

During the summer of 1939 when it seemed odds on that it would not be long before the balloon went up, lots of my contemporaries were joining the Territorial Army. I had decided long before that it would be the Royal Air Force for me. I had been mad keen on the flying game for months past, and had been an avid reader of the "Flight" and "Aeroplane" magazines for some time. From a double page spread from one of these magazines I had studied in detail a sectional diagram showing the crew positions, locations, and the major components of a Handley Page Hampden ~~xxxxxx~~ twin engined bomber, which at that time was my favourite aircraft, my first love one could say. Little did I ~~realise~~ imagine at that particular time that in this connection my wishes would be realised, and I would eventually be a crew member of this type of aircraft when I had completed my Wireless and Air gunnery training.

During the month of June I had sent in my application form to join the Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve as aircrew. As I remember it was a double page form coloured pink for entry as either Pilot or Observer. In due course I received my eagerly awaited instructions to attend a selection board at West Hartlepool. When the day dawned I would not venture to say that I was cool, calm, and collected far from it, but I soon settled down when I became aware that I was only one of many lads who were present from all areas of the North East on that sunny morning of July, 1939 for entry in the RAFVR as Sergeant pilots or Observers. When at last my turn came I sat down very nervously at the table confronted by two RAF Officers who, initially, did their best to put me at ease as they went through all the questions I had answered on my application form. Subsequently they set me all sorts of tests, and asked many questions with which I coped very well. A high standard of both education, and physical fitness was required for selection as aircrew, and despite the fact that my education qualifications were not quite one hundred percent I was accepted. ~~xxxx~~ my keenness and determination were certainly one hundred percent plus. Much relieved, I was ~~passed~~ then passed on to the next, and final hurdle which was the medical, no trouble at all I thought. The medical process was reminiscent of a slow human conveyer belt as each successful applicant from the selection board moved on through different medicals at each step i.e. eyes, ears, nose throat etc, holding ones breath for ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~ what seemed an eternity, and blowing up the mercury level holding it for a stipulated, time, phew, what lung power the lad has. There was no hit and miss in the procedure, and painstakingly it was taking nearly all morning to accomplish. I had successfully negotiated each step until the final test when the Doc thought my blood pressure was a bit high after performing this last exercise. After completing ninety nine percent of the full medical with I though flying colours I was taken aback at this, and despite my appeal that I was just excited at the prospect of "getting in" the mob that was it. The white coated M.O. meanwhile proved very sympathetic, and advised me to take a walk around the town, have a smoke, cool down a trifle, and report back after lunch to undergo another blood pressure exercise.

I duly followed the Doc's instructions, and while feeling somewhat disconsolate I wandered around the metropolis that was West Hartlepool, not being very interested in my surroundings and made sure I returned on time to conclude the proceedings. They were concluded sure enough, but not in the way I had anticipated for on my return I found the building closed with the doors locked, and no apparent sign of any RAF personnel, doctors or otherwise on the premises. I hung around the building, after trying all the doors, for quite some time in the eventuality of the staff turning up, but they never did. I was aware that successful volunteers after both interview, and medical had been taken to Greatham airfield, which was located a short distance from West Hartlepool, to be sworn in as Sergeants in the RAFVR, and perhaps that was the place I should have made for. Being a rather naive, young, and inexperienced in those early days I did not know what to do in the prevailing circumstances, and just hung around waiting for something to happen.

However the situation remained unchanged, and after a while I finally gave up the ghost, and returned home to Stockton-on-tees, a rather forlorn figure of a lad, in direct contrast to the elation of a few hours earlier. I never did find out what happened, I know I should have, but concluded that the proceedings must have been wrapped up at lunchtime, and inadvertently or otherwise I had been left out in the cold, a forgotten man, another minor "cock-up", they were many more to follow during the course of the War.

Afterwards I still hung on to the thought that I would receive some sort of communication from the RAFVR centre in connection with my application, and successful interview, but in the days and weeks that followed nothing was forthcoming, and meanwhile I was involved in my work in the circulation department of the local newspaper "The Evening Gazette". During that "crisis" period of 1939 special editions were frequently on the streets sometimes very late at night, and I was busily engaged.

When the balloon finally went up I re-applied for entry in the RAF, and in due course I was instructed to report to RAF Padgate, near Warrington, Lancashire with a railway warrant to get me there. The Padgate venture proved to be short and sweet, and concluded after a few days with me being sworn in as 982287 Aircraftsman second class etc etc. The first night was notable for my first experience of bottled Nut Brown Ale imbibed in a very crowded, and noisy NAAFI where I made the acquaintance of a host of lads from far and wide who had undergone the same procedure as myself. The next day I was sent home to Civvy Street to await a posting on a Wireless course, and until then, of course, I would not be paid I had to carry on with my present civvy job.

A few months later the long awaited day arrived when I received an official communication instructing me to report to RAF, Cranwell, Lincs to attend No. 1 Wireless School where I duly presented myself along with about two hundred other budding wireless operators who hailed from all parts of the U.K..

RAF Cranwell was a vast camp, and the Wireless School, which trained both ground, and air operators, was only one of many different types of training schools in operation there during the year of 1940.

