. By all accounts, when they all went out for a drink, possibly in the RAF bar in the Eagle there would be five pints of 'black and tan' and two half pints for my mother; she refused point blank to drink from a pint glass. Dewi and his pilot 'Johnny' Price became very close friends and when Dewi was married, Johnny was his best man.

There were other stories such as the crew getting out of the taxi in Trumpington Street in Cambridge after a night out and falling into the horse trough with the usual mutterings that only qualified aircrew could utter especially when the trough was full of water.

When Flt.Lt. Arthur St. John "Johnny" Price was "promoted out" as a Squadron Leader and posted to 297 Squadron at RAF Earls Colne on the 1st November 1945, it apparently came as a complete surprise to the crew which was probably then split up. Dewi spent the rest of the year flying with various other crews. At the end of December 1945, 51 squadron completed its trooping duties.

At the start of 1946 Dewi and 51 Squadron were still stationed at Stradishall preparing for their new aircraft, the Avro York C1.

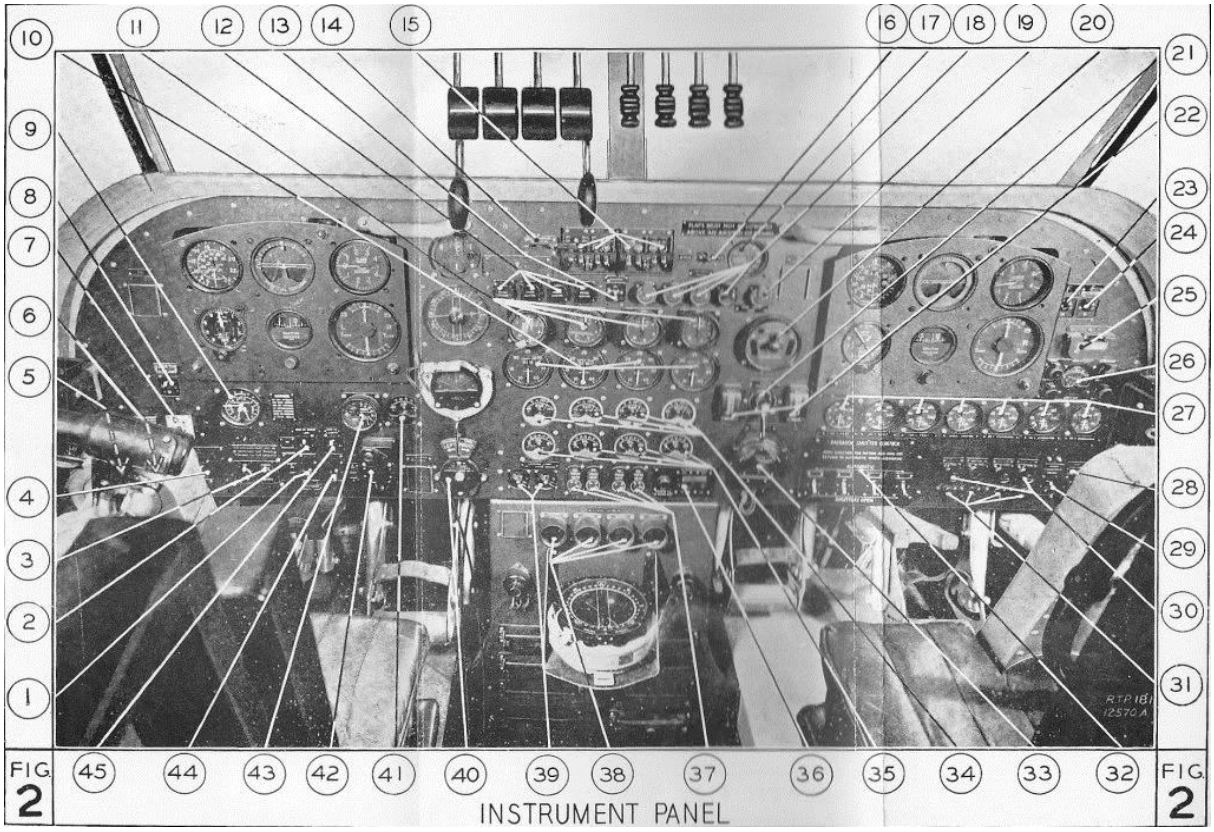
The Avro York C1.
Dewi flew as flight engineer on this actual aircraft MW185 on 28 May 1946.

January and February saw Dewi, now permanently crewed up Flt.Lt. Sanders undertake some extra training with radio navigation aids and by the end of April, now fully qualified on the York the crew was posted to 246 Squadron at Holmsley South in Hampshire. The Avro York C1 was built as a military transport aircraft, although based upon the most successful and iconic wartime bomber, the Lancaster.

The wings, undercarriage and the four Rolls-Royce Merlin 24 1610 horsepower engines were from the Lancaster as were the oval tailplane fins and rudders, however the large flat sides of the fuselage meant that a side wind could upset the lateral handling characteristics. The central tail fin was introduced to reduce this unwanted effect.

The normal crew complement in the cargo configuration was four; Pilot/Captain, Flight engineer/second pilot, Navigator and Radio operator. In the passenger configuration the crew would have been joined by a steward, these days the duty is probably more akin to the Air Loadmaster.

