

My few weeks of comparative idleness came to an abrupt end towards the end of the month of December. The wheels of officialdom were, apparently, still in motion as Corporal "Dickie Bird, the widely acknowledged virtuoso of our squadron orderly room, sought me out to acquaint with the fact that I was no longer a member of 106 squadron. I was to report henceforth to No.14 Operational Training Unit based at RAF Cottesmore, Rutland where I would be spending the following six months or so in an instructional capacity, which would concern pre-operational course Wop/Ag's. I accepted the news with an inward feeling of satisfaction, my latent hopes had been realised after all, and I did not waste much time getting cleared. Just before noon of the following day I was ready for the off, and suitably packed I managed to connive a lift down to my new abode aboard a 106 Hampden AD 988, which I thought was an admirable concession on my ex-Flight commander's part.

My near seven months sojourn with 106 Squadron, indulging in the lottery of Operational flying was, nevertheless, a very happy one. I would always have a close sense of attachment to the squadron, and RAF Coningsby.

The aircrew "Bush telegraph " service was working very well as Bob met me upon arrival at Cottesmore.

A few days before Christmas 1941 I had received a service Xmas card from my former pilot Bob, a very special one as far as I was concerned. On the inner pages of the card he had written a very touching compliment, if you like, typifying the comradeship we shared in those never to be forgotten days. On the opposite page he had appended a poem . This card and its implications meant more to me than a "gong" ,and over the years since then has proved more significant having mellowed with age, oft recurring thoughts have induced me to read it once more. Bob was a good pal, sentimental no doubt, wholly sincere, his comments came straight from the heart. Bob was definitely "One to ride the river with" . Such comradeship was never emulated in the later years of peacetime, and although the circumstances were totally different, and beyond comparison, nonparticipants can ever know or hope to understand what it was like as a member of a Bomber Command operational aircrew .

Although the contents of this Xmas card are of a personal nature they are more than worthy of inclusion in these memoirs, a sincere appreciation from an ordinary pilot to his crew.

I quote :-

"Oft times when I, sit alone with my thoughts, my mind lives again those reckless hours when we sped together into the challenging face of danger confident of our ability to pull through , a confidence born of complete trust in each other, a confidence which we somehow knew would never be betrayed.

Many times I sat there in front with utter despair gripping me, or sheer terror holding me fast, and then I would think of you, Geoff, and dear old Ginger so close to me sharing the very danger that I felt I could not face, and somehow that knowledge lent me comfort. Most of all I felt your nearness for always I knew you to be the most competent of my or anyones crew, and still boast of your abilities, and perfections when I hear of anyone trying to slur the poor old wireless operator, If you ever doubt the part you played in this war just remember this, the plane would never have come home if I hadnt had you to help me, and if ever I am asked what good the ill wind of war brought me I shall boast of the great friendship we share, good fortune and great happiness be with you always , and my greatest wish is "May we fly again together in the future"

Sincerely

Robert L. Mooney.

With misty memories of the many times we faced the music together

I offer the following :-

" I look tonight completed and not afraid
into the windy darkness where shines no light
and care not at all though the darkness never should fade
not fear that death should suddenly come tonight
knowing my last could be surely my lowest breath
I am happy tonight I have laughed with you at death "

With the passing of the years this card, particularly its contents, has meant more to me, and though in a dog eared condition, periodically I sit down with it, and remember. It was indeed a privilege to have been a member of Bob's crew, and to have shared his friendship which was continued throughout our OTU "rest" period at Cottesmore. During the first few months I flew many times with him despite the fact that we were in different flights, and saw quite a lot of him and his wife, May at the time Bob lived out at the nearby village of Whissendine. It was during those first two months of 1942 that Bob received his notification to attend Buckingham Palace to receive his D.F.M.. His two "official" guests were obviously his wife, and his mother, but Bob persuaded me to accompany them. Why not, it was a day out in the big city. I realised I would not be able to attend the investiture inside the Palace.