These included Accountancy and Equipment, as well as a Supplies Depot, but probably the most important unit, being the Flying Training School which together with the airfield was situated on the other side of the vast camp. Our intake was based in East Camp, and we were billeted in two storey brick barracks which were comfortable, very clean and tidy with polished lino floors which ultimately we had to keep spick and span, all the chores being shared out on a rota system. Reveille was at six thirty am, and there was usually a late last minute rush for the ablutions, and shaving positions in those early days of service routine. I was designated to barrack Z 1 along with a smashing set of lads, the majority of which were Scots with a couple of Taffies, and about a dozen Sassenachs including myself making up the complement. Altogether in this ground floor barrack room they would be about forty beds. We soon got to know each other very well, and amongst my room mates were Pat Lavin, Ramsay Joiner, Jock Brown, Frank Kerr, Bob Crisp, Bert Robinson all of whom would also become Wop/ag's. I would be closely involved with Ramsay, Pat, Jock and Frank in later OTU and squadron days. Other course mates in adjoining barracks I would also meet up with at the Operational Training Unit were Doug Wightman and Bob Thompson. The many barracks in East Camp were surrounded by large grass verges with avenues of trees lining the spacious roads presenting a neat appearance to the complex. During the first few days we were kitted out with uniforms, great coats, boots, and all the other accessories including a kitbag. With my surname beginning with the letter "A" I was always first or thereabouts in the queue, but the only apparent shortages concerned a lack of side caps (Glengarrys) so inevitably the lads with surnames beginning with letters way down the alphabet were issued with "Cheesecutters" for headgear. Personally I was relieved, I would not have fancied wearing one of those, it was the side cap at a rakish angle for me every time. Now smartly attired in our new blue uniforms with buttons well polished we said goodbye to our Civvy Street fladrags, all of which we parcelled up and sent home. Most of the course soon dropped into the new routine of a disciplined service life, and we found that barrack comradeship was also something new, and in consequence long lasting friendships were made. The service beds were the push in types with three "biscuits" (type of mattress) and were only pulled out to the fullest extent in the evening after tea. Each morning before leaving the barrack room to form up outside each bed had to be pushed in with the three "biscuit" stacked on top, with one's blankets neatly folded placed on top of the third biscuit. Kit and bed inspections were regularly carried out, and junior and senior N.C.O.'s were always on the prowl so if any bed space, or personal locker was left untidy "Jankers" was always just around the corner. There was no doubt that service life increased the old appetite, and the Airmens Mess was just down the road a spell, exactly opposite the East Camp picture house. With drinking mug, and "irons" at the ready it was always a case of getting your finger out, a good position in the inevitable queue was always something I aimed for at meal times.

I certainly had a good appetite which steadily increased in my new environment. "Seconds" were frequently available at the midday meal, for sweets that is, but one had to wait for the call to be announced. My shell like ears always responded, and usually I was away like a shot to the front of the mess always hoping it would be bread pudding, and custard. Of course a feature of those early days at Cranwell was the innuendo concerning the "bromide" laced tea, was the story really genuine? Supposedly to tone down one's sexual overtones. In those days as a lowly "Erk" the airman's issue mug was really extra large in size, but we were very thirsty lads, and the tea intake whether it contained bromide or not was certainly very high, but the large urns of ready sweetened, ready milked, and sometimes very brown tea in the cookhouse never at any time ran dry.

The NAAFI in East Camp was always well patronised, and the piano was always in action during the evenings, a player always seemed to be available. Regular dances were held here, and were all the rage the floor was always jammed to capacity with perspiring couples vainly trying to cope with the conditions, and the Quick Step. The crowded conditions were not helped by a thick cigarette smoke haze, and the lads invariably were minus their tunics as the whole place seemed to vibrate, in other words the joint was jumping. On other nights Housey House y (Bingo) sessions were also a regular feature, and proved a good laugh for all concerned, more especially if one won a few bob. The nearest place of any size was of course the town of Sleaford, about five miles distant, which boasted a picture house, plenty of pubs, and a decent bus service, the good old Lincolns hire with their then familiar green buses. At the opposite end of the camp outside the entrance was a good cafe which was very popular with all and sundry, although I think I only used it once.

Our wireless course had now started in earnest, our intake had been divided into classes or squads, and as such we marched between buildings, and lectures etc to the accompaniment of band music relayed through speakers which were placed along the camp, road systems, my favourite for vocal accompaniment was "Down at Sussex by the Sea", but our words were slightly different to the original version. I was now getting down to the serious business of absorbing the theory of radio, and the lilting rhythm of the Morse Code. The majority of the lads were training as ground wireless operators, but we all learned the pure theory, and practical side of radio, plus the mastery of Morse. Quite a lot found the Morse code very hard to pick up, while others took to it quite easily, personally I never had any difficulty. Mastery of the alphabet, and a sound sense of the rhythm, and up went one's receiving speed. I believe our course was the first involving personnel direct from Civvy Street, and it seemed to be a streamlined version of a peacetime course, which would take six months to complete. In the end it would prove to be a more valuable, and of a higher standard than other course held later on at other wireless schools, and those of us who had volunteered as Wireless Operator/Air gunners would finish, and certainly benefit from the intensive excellence of both the civilian and the RAF Instructors on this course. Morse Code sessions were frequent, and the Morse machines hammered out exercises at different speeds for our reception. Over the weeks and months my receiving and sending speeds continued to increase, and in consequence several of us became very competitive as to who could take down messages etc at the highest speeds.

As the course progressed tests were given at weekly intervals so our instructors knew exactly how everybody in his class stood, and when I was in my most receptive mood I could take down plain language for an average length of time at a speed of over thirty words per minute, it all became a question of rhythm, and I subsequently achieved ~~achieved~~ a twenty five words a minute pass in the final Morse test at the conclusion of our Wireless course. As the War progressed, and the number of aircrew increased as Bomber Command grew in size appropriate wireless courses ~~were~~ <sup>BECAME</sup> even more streamlined, and in general Wop/Ag's passed out at eighteen words per minute which was more or less the average speed in practical use operationally, with the wireless courses containing much less theory and more practical use of the sets to be used. In other words I was indeed lucky to attend and participate in such an intensive and thorough training school which was No. 1 in the RAF.

From a financial point of view things were a bit tight in those days being only a mere "Erk" (Aircraftsman second class) I was only on the princely sum of two shillings per day, pay parade came once per fortnight, and unless one had a bit in reserve in the proverbial back pocket from Civvy Street days it meant that nights out were strictly rationed.

As a change from nearby Sleaford I and a few pals made up our minds one day to explore the night life of the Cathedral city of Lincoln, about twenty miles distant. We travelled on the Lincolnshire bus service, and enjoyed a good night doing the rounds of the hostelrys in between finding our way around as it was our first visit what we really ~~needed~~ needed was a good navigator. On being informed that our last bus would depart at the ridiculously early time of nine thirty we held a lightning conference and lightheartedly decided there was no chance of us being aboard that vehicle. The night was still young, and as far as we were concerned we would have few opportunities for a return visit.

It is sufficient to say that in the midst of our alcoholic haze the fact had not yet penetrated that we would have to hike all the way back to Cranwell, or perhaps it did and we did not give a monkey. ~~Whatever~~ the reason it is a fact that we certainly walked throughout the night, albeit at a very leisurely pace. We were a bit worse for wear when we eventually left Lincoln behind, but sobered up as the hours slowly passed. <sup>ly</sup>.

Our homeward hike proved anything but monotonous, in fact it was just the opposite, Jerry bombers overhead livened up the proceedings along our route. In those days German aircraft were almost regular nightly visitors over this part of Lincolnshire in small numbers looking for the many aerodromes that were dotted around the area namely Scampton Waddington, Digby, and of course Cranwell.