Unlike the other types which Dewi had flown as the Flight Engineer where his normal working position was separate from the pilot, on the York the Flight Engineer occupied the co-pilot's position, the right hand seat on the flight deck. He would have been able act as the second pilot and take control of the aircraft whenever it was needed and the bulk of the engineer's instrumentation is either on the central console or in the case of the fuel gauges and controls on the right hand control console.



The Avro York C1 flight deck instrument panel.

In the picture of the instrument panel, instruments and controls which are grouped in fours are engine controls, the seven dials on the right (27) are fuel tank contents gauges. The six standard flight indicators are duplicated on each side. They are from top left to bottom right air speed indicator, artificial horizon, vertical speed indicator (rate of climb and descent), altimeter, D.R Compass or Direction Indicator, rate of turn and slip indicator. The magnetic compass can be seen between the two seats immediately below the four propeller feathering buttons (38), The layout of the six main flight instruments is a standard across all aircraft types and is largely still in use today.

Although Dewi was no longer flying in the RAF by the time of the Berlin Airlift between June 1948 and April 1949 Avro Yorks, both military and civilian flew over 58,000 sorties carrying up to 10 tons of freight per flight.

The Middle and Far East transport route.

The Middle East route flew from British or sometimes European bases south to Castel Benito, Tripoli in Libya and after a stop-over across North Africa and on to Lydda or Cairo. Lydda is now the Ben Gurion International Airport in Israel. From there, the flight continued on to Shaibah, modern day Basra, Iraq and on to Mauripur, Karachi in Pakistan.

Once the squadron was re-equipped with the York C1 the route was extended onwards from Mauripur to Palam (now Indira Gandhi International Airport, Delhi) and on to Changi in Singapore. Some of the other RAF Stations which might have been included in such transport routes as the needs required:

Dum-Dum: Calcutta
Pegu: Burma
Negombo: Ceylon, now Sri Lanka
Almaza: Cairo
Poona: Maharashtra, Bombay (Now Mumbai)
Habbaniya: Baghdad, Iraq
Arkonam: Tamil Nadu, India (S.E.India)
Barack Pore: West Bengal, India
Luqa: Malta
Istres: Marseilles, Southern France

246 Squadron. Holmsley South.

Dewi, still with Flt.Lt. Sanders' crew flew a couple of familiarisation flights from Holmsley South, Hampshire before setting out on the now well established route to RAF Castel Benito and onwards in stages to RAF Palam, a return trip which could take over two weeks. Coincidentally, in December 1944 246 Squadron was the first to receive the Halifax modified for cargo duty; the "C" MkIII.

The first week of May saw the crew practicing QGH or Radio Direction-finding Let-down procedures at both RAF Lyneham and their home station and by the 19th May they were heading south once again.

Their first stop was at RAF Castel Benito in Libya for refuelling and then a night flight to RAF Almaza in Egypt for their first stop-over where another crew took the aircraft onwards to its destination. On the 21st the crew flew out of Almaza in another aircraft heading for RAF Shaibah (Basra) in Iraq. The following day the trip continued from Shaibah to RAF Mauripur (Karachi) in Pakistan for another two day stop-over. RAF Palam was just three and a half hours away so they were able to complete that part of the trip both ways in the one day. On the 26th they were on their way home changing aircraft three times while stopping at the same stations as the outward trip, arriving back at their home station on the 31st May. These days, as a comparison, the flight out to Delhi will take just eight hours and about forty minutes direct from London.

Flt.Lt. Sanders' crew only did that one trip out to India before being posted yet again on the 3rd June 1946 to 242 Squadron at Oakington; a return to the Cambridge area, and no doubt the odd evening at the Eagle.

242 Squadron. Oakington.

242 squadron is probably best known for its Battle of Britain history when it was stationed at Duxford and equipped with Hawker Hurricanes flown by Canadian pilots and was commanded by Douglas Bader. However by 1945 it had been transferred to Transport Command and after training on Wellingtons it was initially equipped with Short Stirlings. In 1946 the squadron was re-equipped with the Avro York C1 and tasked with scheduled freight flights to the Azores, India and Singapore through RAF Castel Benito, Tripoli in Libya. Dewi and the crew were once again tasked with the route they had become familiar with, across North Africa to India and on to Singapore.

Dewi on the North African coast

In many cases, the aircraft were kept and serviced at their home bases and flown in to RAF Lyneham or RAF Colerne in Wiltshire for loading before the trip south.

Dewi's last flight as a Flight Engineer in the Royal Air Force was on October 1st 1946, shortly before 242 squadron was merged with 511 squadron. Dewi was demobbed with the customary new civilian suit, shoes and hat on 21st November 1946 at the 101 Personnel Discharge Centre at Warton, Lancashire after six years of service and with a total of 919 hours in the air.

Full circle, almost. 38MU RAF Llandow

Although no longer in the RAF, Dewi found employment for a while as a civilian flight engineer with 38 Maintenance Unit at RAF Llandow near Llantwit Major. Llandow was at the time an annexe to RAF St. Athan, where his aircrew days had all started.

The work being undertaken at Llandow at that time was as one of the storage and disposal units where the now no longer needed bomber aircraft were brought prior to being sold off to other air forces or sold for scrap. I have a vague memory of Dewi stopping the family car at the side of the road between Llantwit Major and Wick and taking me to the perimeter fence at the south western edge of Llandow to see the aeroplanes parked out on the field there, I can't remember now whether they were Lancasters or his beloved Halifaxes.