The big day was well under way as outside Buckingham Palace with Bob resplendent in his best blues we approached the special gate at the side of the stately building. As we were quietly engaged in conversation Bob suddenly remarked "Ted, you are coming in with us". I immediately remonstrated to inform Bob not to be so bloody daft, after implying that one recipient and two guests as per invitation card could only be permitted admission. I did not fancy undergoing the embarrassment of being thrown out of such palatial surroundings as a gate crasher. Nevertheless a fast one was worked, the security man on the gate accepted Bob, his wife, and mother, and then asked me if I was a recipient, I cannot specifically recall who it was, but I am fairly certain that it was Bob who replied "Yes". Despite the fact that my uniform chest was minus a medal ribbon under my flying brevet I was through the portals, and on my way to the ceremony. I suppose that very few, if any, can truthfully admit to gatecrashing the Palace especially in wartime, a dubious, but well meaning achievement on my part. Later when inside the room in which the Investiture was being held I still had misgivings, and thought I would be thrown out as I felt pretty sure that the arrangements would ensure just the correct number of chairs to correspond with those invited, but nothing untoward happened everybody was suitably seated including me, and the show went on without a hitch. It was quite an experience sitting tranquilly in that stately room listening to the soft strains of martial music whilst awaiting the commencement of events. King George VI duly appeared he was only a short distance in front of me, and I watched with great interest as Bob and all the other medal recipients proudly received their well deserved decorations. A marvellous day for Bob's wife May, and his mother too.

During the late afternoon we said goodbye to Buckingham Palace, and made a bee-line for the Strand Palace Hotel to partake of a celebration meal, and it was all on Bob.

^{in 1942}

One sunny spring day Bob and I paid a visit to our old squadron at Coningsby, and lobbed down in an OTU Hampden. It was just like old times, and while I had a few words with some old "oppos" who were still on the squadron Bob had a few words with the Wingco with a view to getting back with 106 for a second tour. The lads were now flying Avro Manchesters in place of the old Hampdens, but inside a few months would be converting on to the four engined Lancaster. Sadly we never did get back to 106 squadron, and a few months later poor old Bob was grounded with eye trouble. We were not destined to team up again operationally, and later in the year when I left 14 OTU Bob, commissioned now, and a Flying Officer was still officially grounded from a medical point of view. I was not to know until I returned to the U.K. in 1945 from P.O.W. existence in Upper Silesia that Bob eventually went back on Ops, and was shot down being listed missing believed killed in action in the early months of 1944. The news was a real body blow to me, Bob Mooney DFM was one of the best, a good pal and a good skipper, I have and always will have fond memories of him.

Going back to the commencement of my "rest", a misnomer if they ever was one, flying in very much used, and in some cases clapped out aircraft that term was not exactly accurate, I would sooner say it was my term as an instructor or staff wireless operator. Anyway along with other tour expired aircrew I was billeted outside the station itself at Cottesmore House, a large private house a few miles from the airfield taken over by the establishment. Also billeted at the house were pupil aircrew, a mixed bag amongst which were Australians, Canadians, new Zealanders, Rhodesians, and of course our own RAF lads. In the main they were a grand bunch, mostly regardful, a little bit in awe of the fact that we screened bods had completed a tour of Ops. I looked after them very well in the air, that was my job, and I was never short of Sweet Caporal and Macdonald cigarettes, sheepskin "liberty" bodices, peanut butter, and all the goodies they received from their distant homes. I can recall one night at Cottesmore House when fresh lamb chops were on the menu for supper provided by a couple of "Kiwis" one of whom was obviously a butcher in Cnavvy's street, but the least said about that the better, it is best left to the imagination. I, enjoyed the atmosphere at the Hall we had some good times but after a few months I managed to obtain a room in the living quarters of the Sergeants Mess on the station. It was more convenient for me, and I shared the room with F/Sgt Davey Craven, a fellow Wop/Ag on rest, and a fellow North country lad, he originated from West Hartlepool. He often took umbrage, and I did not blame him one little bit, at the pungent odour of my thick white flying socks. He often required me to hang the offending items outside the windows of our room during sleeping hours. Davey and I had some stirring times sober and otherwise. ~~Was~~ Notably we were a good darts partnership, as all the local villagers duly found out much to their customers chagrin. On one such night after a successful evening at the nearby village of Greatham as we came back across the fields to our drome Davey wagered that I could not mount and ride one of the many cattle that were in this field.

Of course, Dave won his bet without experiencing the slightest bit of anxiety. As for myself the exercise was foolhardy to say the least, I could easily have broken my fool neck. In the near midnight darkness I managed to mount one of these heifers, or was it a steer, but before I could settle was immediately thrown by my somewhat indignant bony four legged animal. Despite the ample grass covering the ground was really hard, and the impact had the effect of sobering me up very quickly indeed to mark the end of my equestrian antics for a while.