That night was no exception as we heard the familiar de-synchronised engine noise of several German aircraft stooing around overhead, and for an hour or so various loads of incendiaries together with a few bombs were dropped around the countryside, but not in our immediate vicinity as we wearily plodded on steadfastly along the country roads towards Cranwell. For some considerable time all had been silent, the "Jerry" bombers had disappeared, our conversations had dried up, and now the only noise that could be heard was the steady rhythmic crunch of four pairs of RAF issue boots as we proceeded along the gravelly roads. Dry of throat, almost on our chinstraps we eventually arrived at the sandbagged outer barrier of RAF Cranwell, the time was then almost five a.m. Our leg weary party of four were greeted with a harsh but strained challenge as one of the barrier guards, with his rifle at the ready, hailed us with the words "Halt who goes there". With a very tired but audible shout of "Friends", we were subsequently informed to "Advance and be recognised". The Corporal in charge of the guard detail made a quick appearance upon the scene, he took one long look at us as we shuffled through the barrier, and remarked "Where the bloody hell have you lot been". It had been a trying, and eventful night, the question was ignored, and so the silent thought was "Bugger you, Corporal", we were too far gone for any humorous repartee, besides we still had a fair distance to walk to reach East Camp before Reveille.

We had lost a nights kip, but the general concensus of opinion was that the outing had been well worth the trouble, and after an invigorating wash, shave and brush up it was the airmens mess for an early breakfast of bangers, bacon and beans a meal which was attacked with great enthusiasm. After our epic hike what an appetite we had, everything was hungrily disposed of to be washed down copiously with several mugs of tea.

Later on that day during the afternoon classes I was a tired airman, so much so that at one period I could not help nodding off, and the civilian instructor's voice slowly but surely disappeared into oblivion, but it soon returned when he shouted "Wake up at the back there you horrible airman". The incident certainly broke the monotony, and brought forth a few sniggers from the rest of the class.

The outcome of the previous nights events caused a change of mind in which my "oppos" and I were in unison, no more walking back from Lincoln in future ventures. In fact we paid only one more visit to this city which took place much later on during our course, which was amusingly noteworthy in respect of the inconsistencies or such of a "blind" pick-up. During that particular night I was a member of the same foursome, and whilst walking along the main thoroughfare of Lincoln in black out conditions we somewhat light-heartedly picked up, the correct term, four slices of "crumpet", and headed for a nearby cafe. After negotiating the black out curtains inside the entrance door, and being a gentleman I made it my job to procure a suitable table in order that the females could take a seat. Credulously I looked around, my three mates were missing, and had literally vanished from the scene. In the full light of the cafe I could now see why, the four females were really ancient, and all looked to be old enough to be my mothers. My three very observant, and quick witted mates had seen all well in advance, and they had duly scarped red to leave me, naively, holding the baby. Nothing daunted I nevertheless kept my cool, and carried on with the act. I asked the "girls" their choice of beverage, and then sidled up to the counter on the pretence of ordering, edged slowly towards the door to make a quick exit through the black out curtains into the night. Needless to say my three mates were lurking outside the cafe, laughing like drains, ~~xxxxxxx~~ although I called them a few names I could not help joining in the general mirth. Obviously we were aboard the last bus, ~~this~~ and so it was goodbye to Lincoln, at least as far as my Cranwell days were concerned, but that episode was the first, and only time I indulged in a blind black out "pick-up", thereafter it was the see it all, slow approach for me in all my <sup>future</sup> connections with the opposite sex.

It was back to nearby Sleaford on subsequent nights out, but in the main most off duty moments during the evenings were spent on the camp premises with the ever reliable NAAFI being readily available at most times. However on certain evenings throughout each week our Camp picture house provided entertainment when either films were shown, or an ENSA concert was scheduled. These attractions always provided for a well attended audience. Throughout the summer months an alternative mode of entertainment was provided at fairly regular late night intervals, by units of the Luftwaffe. The airfield, and the station in general attracted the attention of various German bombers. When the wailing noise of the air raid warning sirens punctuated the quietness of the ground level night, junior N.C.O.'s in the various barrack blocks noisily invaded each room in order to roust everybody out of their warm beds. All and sundry had to make an orderly but rapid exit, and head for the nearest shelters. On the odd occasion, as we made the short journey in the dead of night, the dark sky above would be brightly lit up, looking like a vast twinkling candelabra, with the many hanging green flares, which had been dropped by the German crews as they tried to identify their target. I gave the Luftwaffe full marks for persistence, but neither the camp or the airfield was hit during my stay.

During the first two months of our wireless course its momentum was interrupted when it was decided that we would have to undergo a week of intensive "square bashing". On the very large parade ground a bevy of ultra keen Corporals put the entire course intake through all the known drills. Split up into squads, we suffered many a tongue lashing especially from a vociferous Warrant Officer who supervised the whole of the proceedings. Complete with pacing stick he put us through our final paces with such verve, and persuasion, that by the end of the week the transformation was complete, we were then very smart airmen indeed.

During the month of September we suffered yet another diversion from course activity when the powers that be suddenly made up their minds that we U/T wireless operators should perform our share of the Camp guard duties, and this we did for a total period of three weeks. Initially, we had a short spell of rifle tuition, then actively accomplished a mini arms drill routine being equipped with old Lee Enfield rifles. The guard duties

consisted of security details on the outer camp barriers, and other places of importance within the confines of East Camp during the night hours. Furthermore, as the main road ran through RAF Cranwell, and was used by the Lincolnshire Road Co. buses, a security guard had to accompany each bus from barrier to barrier. His job was to keep a watching vigil, and make sure that no unauthorised civilians left the bus within the limits of the camp. A particular eventful week of duty springs to mind when I was on guard detail during the night hours. The long nightly stint, I think, was twelve hours which worked out at four hours on, and four off. I was part of a team patrolling the wooded outskirts of the camp where the married quarters were then situated. At the time enemy parachutist, and Invasion rumours were rife, and there I was on patrol in my sector of the woods armed with a Lee Enfield rifle, supported by only five rounds of ammunition.