By 1950 the maintenance unit was also dealing with the first generations of RAF jet aircraft; the Gloster Meteor and the de Havilland Vampire.

Dewi (4th from the right) at Llandow maintenance unit.

RAF Llandow was closed in 1957. Parts of the old airfield, mainly portions of the runway and perimeter track are now used for motorsports and some of the remaining buildings are industrial and storage units.

The Royal Observer Corps

Following his demob Dewi's involvement with all things aeronautical didn't diminish one iota.

In about 1952 Dewi and the family moved to North Cornelly, where I grew up after he found work at the then new Steel Company of Wales Abbey Works in Margam, Port Talbot as a General Works Services maintenance fitter, and so I've been told he hated every minute of it.

It was while we were living in Llantwit Major shortly after his demob that he volunteered for service at the local Royal Observer Corps (hole in the ground) post and when he started work at Port Talbot he transferred to the Briton Ferry ROC post as a Leading Observer where they practiced for the "Cold War" turning hot and the presumed "Nuclear Armageddon" which would follow by tracking pretend fall-out clouds. I do remember taking an interest in a wooden box with a celluloid film in it that drove a little pointer up and down a scale marked in Röentgens. He did qualify for the "Observer Corps" medal. The Briton Ferry ROC post was closed in 1968.

The Royal Observer Corps Medal

Dewi was a man not given to great outward shows of emotions, like so many who had been through the horrors of war but I like to think that he was pleased when I and later my brother joined the local Air Training Corps squadron and no doubt chuffed to bits, though he never said so when in 1970, shortly before he died, I was commissioned to the RAFVR (T) as a Pilot Officer.

Dewi's medals.

1. 1939-45 Star with rosette (Bomber Command clasp, awarded to all bomber aircrew in 2012)
2. Africa Star
3. France and Germany Star (Awarded instead of the Aircrew Europe Star to aircrew who commenced bombing operations after D-Day.)
4. Defence medal
5. War medal
6. Royal Observer Corps medal

B.C. FORM 10.

BOMBER COMMAND FLIGHT ENGINEER LOG.

'A' TO BE COMPLETED BEFORE FLIGHT:-

CAPTAIN:-	F/ENGINEER:-	BOMB LOAD:- lbs.	TOTAL FUEL:- gls.	A.U.W.:- lbs.
DATE:-	AIRCRAFT TYPE:-	MK.	AIRCRAFT Nº:-	LETTER:-

'B' CHECK BEFORE FLIGHT:-

ITEM	INITIALS	ITEM	INITIALS
PITOT HEAD COVER OFF		ESCAPE HATCHES SECURE	
STATIC VENT PLUGS OUT		CONTROLS UNLOCKED	
NITROGEN SYSTEM ON		AUTO-CONTROLS (CLUTCHES IN)	
SUPERCHARGER 'M' GEAR		D.R. COMPASS ON	
AIR INTAKES (COLD)		GILL OR RAD. POSITION OPEN OR CLOSED	
BRAKE PRESSURE BEFORE 'CHOCKS AWAY'	Lbs/□"	BRAKE PRESSURE AFTER LANDING	Lbs/□"

'C' TO BE COMPLETED AFTER FLIGHT:-

TIME TO NEAREST MINUTE OF:-					
START UP	Hrs.	SWITCH OFF	Hrs.	TOTAL RUNNING TIME	Hrs.
TAKE-OFF	Hrs.	TOUCH DOWN	Hrs.	TIME AIRBORNE	Hrs.
SET COURSE	Hrs.	OVER BASE	Hrs.	TIME ON COURSE	Hrs.

TARGET:- SQUADRON:- 640

'D' FUEL ANALYSIS:-

ITEM	FUEL USED	FUEL LEFT	AIR MILES	TRACK MILES	A.M.P.G.	T.M.P.G.	G.P.H.
F/ENGINEER	Gls.	Gls.					
F/ENGINEER LDR	Gls.	Gls.					

'E' REMARKS:- BY F/ENGINEER.

LOG COMPLETE:-
F/ENGINEER

REMARKS:- BY F/ENGINEER LDR.

LOG CHECKED:-
F/ENGINEER LDR.

Wt. 34419/Q1635. 250,000. 10/44. S.B.Ltd. 21-937.

Resources.

1. RAF Form 1767 Flying Log Book for Flight Engineers. D.E.Walters.
2. His personal letters to and from friends and family.
3. Personal record of service, David Elwyn Walters. RAF Archive. RAF Cranwell.
4. Selected Squadron Operations Record Book. The National Archive.
    a. 76 Sqdn RAF Form 541. Operations Record Book. August 1944
    b. 77 Sqdn RAF Form 540. Operations Record Book. December 1944 to May 1945
    c. 77 Sqdn RAF Form 541. Operations Record Book. December 1944 to May 1945
    d. 51 Sqdn RAF Form 540. Operations Record Book. May 1945 to December 1945
5. "To See the Dawn Breaking: 76 Squadron Operations". W.R. Chorley.
6. "4 Group Bomber Command, an Operational Record". Chris Ward.
7. "4 Group. The Pendulum and the Scythe". Ken Marshal.
8. "The London Gazette", various dates, online version.
9. The Internet: Official RAF websites, Wikipedia, Squadron associations' websites.
10. John Larder, Archivist, Yorkshire Air Museum. Elvington.