What incredible fire power I had at my command, its a bloody good job there was no substance to the parachutist stories. Nevertheless on that particular night "Jerry" was about, bomber units of the Luftwaffe were droning around overhead to drop quite a few delayed action land mines around the countryside. Several of these were not too far away either, as I heard many a whistling whine as the bombs descended, and I hit the deck on quite a few occasions whilst I was on patrol. Everything seemed to be happening that night, I was not sorry I did not meet any enemy parachutists. During the onward course of the next two days a good many haphazard explosions were heard by us in the camp as the different land mines, dropped that <sup>on 5.10.45</sup> ~~particular~~ night, detonated.

Now and again we were privileged with the issue of a forty eight hour leave pass, and at the appropriate weekend, as soon as classes terminated on Friday evening, the general exodus of East Camp would begin with U/T W/Ops heading briskly in all geographical directions.



Due to financial reasons "Hitch hiking" was all the rage during those days, and it was a common sight to see many airmen making for the different main road junctions. I usually hitched a lift to Grantham, and then caught the main line train to Darlington. It was a common occurrence then to take a chance and travel on the railway without a ticket, and it was surprising how many got away with it, many of the lads knew all the dodges, and the railway routine. I only tried it twice, and was caught on the hop second time round at Grantham station on my way back to Cranwell. I had been home on a forty eight hour pass, and had alighted from the main line train during the early hours of a Monday morning. After partaking of a meal of sorts at the Salvation Army hostel just outside the station I was reclining in a empty compartment of the early milk train which would leave at four thirty am for Cranwell way, when I was rudely interrupted by a railway official who asked to see my ticket. I cannot recall whether I had to pay up or not, but I somehow think I had to, and cut my losses by saying I had only travelled from a short way up the line. Nevertheless I had learnt my lesson the caper was never repeated, of course six months later as a Sergeant Wop/Ag I was, in comparison, reasonably better off financially my daily rate of pay then ~~was~~ <sup>being</sup> eight shillings and threepence per day.

Three very interesting months had quickly gone by when rumours abounded that all our course were going to be allowed seven days leave, our first real furlough. The rumour proved to be correct, officially sanctioned 259 leave passes were in due course issued, and nigh on two hundred happy airmen scarpered to all points of the compass homeward bound to show off their RAF blues, some of the lads somewhat prematurely had sewn on their wireless badges. A slight case of vanity, of course not yet earned, but something to show off to the family or girl friend. Stimulated after the weeks break I along with the rest was now well into the intensive part of the course horse speeds were accelerating, and the mysteries of radio were beginning to unfold. Practical use of different sets were now well under way, and we were now adept at the manipulation of the T1082/R1083 transmitting and receiving set which at that time was the standard W/T set used in Bomber Command, and as air operators this was the set we would be working. It was not an easy set to work, in fact rather complicated to tune, and back tune, extensive practice was essential. For transmitting purposes it had two different types of coils, one for M/F (Medium frequency) for long range fixes, and the other for H/F (High frequency) for QM's (single homing bearings). Dependent on what was required the respective coil was pulled out, and the other substituted. I also became familiar with the use of the D/P (direction finding) loop aerial which was used in conjunction with the W/T set for obtaining loop bearings from beacon stations.

and also became skilled in the use of the Aldis lamp for visual Morse communication with either ships or other aircraft.

All work and no play etc, that old cliché, was and still is very true, and our winding down day was Sunday when sport of all kinds was enjoyed by all, even if it was just a spectator role. Matches were arranged between different barracks, notably the games concerned either Soccer or Hockey, I enjoyed playing either game. Friday was the acknowledged "Amami" night as it was generally known, the only exception being the odd occasion of a forty eight hour pass. As the name typifies "Amami" night was the time when all the household chores were carried out, namely ironing, washing, button cleaning etc etc. In our barrack room after the domestic duties had been satisfactorily concluded nearly all the Scottish contingent after making themselves spick and span would take off from East camp to make their way down the road to the "Waafery" to enjoy a mixed gathering in what was called "Scotch" night, an enjoyable social evening. As I was more or less initiated as a "naturalized" by my Scots friends in the barrack I was therefore invited on several occasions, and really enjoyed the proceedings especially the company of the Maaf's to say the least.

During one Sunday in the month was the occasion of the compulsory Church parade when the bands were in full swing, and a really smart turn out paraded to march neatly up the camp roads stimulated by the stirring sound of martial music, the Station church being, of course, the ultimate destination.

Towards the end of the course I and all the other potential Wop/Ag's commenced our air operating training, and for me and quite a few of the other lads it would be our first experience of flying, and was eagerly anticipated by us all.

We had learned all we had to know about the W/T set theoretically, and otherwise during our ground training, we were adept at the sending and receiving of Morse at speed, and now the time was ripe for us to put it all to the test in the air. Our first airborne experience was in a flying classroom namely a Vickers Valencia. The roomy cabin of the twin engined Valencia accommodated six of us at a time, with an instructor in charge we flew around the vicinity of Cranwell, and in the process each pupil took his turn to sit down at the 1082/1083 W/T set, and Morse key to have a go at an exercise with a ground station.

Following several trips in the flying classroom, and the relevant tuition we were then thrown in at the deep end to perform individual air to ground wireless exercises. My first flight was hair raising to say the least, an open cockpit job. I was ensconced in the rear cockpit of a Fairey Swordfish, a single engined biplane later to achieve fame and notoriety in both the Fleet Air Arm, and Coastal Command as a torpedo dropping "kite".

After climbing up into the rear cockpit I then had to attach what was called the "monkey strap" on to a metal ring fitted on the rear of my parachute harness, a safety measure to prevent me falling out of the open cockpit, I was thus anchored to the floor of the rear cockpit. Despite my trepidation, being only a sprog flyer, I hung on grimly to the sides of the open cockpit during the take off, but I quickly adjusted to this new sensation, and though not completely at ease with myself, began to marvel at the wide open view of the surrounding sky. This was the life for me, a knowing gleam was now in my eyes, it was really exhilarating, and despite the many bumps I thoroughly enjoyed the new experience. The obvious discomfort of my working position posed a few problems, whilst I was operating the 1082/1083 W/T set, but ultimately I managed to carry out my air to ground exercise quite adequately. While carrying out these wireless training exercises the various pilots did not venture very far away from our base, but following two or three open cockpit flights the remainder of my training exercises were carried out whilst flying in Percival Proctors. These aircraft were single engined three seater cabin monoplanes with a very comfortable stable working position, and would be replacing the open cockpit jobs like the Swordfish, and the Wallace. Relishing the improved working facilities provided in the Proctor aircraft, I had flown about six hours or so in total time performing various W/T exercises, when I was informed by our Instructor that the time I was now ripe for me to undertake my final air operating test. This took place the following day, and sitting comfortably at my W/T position behind the pilot in the Proctor trainer we took off, climbed up to a reasonable height to then fly around in a wide circle. Meanwhile I had switched on the 1082/1083 W/T set, and when the aircraft had straightened out to straight, and level flight, at a height of around 2000 feet, my pilot gave me the go ahead, I could commence. Nervously, but none the less confidently, I got down to work, tuned in to establish Morse contact with the appropriate ground station to then carry on with my exercise, which happily I passed successfully.

During the month of November our course intake had completed the final examinations, or tests, in both written and practical spheres, and my pass marks overall were over sixty percent. This meant that I was upgraded to the dizzy heights of A.C. 1 (Aircraftman First Class), phew, promotion at last, and a rise in wages resulted. I was now on four shillings and threepence per day, high finance indeed compared with my previous two bob a day. In the final Morse speed tests I achieved a pass of twenty five words per minute at both sending, and receiving, which counted towards my AC 1 pass out grade. I was then a fully qualified Wireless Operator, and the badge denoting same was duly sewn high up on the right sleeve of my uniform tunic.

The time had now arrived to say goodbye to most of the ground wireless operators who were part of our course, and I had made some good pals, especially within the large Scottish contingent. They found themselves posted to various RAF stations all over the U.K., and despite that old cliché inferring it's a small world, regrettably, I did not come across any of those ground Wireless Operators during my service travels of the following few years.

Those of us who were potential Wireless Operator/Air Gunners, at the conclusion of the wireless course, were split up into small groups of five or six to facilitate postings to different Gunnery schools. I would meet up with quite a few of them

during the onward course of the following year while serving on an operational squadron, but towards the end of that year of 41 many of these lads had been reported missing in action.

It transpired that as far as the small group to which I was attached was concerned, no immediate Air gunnery course was readily available at that particular time. We were informed that until this was so we would be posted to RAF, Thorney Island, situated a few miles south of Emsworth, in the extreme south of England. This station was a Coastal Command base, which at that period was occupied by two Bristol Blenheim squadrons. By virtue of its geographical position RAF, Thorney Island was very much in the firing line in those days, being the target for frequent hit and run air attacks by units of the Luftwaffe.

Although we knew this was only a stop gap posting, and therefore did not expect to stay very long at Raf Thorney Island, I am bound to say that I never enjoyed a short stay so much, it was a really happy station. I settled down almost at once, it was my first glimpse of life on an operational base, and the obvious camaraderie that existed.

The period was particularly noteworthy as I experienced my first Christmas in the service here which proved to be a really good one too.

The most memorable recollection was the Xmas dinner held in the Airmens Mess with the Officers, and senior N.C.O.'s traditionally waiting on, and performing their menial tasks with remarkable enthusiasm, and dexterity amidst the general overall merriment. These "amateur" waiters really exuded the old Christmas spirit, there was no doubt that this once per year chore gave them much pleasure, and amusement.

My short but sweet stay at Thorney Island lasted in all three weeks, but we were not idle, the Station Signals section kept us busy during that time. We were put to work in the ground wireless station, and operated on eight hour "watches", working shifts around the clock, which in all provided good experience, and kept our Morse up to scratch.

Initially, I was soon aware that one of the first questions asked upon <sup>arrival</sup> at a new station concerned one's prowess at the game of Soccer, so it followed that I was able to enjoy a couple of matches with the Station team.

The time passed like wildfire, but two days after Christmas our group of five received our inevitable posting instructions, we were on our way at last, our gunnery course had come through. The station Orderly room informed our group of five that we would be leaving the following day to report to No. 8 Bombing and Gunnery School based at RAF Evanton, which was on shores of the Cromarty Firth, a few miles north of Dingwall in the wilds of Scotland. I gave a wry smile, our destination could not have been further away, what a journey to contemplate, especially in the depths of winter.

Before we embarked upon our long trip all five of us had to attend the local Stores branch to be kitted out with the necessary flying gear, which we did with obvious relish.

I was issued with flying helmet, goggles, inner and outer Sidcot flying suit, inner silk gloves, outer leather gauntlets, and finally a pair of black leather furlined flying boots. I was really proud of those boots, I would look after them with a watchful eye, they would keep my feet warm, and comfortable during the following hectic years whilst flying thousands of miles over both home, and enemy territory.

Eventually the boots would be forcibly transferred to finish up on some unknown German's feet somewhere amidst the freezing wilderness of the Russian front, but that is another story upon which I will digress later in this narrative.

Besides our flying kit we were each issued with a flying log book, in which every flight together with relevant particulars would be henceforth recorded concerning both training, and operational flying. Operational sorties would be recorded, and entered in red ink, with monthly flying hour totals being confirmed, and signed by a Flight commander. Proficiency ratings, and assessments were usually entered in the acknowledged space in the front of one's flying logbook.

My four "oppos" and I were now ready for anything, having collected our rail warrant, and a large cardboard container which held five mens rations for two days, these consisted in the main of hurriedly made thick, corned beef sandwiches. Fully dressed, complete with greatcoats, loaded kit bags at the ready, and not forgetting our large box of travelling rations we waited patiently outside the Guard Room for our transport. The M.T. section were on the ball, we did not have to wait very long, and after piling in our kitbags etc we jumped aboard to be subsequently dropped off at Emsworth railway station. In those distant wartime RAF days there was always someone designated to be in charge of a party, however small it be, and in this case it may have been myself being an AC1, but I cannot recall giving out any words of command to my four mates throughout our long rail journey up to

Ross-shire, and our Gunnery School. The initial rail journey on the Southern Region took us to London where we had to change stations. This entailed travelling across the city via the Underground system which was quite an experience, always remembered. The night bombing by the Germans was at its height, and the Tube stations platforms were covered by a mass of humanity. These Londoners had brought their sleeping requisites, makeshift beds etc which they had spread out on the platforms in preparation for their nights rest in this underground refuge from the bombs. With our loaded kitbags it proved to be quite a task meandering along the platforms trying to avoid the innumerable bodies, but their problems were worse than ours, and despite this these Londoners were a cheerful lot, laughing and joking with many making light of it all by indulging in group sing songs. Many a humorous remark was made to us as we staggered through, and around their temporary sleeping arrangements. <sup>ON</sup> our way towards the stairway exits. It goes without saying that our repartee was equally amusing, but one could not help admiring their spirit.