A crash landing

Now, as the events of the Second World War pass from living memory into the nation's history, it is often left to the descendants of those men who did those things to make an attempt to document their deeds.

I cannot pretend that this is the absolute truth, instead the story told here depends upon what my father chose to remember and relate to me and on my own memory considering that I was told almost sixty years ago.

This is the story of his aircraft's attack on the Opel vehicle works in Russelsheim, Germany on the 12/13th August 1944 and the subsequent crash landing.

The flight out was fairly routine and they were well into the bombing run; probably the most hazardous part of the sortie when on the approach to the target the aircraft had to maintain straight and level flight to allow the Bomb Aimer to accurately identify the target and release the bombs so that they landed in the target area.

It was during this bombing run that a flak shell burst close to the aircraft, the shrapnel from which instantly killed the rear air-gunner, badly injured the mid-upper air-gunner, wireless operator and pilot as well as causing almost fatal damage to the aeroplane.

Some of that damage was caused to the D.R. compass system, the master unit for which was mounted well back along the fuselage away from most magnetic influences. The flak burst had started a fire in the unit, a fire which could have threatened the whole aircraft. The Flight Engineer was able to leave his normal position, which during the flight was behind the pilot and go back to deal with the fire, this he did by hacking the unit off the wall with one of the crash axes and throwing it out of the aircraft.

The disruption to the bombing run meant that the aircraft had to drop out of the main stream and return to the bombing run start point. This they did and they dropped their bombs on target before turning for the run home.

Other damage to the aircraft resulted in the loss of internal lighting and the severing of some fuel pipes which allowed some fuel to leak out onto the floor of the fuselage before the Flight Engineer was able to take action to close off some fuel valves and seal the leak. There was also some damage to the 'Perspex' fairing at the nose of the aircraft which allowed a very large draught to blow right through the fuselage which fortunately prevented a build-up of petrol fumes from the fuel slopping about on the floor. The loss of internal lights meant that the navigator couldn't see his charts to do his job and the various instruments essential to safe flight couldn't be seen either. It was then that the engineer had another one of his "brain-waves", he was good at brain-waves – most of the time; the crew could work by the light of glowing cigarette ends.

After dropping their bombs, and joining the end of the bombing stream, they had become a 'straggler' and the favoured prey of German night fighters but in this respect they were lucky and they made it to the coast, however due to the difficulties in navigation they were suffering without the D.R. compass they missed the gap in the coastal flak batteries and were attacked again. They managed to dive through the flak without further damage and out over the North Sea.

The raid had cost the crew their rear-gunner killed, the mid-upper gunner and the wireless operator injured along with the pilot who had much of his calf muscles ripped away by shrapnel.

Woodbridge aerodrome. The modern standard width runway can be seen.
The wartime emergency landing concrete runway is outlined in red.

Safe for now, the run for home in a damaged aeroplane was never as straight-forward as the reports would suggest, but they were able to reach the emergency aerodrome at RAF Woodbridge in Suffolk. One of only three such aerodromes, the others were at Manston in Kent and Carnaby in Yorkshire and like Woodbridge they too were specially designed with a reinforced concrete runway five times wider than that of a normal airfield and on a direction in line with the route of returning aircraft rather than prevailing winds so that damaged aircraft could land with little or no need for direction changes, sometimes impossible changes.

On the approach to Woodbridge, the engineer fired a "Very pistol" flare indicating that there were injured personnel on board and their Halifax touched down, very much harder than normal, but down on terra-firma and more importantly on its wheels. The pilot's injuries meant that he was unable to apply the brakes with the necessary force to bring the Halifax to a normal halt, even though they had a serviceable hydraulic and pneumatic systems. Had they been in a Lancaster, the undercarriage would probably have not withstood the impact force of the hard landing and resulted in either a complete collapse or the undercarriage legs and the wheels being driven up through the wings and a pancake landing which with all the petrol still slopping about in the fuselage would have probably resulted in a fatal fire.

Once the Very light flare had been fired the engineer moved to his crash position but the force of the landing caused him to hurt his back, an injury which in time would contribute to the causes of his relatively early death.

The Halifax undercarriage was much stronger and withstood the impact, and still on its wheels the aircraft careered along the concrete runway, through a fence and with the ambulances and crash tenders in hot pursuit through three ditches before finally coming to a rest, the moment that the aircraft came to a stop the pilot immediately passed out probably due to the pain, blood loss and relief. The emergency escape hatches of the Halifax were also more usable than those of the Lancaster and once the engines were shut down those three crewmen who were able to extricate themselves did so and the crash crews were able to remove the injured crewmen and the body of the rear-gunner to the medical centre.

A contemporary aerial photograph of RAF Woodbridge and RAF Bentwaters so that the runways can be compared.

I don't remember ever hearing him say anything about an aching back, and as I grew up, I only moaned about a backache once, probably after a bit of gardening or something equally silly, it was then that my father told me about some of the crash landing, finishing the story with "You don't complain about a backache when they're pulling your rear gunner out in three pieces". I never moaned about a bad back after that, not even when the doctors found and thankfully removed a benign tumour inside my spine.

Dewi kept a diary during his journey from Britain to Khartoum.