Finally arriving at Euston station we thankfully boarded our train, found an empty compartment, and immediately made ourselves comfortable, it would be a long, tiresome journey. The inevitable air raid warning was in operation at the time of our departure, and the train moved out of Euston station very, very slowly to crawl along with frequent intermittent stops. Considerable amounts of anti-aircraft fire were being directed at the German bombers, but thankfully no bombs were dropped anywhere near our train, and eventually we cleared London at which point the train commenced to pick up speed. It proved to be a very cold night, ~~XXXXXX~~

the compartment heating was non-existent which belied the "ON" switch position. Nothing daunted we delved into our kitbags, and donned some of our flying kit in order to keep warm throughout the night. Now suitably clad, the black out blinds already in position, we prepared our sleeping positions. Two of the lads slept on the luggage rack, a precarious position to say the least, how they managed it is a matter for conjecture for it was a long drop to the floor, but I did not hear any dull thuds during the night. Another of our number occupied the floor berth, and the remaining twosome, one of which was myself, slept along the two long seats. Although the memory is slightly dim I should think we latter pair must have surely won the toss concerning the choice of sleeping berths, I cannot surmise it could have happened otherwise. During the following day as the tedious journey progressed on its northerly course we coped very well for cups of tea at the various stops along the route with the W.V.S. tea trolleys always at the ready on most railway stations platforms. The many hours slowly passed, and the feeling was unanimous when it seemed to me that we had been aboard our trains for days, what a journey traversing the entire length of England, and ultimately the greater part of Scotland. What a picturesque trip it would have proved to be in the summer months, but alas not so in late December. It was pitch dark when at long last we arrived at Ewanton where the entire landscape was covered with a white blanket of snow, and it was also freezing cold.

The time was about nine thirty pm ~~xx~~ when five greatcoated U/T air gunners flexed their stiff limbs, slung their kitbags over shoulders, and commenced to step out in the direction of the camp. As we approached RAF Ewanton, encircled by the white wintry scene, all was deathly quiet with no visible signs of human habitation, except of course for we five as we trudged noisily through the snow to eventually report our arrival at the camp guard room.

We were billeted in single storey wooden barrack huts which contained about twenty beds, and the heating was provided by two stoves positioned along the centre line of the hut. In the prevailing wintry conditions the main idea of we inmates was to endeavour to keep the stoves well primed with fuel for as long as possible well into the night. The idea was good, but in practice it was never accomplished, and consequently Reveille in the cold, dark winter mornings was always a freezing occasion, which I and everybody else inevitably got used to. After all we were hardy, young, and fit, and regular P.T. sessions together with cross country runs in the snow covered hills around the camp would ensure this was so. The crafty lads amongst us were those who managed by accident or design to wangle a bed adjacent to the stoves thus ensuring a comfortable start to the nights sleep, especially in the below zero temperatures prevalent in that winter of 40/41.

The full title of the station was No.8 Bombing and Gunnery School so it followed that not all the trainee aircrew personnel were potential Wop/Ags. The half winged "O" brevet of the Observer category, more popularly, if not crudely, known to us as the flying "arsehole", was also very much involved, with these lads undertaking a short bombing course. Before the advent of the four engined bombers, and the introduction, during the late months of 1942, of the new grade of Bomb Aimer, the Observer was responsible for both the navigation, and the bomb aiming, hence their presence on a bombing course. Those I met, and got to know very well at Evanton were a great bunch of chaps, I regret very much that our paths did not cross again during later days at both O.T.U., and Operational levels. The main reason for this was the fact that Bomber Command was a large organisation, comprising at that time of Groups one to five, and ever growing in size, and potential. Alternatively, along with other different aircrew categories many of these acquaintances were lost on bombing operations during the following twelve months.

The Air Gunnery course normally occupied about six weeks in its entirety, our Instructor was a Sergeant Observer, and as usually was the case one of the first items on the agenda was the taking of our Wop/Ag course photograph. Undoubtedly, in the foreseeable future someone, somewhere would scrutinise this group photograph, and point out that most of these young, smiling airmen were either killed or missing over Germany, Occupied Europe, or the North Sea. It would prove to be likewise with later O.T.U., and ultimately operational squadron photographs.

With our gunnery course now well under way I learnt all about the theory of air gunnery, bullet trail, and trajectory, the art of deflection shooting, the use of tracer, and its values, harmonisation, aircraft recognition, and how to strip down, and reassemble the two guns in general use operationally, the Vickers K gas operated, and the Browning machine guns.

Having then accumulated a practical working knowledge of both guns I also became adept at clearing the various types of stoppages, and how to feed ammunition belts which concerned the 303 Browning machine gun.

As the ground lectures, and classes continued I was finally taught all the "Gen" concerning the power operated multi gun turrets Fraser Nash etc which normally house the multiple 303 Brownings. When the time arrived to put all our accumulated theory into practical use, I along with the other potential Wop/Ags on the course performed all the air firing exercises flying in Handley Page Harrow aircraft. The old Harrow was a large twin engined machine with pegasus 925 H.P engines, two notable features of the Harrow were its high wing, and a large fixed undercarriage. This aircraft was formerly used as a bomber-transport, and came into RAF service in 1937, but by the time the War had commenced was considered obsolete as far as operational use was concerned, hence its use at that time at a Bombing, and Gunnery School. Some months later, during the Spring of 1941 they would be superseded by Blackburn Botha aircraft at Evanton. The twin engined Blackburn Botha had been in use with Coastal Command as a torpedo bomber, but because of its shortcomings was withdrawn from operational use, and relegated to a training existence at Air

Gunnery schools.

It was a fact that the old Harrow possessed front and rear Nash and Thompson power operated turrets which housed twin Lewis machine guns of pre war vintage. We trainees soon found out that it was not possible to maintain a constant even flow of accurate short bursts using these guns, as they were prone to continual jamming, consequently too much time was spent endeavouring to clear the various stoppages. These clapped out Lewis guns did not help us at all in our aim to be really proficient air gunners, and in the prevailing circumstances it was understandable that we Wop/Ags on the course did not register many hits on the respective drogue targets, during air to air firing. During these exercises, at least four trainees would fly in the Harrow, and each man would take his turn in the turrets, both front, and rear were used, and perform his stint when the drogue appeared in position. The ammunition in the circular drums, which were fitted on the Lewis guns, had been previously daubed with a distinctive colour of paint, in order that each gunner's hits could be readily identified, and counted following the completion of the exercise.



On such gunnery exercises our Harrow aircraft after take off, would then fly over the waters of the Cromarty Firth to then cross the Moray Firth until we were well out over the open sea. At a certain point the pilot would await the arrival of the drogue towing aircraft, which was in most cases a Fairey Battle, the ex light Bomber. By the time the rendezvous was reached the winch operator, ensconced in the rear seat of the Battle, would have the drogue, an extra large windsock, well in tow. When he was certain he was in a correct, and safe position, the pilot of the Battle would then signal over the R/T that we gunners in the adjacent Harrow could commence firing at the drogue target. Obviously some care had to be taken, although we were novice gunners one could hardly mistake a Fairey Battle for a drogue, though it is true to relate that various types of calamities did occur frequently during those wartime days. Upon receiving the go ahead from our pilot, both front, and rear gunners got down to the job in hand, eyes behind relector sights, and in systematic short bursts would expend their drums of individually coloured ammunition, at the same time quietly hoping for some hits on the drogue, which was trailing well behind the towing Fairey Battle at an approximate range of two hundred or more yards. I found out that nothing seemed to go smoothly with the guns constantly jamming, consequently I was continuously clearing stoppages, therefore my firing was spasmodic to say the least, and these happenings sometimes prolonged the exercise. Nevertheless, the best was made of a bad job, hits were made on the various drogue targets, but not a great many, and although I am not claiming that we were all crack shots, we were keen eyed lads, and made proper use of the theory we had learnt on the ground. Frankly, I think we performed as well as was possible under the disadvantage of working with inferior equipment, and by that I mean the clapped out pre-war vintage Lewis guns. Despite all, I enjoyed my air firing flights in the Harrow, a cabin aircraft with a large roomy fuselage. The landing ground at Evanton was fairly narrow, and being very adjacent to the waters of the Cromarty Firth meant that cross winds presented a bit of a problem at times, but the Harrow was a steady old kite, and the Polish pilots were pretty good. Most of them were Sergeants, and after my sessions in the gun turrets I often sat up front with respective drivers, where on odd occasions I even got to handle the controls for short spells, flying straight, and level, of course. Although the Highland weather was pretty awful at times it was typical for that particular period of the year, but it did not prevent me, and the other course trainees from utilising all our allotted flying time. Slotted in between flying, and ground training was lots of P.T. sessions as well as several crosscountry runs around the local hillsides. I can truthfully say that I was never so fit than at that period of the War.

The ground firing range attached to the Gunnery School was situated at Tain, which was almost fifteen miles North East of RAF, Evanton, located way out in the wilds. On the occasions we visited the Tain range our course contingent of U/T air gunners piled unceremoniously aboard a covered RAF lorry to endure a really rough ride, up hill and down dale, as we travelled, bumping, and swaying, through the wild, north Highland countryside, a journey which was always enlivened by all indulging in a very boisterous sing song, to ease the monotony. It proved to be rather bleak at Tain, and apart from the RAF personnel at the range, all I saw was a few seagulls, some sheep, and the odd Short Sunderland flying boat stooging around over the Dornoch Firth, such was the solitude.

Following our somewhat frustrating experiences during air firing exercises solely due to the shortcomings of our obsolete old friend, the Lewis gun it was indeed a revelation to handle, and manipulate a good, modern machine gun such as the 303 Browning. The contrast was amazing, with our instructor emphasising, once again, that the main thing was to fire in a methodical succession of accurate short bursts. The several power operated gun turrets in which we practised our art at Tain were individually fixed within strong metal frames, and were mobile inasmuch as each turret framework was equipped with four rubber tyred wheels. I and other trainees each took our turn to climb inside, and operate the latest Boulton Paul four gun turret, which housed 303 Browning machine guns, the effect of which I thought was electrifying, a real example of fire power. This was training of real value towards the ultimate objective, being a proficient Air Gunner. During my firing practice sessions in the turrets at the Tain ground range, I found the stoppages were minimal, and easily remediable, with the ammunition, of course, being belt fed, yes, the Browning was an excellent gun.

A complete day on the Ta in range passed very quickly, we were certainly fully occupied and, I might add, in an enthusiastic fashion. Towards the end of our ground firing practices I had a good work out in the smaller Fraser Nash turret operating twin Brownings this time. The approach of dusk saw the cessation of the range firing exercises, and as we boarded the transport to commence our journey back to Evanton, and Tea all the lads of our course were unanimous that a great deal of "know how" had been accumulated that day, at last we really began to feel like confident Air Gunners.

Perhaps I can reiterate that generally well known expression "All work and no play etc", and of course the wartime RAF was no exception to the rule as sport obviously played a big part in service life. At Evanton it was the acknowledged norm for the Station soccer team, which at that time included several ex professional players, to do battle against a team selected from the current courses. This regular event apparently always finished up with the Evanton station team being the victors by a very wide margin, which was usually double figures. Our trainee team was selected, named, and when the big day arrived it was fortunate for all concerned that the snow of the past few weeks had thawed, indeed the pitch was just playable. Nevertheless the football field was heck deep in mud, it would be really heavy going in conditions ~~xxx~~ which would really separate the men from the boys. The match was eagerly anticipated by both spectators and players, nobody more so than I, playing at right back I revelled in the muddy conditions. My motto was 'they shall not pass, and very few did, many was the successful sliding tackle timed to a nicety. With their reputation it was inevitable that RAF Evanton's experienced teamwork would prevail in the end, but we gave them a hard fight, and it was a good game which we eventually lost five goals to one. This was not a bad result considering they were accustomed to double figure victories. I really enjoyed competing, and was moving just as fast at the end of a gruelling ninety minutes with my playing kit now as black as the churned up muddy pitch, I was fit in those days.

Somebody must have been impressed as after this match a Wop/ag course mate, Bob Lown, and I were invited to play for Evanton Station team in subsequent games against Inverness, and various Army teams in and around Ross Shire. These outings, which were played on either Saturdays or Sundays, were always keenly anticipated. This was the life, I had an equal passion for both Soccer, and flying. Ninety minutes of football even in heavy underfoot conditions was nothing really, and did wonders for the appetite. That word appetite brings up the subject of food, and in this connection it was generally acknowledged at Evanton that I held the gourmet record for the teatime meal in the mess where each dining table was liberally provided with baskets heaped with slices of ready cut bread. A dubious achievement I must admit but it was noticed at one certain teatime session that I consumed about twenty slices of bread and Jam plus four or five large mugs of tea. I cannot help suppressing a grin, but it certainly rings a bell for I can recall being in attendance at the table for about an hour and a half slowly but surely whittling down the heaped pile of cut bread in the baskets. It was purely a "one off" situation, and in defence I can only say it must have been the Highland air.