Overseas Diary

Saturday February 14th 1942

Left kitting out station at Blackpool for Liverpool. Went straight on board HMT Strathaird a converted P&O liner. 4700 troops on board plus 200 crew mostly Lascars. Packed like sardines in our mess on "G" deck. Real "panic" when we sling our hammocks at night. Distance between hammock hooks is only 2 feet so you can guess what the sleeping accommodation is like. Managed to give 2 letters to a civvy when we were coming from the station to the boat.

Sunday 15th

After very restless night due to strangeness of the hammock, we were tumbled out at 6.0 am. Breakfast at 7.0 after which we hung about on deck until 10.0 am when we had lifeboat drill. Found out today that there is about twice as many on board as there should be. Everybody is crazy over the price of fags 1/3 for 50. What a change from civvy street. Still in dock. Hell of a mess on the docks from Jerry Blitzes.

Monday 16th

Started out from quayside – at least cast off and tugs pulled us out about 30 yards, but something went wrong and the tugs pushed us back in and tied up again. Found out later that a steam pipe joint in the engine room had burst. Remainder of the convoy out in the Mersey left without us. Apparently this is the fastest boat in the convoy and we will catch up with them in a day or two.

Tuesday 17th

Rumours that we would start at 9.0, then 10.0, but eventually left the dockside at 2.0 pm. Steamed straight out of the Mersey across towards Ireland then up the Irish Sea and passed the Isle of Man about 7.0 pm. We had an escort of 1 destroyer and 1 corvette with 2 Spitfires above us, but they all left us at nightfall, evidently relying on our speed to dodge any subs which might be about. Can feel the vibration of the propellers badly in our mess and it is worse in the hammock. Sea fairly calm. Rumours that we are calling at Iceland and then down the American coast.

Wednesday 18th

Steaming N.W. and passed Ireland during the night. Escort of 2 destroyers picked us up early morning and 2 Lockheed Hudsons of Coastal Command circled over all day. Typical North Atlantic seas making everyone, or nearly everyone feel rather sick. Have been feeling very good all day except when down in the mess, where conditions are terrible. In the evening sea got rougher and people sick all over the place. Ernie Hall (one of the Stormy lads) missing since 9.0 am, looked all over the ship for him but could not find him. He turned up or rather staggered into the mess about 8.0 pm, having been in the lavatory ill since 10.0 am and unable to stand.

Thursday 19th

Sea still very rough and started raining about 10.0 am. People still sick about the place. Still have the two destroyers with us, poor lads on board them must be having a rough time. Makes

me feel good when I think of what they go through. The destroyers go down out of sight one minute and then up on top next minute. No planes with us today. Still no sign of the convoy that we were supposed to be with. Have done roughly 1500 miles in approximately NW direction. Sea calmed down a bit in the afternoon and blue sky, but changed again to fog about 4.0 pm. Have turned watches back 2 hours since we started.

Friday 20th

Nothing of importance except funny rumours flying about the ship. Sea still rough but everybody seems to have found their sea-legs.

Saturday 21st

Started off by turning around and steaming North – One of our light cruisers met us about 9.0am and flashed signals to us. We altered course and about 12.30 two Swordfish aircraft of the Fleet Air Arm flew over us and indicated a new course. Sighted the convoy about 1.0 pm. What a sight! I don't think I will ever forget it. Ship after ship all along the horizon with a screen of destroyers out along the perimeter. When we caught up with them we counted 30 ships altogether. The ships were mostly troop transports and some cargo ships but we have an escort of 1 battleship, 2 aircraft carriers, 2 or three cruisers and about 10 destroyers. Marvellous!!

The sea has cut up terribly rough as I am writing this and the old ship is rolling like a barrel. Up to meeting the convoy we have steered first NW then N then W then SW then S back to N and NW then now S again.

Wednesday 25th

On guard duty today outside ship's orderly room. Oh this red tape! Men placed on guard over drinking water taps – but no water in them!!

Nothing important in the last few days. Steering a zig-zag course in a southerly direction and now well into the tropics. Sea quite calm and the weather terribly hot but we have not changed into tropical kit yet. Several fellows fainting with heat.

Thursday 26th

Nothing much today except that I saw one of the planes taking off from aircraft carrier, tip over and go right in the sea in front of the carrier. Think crew were safe.

Friday 27th

Bit of excitement today. Could hear heavy firing in the distance for a couple of hours. We changed course steering away from the sound at the same time throwing smoke screen up behind us. But nothing came of it and went back on old southerly course later on.

Sunday March 1st

Woke this morning to find the African coast in sight. Went straight towards it and dropped anchor off Freetown. Terribly hot now and when ship stopped there was no breeze at all. Local niggers came out in their canoes and dived after silver coins. They could speak English very

well as well as singing popular songs. Nice to see land after nothing but sea and ships for such a long time. Red colour of the sand shows up nice against blue of the sea. Queer trees growing on the mountains which rise practically from the shore. When night fell nobody bothered about blackout and all the lights from the portholes of the ships together with the windows of the houses on shore made an unforgettable sight after the blackout of England that we had grown used to after 3 years. Everyone has been given instructions to wear long trousers as protection against the mosquitoes. Terribly hot at night.