In the ordinary course of events I was not normally a galloping gourmet I can only describe the aforesaid episode as an occasional circumstantial lapse on my part, but it was a very good airmens mess, never any complaints at Evanton, not even with the salty porridge, happy days. Apart from the normal daily course program, <sup>me</sup> it was possible during the evenings, to keep my hand in at Morse, as a room was available for this, being complete with all the necessary equipment, Morse sending keys etc. I thought the idea was very <sup>ENTERPRISING</sup>, but not every budding Wop/Ag had the same train of thought, and many did not take advantage of these helpful facilities that were provided. These sessions were not compulsory, but most of us keen types indulged for it helped considerably to keep up ones standard at both sending, and receiving. Likewise, in connection with the gunnery side of our job a large shed was provided which housed two or three Fraser Nash gun turrets, which could be operated solely for the familiarisation of movement by following a beam of light along the walls, and ceiling of the shed, a process which was good turret handling practice. A note book was in situ on an adjoining table for trainees to append their names, number, and the total time spent on turret familiarisation. As with Morse practice this exercise was again optional, and I and quite a number of the other lads amassed totals of over forty hours, which was obviously time well spent, even if it was performed in our own free time. I do not think it was generally realised that the extra time <sup>SPENT ON</sup> turret practice was really beneficial, and could very well mean the difference between "getting the chop" or not, during future bombing operations that we would be indulging in when we reached a squadron.

Towards the end of our course two of my "oppos", Doug Wightman, and Frank Kerr, accompanied me on a free afternoon when we decided to explore the sights of Inverness, which was the nearest large town. We travelled by train, looked around the town centre, and at the same time found the <sup>SHOP</sup> we had been searching for, which was the prime reason for our visit. In confident anticipation of the final outcome of our gunnery course we duly entered this shop, and thereupon each purchased a set of Sergeants chevrons, plus a spare Air Gunners half wing brevet. Leaving the shop, quite pleased with ourselves, we agreed that a meal would be the ~~next~~ item on our agenda, and thus made a beeline for the Services canteen in the town centre. This move proved to be a big mistake on our part, the canteen was <sup>FOUND</sup> to be crowded with Highland "khaki jobs", who for no reason except the colour of our uniforms became very antagonistic, and seemingly wanted to wipe the floor with us, in short it appeared that "Brylcreem Boys" were not popular in this neck of the woods. The situation was weighed up, it did not take us long to realise that discretion rather than valour was needed in our circumstances. We were grossly outnumbered, the odds were beyond contemplation, our three minds compounded, yes, it had to be a very abrupt departure on our part. It proved to be impossible to leave via the normal exit, and a touch of the "Errol Flynn's" was obviously needed to effect our getaway. Three very agile

leaps, and we were on our way out by means of a window exit door to disappear down the front fire escape steps to the street below. A somewhat convenient escape route maybe, but we would never have made it otherwise, so much for a quiet visit to Inverness.

One might say "Why the aggro"? Well, I can only surmise that, despite the outcome of the Battle of Britain, many Army lads still persisted, at that time, with the utterance of the jibe "Where were the R.A.F. at Dunkirk". In most cases the issue did not venture beyond the argumental phase, but these Inverness Army types obviously had strong feelings on the subject.

With aircraft not visible over the beaches during that traumatic period they had a mistaken belief that the RAF had let them down. The fighter boys were undoubtedly present, with the air battles being fought at height a few miles to the east, but no doubt the "brown jobs" became aware of this in later days.

The adverse weather around Evanton, and our financial status precluded many nights out, and so most evenings were spent on the Station. The exceptions were the odd visit to Dingwall, a few miles distant, and the local shindigs in Evanton village where the local, and Scottish W.V.S. hospitality was first class. Our short term of training, six weeks in its entirety, passed by very quickly, and on a certain Friday afternoon, early in the month of February, our smartly dressed course squad formed up on the Station square for our passing out parade ceremony, during which I and the remainder of the course were awarded our Air Gunners half wing flying brevet, and thus became fully qualified Sergeant Wireless Operator/Air Gunners.

The previous evening had been spent busily sewing Sergeants tapes on to both tunic, and greatcoat sleeves in preparation for the big day to follow. Although I was due to leave on the following day, Saturday, I was asked to stop over, and play for the Station soccer team that weekend. I must say that I was really tempted, but eventually preferred to travel down on the homeward bound train with the remainder of the lads, accompanying them as far as York railway station at which point I alighted to bid them Au Revoir, I would be meeting several of them at a later date. All had been allocated seven days leave on completion of our course plus different posting instructions. Myself, and four other bods, who I can recall were Ramsay Joiner, Doug Wightman, Bob Thompson, and Frank Kerr were to report to RAF, North Coates on the termination of our leave, which, in my case, was notable for some really rough weather with plenty of snow, at least my flying boots came in very handy for trudging about in the snow.

I was justifiably proud of my flying brevet, and new aircrew status, so obviously throughout my leave, I was eagerly anticipating all that would be in store for me in future weeks, and wondered what would be our role at North Coates. I was soon to find out, RAF North Coates, situated on the East Lincolnshire coast, was an operational Coastal Command aerodrome, occupied by two squadrons, No. 22 squadron flying Bristol Beauforts, plus a Fairey Swordfish squadron, a diverse combination. The twin engined Beauforts were busy at that time bombing German ports, and shipping. The base orderly room was at a loss wondering what to do with our fivesome, and finally we were temporarily attached to the Bristol Beaufort outfit, it was evident that this was, once again, merely a stop gap posting to await entry to an Operational Training Unit. The Beaufort squadron had a full complement of crews so we were superfluous to requirements. Our small group of five spent an idle week hanging around the Beaufort squadron flight offices, and although we got to know quite a lot of the aircrew lads, we did not manage to get airborne, and usually finished up sprawled out comfortably in their excellent Sergeants Mess. This state of affairs did not last very long as, hey presto, we were on the move again, much to our relief. It was the real thing this time, our O.T.U. posting to RAF, Finningley, near Doncaster, not much of a journey for us from RAF, North Coates.