Friday 6th

Neglected the diary lately but nothing much has happened until today. Past week has been awful, terribly hot and I can understand why Sierra Leone is called "the white man's grave". Several cases of dysentery amongst the troops supposed to be caused by the fruit sold by the locals. We left Freetown harbour at 0900 this morning with no regrets. Sea very calm and the course all day has been westerly. Saw several schools of porpoises and a few sharks, also turtles and flying fish. Terribly hot again tonight. I have a bad touch of "sweat pimples" on my body – like measles rash.

Wednesday 11th

Nothing much to write about lately. Crossed the Equator Monday sometime but without any of the celebrations of peacetime. We had pay on Saturday but only 10/-, still if one takes things easy it should last a week. But I don't take it easy as it doesn't seem to last a week with me. The ship is now covered every day with "Housey" schools and card schools which I keep out of. My money goes on cigarettes and food and occasionally a game of housey which helps to pass the time. Definite now that we are going to Durban and will have some shore leave there. Heat and familiarity makes many fellows short tempered with the resulting fights taking place. Don't know what to do next. Bored stiff.

Thursday 12th

Passed the Island of St. Helena about 7.0 am, but only saw it faintly on the horizon. Weather getting cooler now as we leave the equator behind.

Friday 13th

Nothing much to write about today except for one little incident. That was when we saw a bird. Rather strange to see so far out to sea as this. Found out later on that it was called a "Cape Pigeon", just about the size of a swallow with white feathers on the back of the wings. Nothing to do all day so I have been asleep most of the time on deck.

Friday 20th

Day after day nothing else to see except water and the other ships of the convoy, everybody fed up to the teeth with the same things all the time.

On Tuesday the convoy split up, about half the ships turned off to Capetown whilst our ship and the rest of us was picked up and escorted by a Union Castle liner which has been turned into an armed auxiliary cruiser. She is a beautiful looking boat but we are sorry to see that the "Newcastle", a cruiser is not with us anymore. We are keeping close to the coast and can see the lighthouses flashing at night. Should get to Durban anytime now.

Saturday 21st

Arrived at Durban this morning and to everyone's delight were allowed on shore in the afternoon. Very nice place indeed with all modern houses or hotels with on average about 12 floors. The people of Durban are very nice to all servicemen. I and 2 pals were taken to supper by an old lady who insisted on our going with her. We had a wonderful view of the lights of Durban from the roof garden of her hotel. The lights were simply great, all different colours and no kind of blackout anywhere.

Sunday 22nd

Went ashore again today and had a ride in a rickshaw. These fellows earn all the money they get. The boys make up races amongst themselves and cheer madly as they go tearing down the road. The authorities here have made wonderful gardens all along the front. One of the nicest places is the amphitheatre which is an open air dance "hall". The sunken garden is beyond description, especially at night. Had supper with the same old lady. She gave us books to bring back.

Monday 23rd

Changed ships today from the Strathaird to the new "Mauretania". This is a beautifully built ship but unfortunately is full of bugs, cockroaches and rats. About 50 of us, me included walked off the ship in protest but it was of no use. We sailed at teatime in a NE course heading for the Red Sea. I am sleeping on deck rather than in the bunks. Very fast ship and so we are sailing without an escort of any kind.

Tuesday 24th

Many of my pals are in cabins and so are lucky but there are bugs in there too. Food is very good.

Saturday 28th

Today we should be somewhere off the coast of Italian Somaliland. Have been sleeping on deck all the time and so we have been able to keep ourselves and our kit free of bugs. Wednesday and Thursday nights we saw some marvellous storms. This is about the Monsoon period and the rain comes down in sheets. On Thursday night the lightening was right overhead and lit up the whole sea. The thunder was deafening.

Sunday 29th

Turned into the Gulf of Aden about 4.0 pm, sea was very calm and hardly a breath of wind. Passed very close to the coast of Italian Somaliland, looked a terrible place.

Monday 30th

Passed town of Aden in the night. Passed between Perim Island and the coast of Eritrea: Place was beyond description.

Saturday 4th April

Landed at Port Suez on Thursday 2nd and taken by train to the RAF Middle East Pool at Kasfareet camp Ismailia. In a tent with four others, Dai Clear, G Discombe and two others. Hoping to be posted to the place as Taffy Clear or "Dissy". Should have pay today. Flies are a nuisance in this place. Arabs are a stinking lot of rags walking about on two legs.

Sunday 5th

On fatigues at new camp about 5 miles from here. Terribly hot in the daytime but cold at night. Food is quite good at this place.

Tuesday 7th

Posted today with Taffy Clear and a few more of my mates on the old Strathaird to Khartoum. Taffy Clear is as happy as a dog with ten tails. Poor old Dissy is going to Asmara in Eritrea but that is not far from Khartoum. Plenty of Italian prisoners working on this camp. The other two in this tent are posted to supply columns.

Monday 19th

Have not had anything in particular to write about for the last fortnight so I have been saving paper. Old Discombe left us on the 10th and nearly broke down when he was saying goodbye. He was one of the best lads I have ever met. The other two lads left the following day so Taffy Clear and I were left alone in our tent. We were joined later by one of the lads who came from Stormy Down with me. Hell of a nice lad. Had our first experience of a sand storm last week. On times could only see about 20 yards. The sand and dust was everywhere. After they were over (lasted 2 days) it was hot and getting hotter. Flies are a great pest now also sand fleas and mice. Been bathing in the Suez and having a good time, rapidly perfecting the noble art of scrounging especially in regards to parades.

Wednesday 21st

Left Kasfareet 6.30 am and arrived in Cairo 12.30 pm. Spent 5 hours walking around looking at the sights but didn't think much of the place. Taff Jenkins bought a camera and took a few snaps of the places of most interest. Boarded the train at 8.0 pm.

Thursday 22nd

Just before it went dark last night I saw the Pyramids in the distance. Spent the night on the rack of the carriage. Several Indian troops are in the carriage with us. Nice lads. Travelled miles sitting on the buffers of the carriage, coolest part of the train. Arrived at El-Shillal at about 11.0 am and changed from the train to a steamer on the Nile. The natives of this part stink something awful, but some are good natured enough. Taff Jenkins left his camera on the train, when he ran back for it, it had vanished.

Friday 24th

Travelling down the Nile since 8.0 pm last night, on the river boat Thebes. Dining on our "iron rations" bully beef and biscuits. Getting hotter every hour. Several lads down with bad doses of diarrhoea.

Saturday 25th

Arrived at Wadi Halfa at 6.0 am but did not go ashore until 10.0 am. Quaint little native bazaars with the natives selling all sorts of merchandise. Left W.H. at 5.0 pm on a train of the Sudan Railway. The carriage is no more than a cattle truck. We will be on it about 36 hours.

Monday 27th April 1942

Arrived Khartoum 6.0 am.

Note: Some of the language used in his diary might seem to be somewhat offensive to modern eyes, but it was quite acceptable at that time.

RAF Full Sutton

Situated in the East Riding two miles from Stamford Bridge, RAF Full Sutton was a late addition to Yorkshire's Bomber Command airfields. Opened in 1944, Full Sutton operated the Halifax MkIII and VI of No. 4 Group's 77 Squadron. The following year, in July 1945, the airfield was passed to the charge of RAF Transport Command as its bomber role came to an end.

Unlike many wartime austerity airfields which reverted to agriculture as soon as hostilities ceased, Full Sutton remained in military use into the Cold War as a Thor missile base. It eventually closed in 1963.

Crashed Halifax MkIII in staged photo of WAAF nurses attending to 'injured' crew

Of all the airfields on this part of the East Riding of Yorkshire, RAF Full Sutton is one of the least complete. The main technical site has been extensively redeveloped as a farm and industrial estate

around the original wartime perimeter track. A separate complex to the north houses Full Sutton Prison and civilian light aircraft use a grass strip on the site of one of the original wartime runways.

Full Sutton airfield old and new

The main asphalt runway, meanwhile, extends from north to south and, along with the western perimeter track, is one of the last surviving relics of its Bomber Command heyday. The abandoned control tower was demolished in 2003.

RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor

Typical wartime building alongside a repurposed hangar

Unlike RAF Full Sutton, the abandoned runways and perimeter track of RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor are long gone, but the technical site, with its surviving hangars and other wartime buildings, remains more intact. Today, a memorial to its Bomber Command squadrons stands near the abandoned airfield's main entrance – now an industrial estate where newer buildings stand amid their surviving wartime counterparts.

Halifax MkII DK148 'Johnnie the Wolf' returns from Essen – just!

Construction of RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor began in 1940 and was completed the following year. The airfield was built to Bomber Command's Class-A standard – three concrete runways surrounded by 36 hard standings, dispersed across the base in a bid to protect valuable aircraft from enemy attack. To the north-east, the main technical site comprised three hangars, beyond which were administration and operations blocks, and accommodation for some 2,000 personnel. Bomb stores were housed well away to the north-west of the runways.

Originally a 1 Group station, the base passed to No. 4 Group Bomber Command in June 1943. The Halifax MkIII and VIs of 76 Squadron remained at Holme until 4 Group transitioned to RAF Transport Command at the end of World War Two. The close of hostilities saw the deserted bomber base placed on 'care and maintenance' status until the escalating Cold War brought the US Air Force, who lengthened the runways before moving on in 1957.

A 1663 HCU Halifax lands at Holme, October 1943

An early Blackburn Buccaneer S1 of the Fleet Air Arm

The enhanced infrastructure proved useful later when RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor was leased to Blackburn Aircraft Ltd the following year as a test site. Because the runway at nearby Brough Aerodrome, Blackburn's main factory, wasn't long enough for the new breed of fast jets under development including the successful Buccaneer, the old wartime airfield remained in use for the next 25 years.

Former Sergeants Mess, demolished around 2004

It was finally abandoned in 1983 by British Aerospace which, by that time, had swallowed up most of the UK's historic aviation companies.

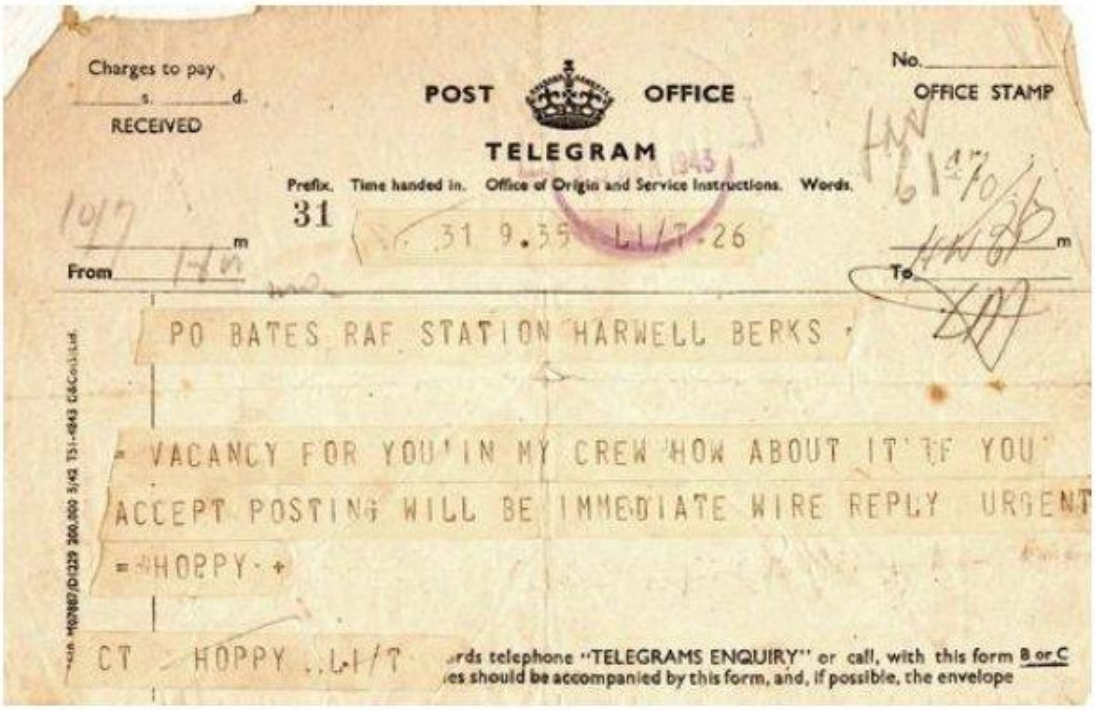
Surviving hangars at Holme-on-Spalding Moor

The area once occupied by RAF Holme-on-Spalding Moor's long runways has now returned to its pre-war use as farmland. The old T2 and J type hangars (above), meanwhile, live on amid a few other wartime buildings

Combined ops … A family affair

A number of years ago my cousin Ken started writing a biography of his father's wartime RAF service; Bill Bates was a navigator and flew most of his ops with 106 Squadron where his pilot was John Hopgood and the squadron commander was Wing Commander Guy Gibson. On 17th January 1942 they did their last raid in Lancasters to Berlin. Bill Bates's logbook describes it as uneventful. His Lancaster had the famous American Broadcaster Ed Morrow on board and Guy Gibson took Richard Dimbleby for the BBC. Their famous commentaries often played on radio and TV describes the raid as far from uneventful.

At the end of the tour he was asked to join John Hopgood for a "special job" we now know as "Operation Chastise"; the Dambuster's raid. Following some very firm instructions from the family, he declined the offer.



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After a period as an instructor, he returned to ops flying Mosquitoes with 105 and 106 squadrons, and it was this period which drew my attention to some of the raids on which both he and my father flew, although, at the time neither probably knew of the other's presence.

My father Sgt. Dewi Walters was a flight engineer on 76 Squadron flying the Halifax B MkIII and the Mosquitoes were then being used by the Pathfinder Force, marking targets with flares for the "heavies" to bomb on.

A list of the raids on which both my father and uncle flew.

6/7/44. Croixdalle
This raid was a daylight raid against 5 flying bomb (V1) sites and included 314 Halifaxes, 210 Lancasters, 26 Mosquitoes, 1 Mustang. The Mustang was flown by Wing Commander Leonard Cheshire and is mentioned in Paul Brickhill's book "The Dambusters"

9/7/44. Chateau Berapre 197 Halifaxes, 120 Lancasters, 30 Mosquitoes
Another daylight raid against 6 V1 launching sites.

12/7/44. Rollez/Thivemy. 168 Halifaxes, 46 Lancasters, 8 Mosquitoes
Daylight again. A raid against a bomb storage dump at Thivemy and a launch site at Rollez.

15/7/44. Nucort 47 Lancasters and 6 Mosquitoes
A daylight raid against the flying bomb storage site.
A follow-up night time raid by Halifax bombers of 4 Group, including 76 Squadron.

28/7/44. Forêt De Nieppe
A night time raid by Lancasters and Mosquitoes against a flying bomb storage site.
This was followed up by a raid in daylight by Halifaxes.

7/8/44. Falaise
1,019 aircraft - 614 Lancasters, 392 Halifaxes and 13 Mosquitoes - attacked five aiming points in front of Allied ground troops in Normandy. The attacks were carefully controlled - only 660 aircraft bombed and German strong points and the roads around them were well cratered. 10 aircraft - all Lancasters - were lost, 7 to German fighters, 2 to flak and 1 to an unknown cause.
Dewi also flew on this raid as flight engineer in a Halifax B of 76 Sqdn. Details in his logbook just listed as "Ops. Battle Area. Caen". The raid by 76 Squadron was ordered to be "Abandoned Over Enemy Territory" (AOET) by the Master Bomber.

Sometime later in the month, Dewi's Halifax was damaged by flak on a raid over Russelsheim and crash landed at Woodbridge emergency aerodrome. They never flew on family "Combined operations" again, although Dewi did return to ops with 77 Squadron.