All the tour expired instructors at No. 14 OTU, Cottesmore had various jobs to carry out, and in our case, as Wop/Ag's, some were connected with the ground instruction of each course, while others performed in the air acting as both W/T instructors, and safety links on day and night cross-country exercises. These were in the main carried out flying in the twin engine Avro Anson 1 aircraft. The old Anson was an ideal machine for crew training of Observers, and wireless operators. With its twin Cheetah engines it was easy to fly, and had no vices, the only drawback was the physical effort needed to manually wind up or retract the undercarriage, but generally we avoided this chore by leaving the undercart permanently down.

After an interview with the unit C.G.I. (Chief Ground Instructor), who was usually a Squadron leader, I was allocated to the Flying Pool, and subsequently flew as "staff" wireless operator on crew training crosscountry exercises in the Anson Flight. On these occasions the total crew complement was five comprising of pilot, two trainee navigators, a trainee Wop/Ag at the W/T set, and a "screamed" Wop/Ag like myself. I was present mainly for safety purposes, but from an instructional point of view kept a close watch on the trainee W/Cp in order to keep him on the straight, and narrow. I was always on hand with sound practical advice, helped him when and if he got into difficulties, and anything they did not know.

In connection with any type of W/T method of operation I would demonstrate the correct procedure of working. If the trainee could not cope I would then take over the set, but I must say that they were very few in that category.

The great majority of Wop/Ag trainees coped very well with only minimal assistance from me. Of course, it was inevitable that now and again the W/T equipment became unserviceable, it was then up to me to get to work, and try to put things right in order that the trainee could continue with his exercise, and his assistance to the pupil navigators, in respect of bearings.

As each course progressed with both navigators, and Wop/Ag's becoming more proficient they then graduated on to Hampden bomber aircraft to join their pilot's as a crew participating in both day, and night high level bombing exercises before flying on long cross country trips. They would then begin to know each other with the shared experience of navigation, bombing, wireless telegraphy, and air gunnery to eventually emerge fully qualified as a crew, and be then posted to an operational squadron in Bomber Command.

On Sunday 4th January I was listed as duty wireless operator, but night flying was scrubbed at eight thirty pm owing to very bad weather conditions, so I spent a quiet evening in the Sgts Mess with convivial company, which was more amusing than night flying. The following day I was again earmarked for a spell of night flying and it proved to be a very busy night for me aboard the old Anson. Despite my diligent assistance, the trainee W/Op could not cope, and in the end I had no option but to take over the W/T set to obtain more than a few bearings. It was one of those nights, even the trainee navigators were struggling, and in the circumstances we bypassed our home base to effect a landing at nearby RAF North Luffenham, where we spent the night.

I met several old acquaintances of mine from earlier service days who were members of 144 Squadron, a 5 Group outfit, operating at that time from North Luffenham in Hampdens. Relaxing in the Sgts Mess we had quite a lot to talk about, supplemented of course by a few pints of best bitter. On returning to Cottesmore the following morning I found that Bob had wangled me four days leave during which I accompanied him, and his wife May to Edinburgh where we stayed at his in laws.

During the remainder of the month I was kept busy in the Anson Flight flying both day and night crosscountries. The weather during this period was pretty rough, therefore night flying exercises were often scrubbed usually after an hour or two standing by in the crew room. A particular night excursion of sorts was a cross country at the end of January when in Anson O2 with Sgt. Baker as pilot I flew as staff W/O on a DR2 and DR3 combined exercise. We were airborne five and a half hours which was then almost an endurance record for an Anson trip. My trainee W/O was a Sgt. D. Price who performed very well on the 1154/1155 Marconi set, I was merely a passenger.

It was raining cats and dogs the following Friday, and I accompanied by a few of the boys decided to try out for the first time the hostilities of the city of Leicester as a "liberty wagon" was scheduled to visit this metropolis of the Midlands. Some metropolis it proved to be, we were not very impressed with the facilities on hand and collectively it was not a very successful venture. I was nearly run in by an over zealous special constable who, unseemingly, objected to my RAF official issue torch which I was using in the black out conditions. At first he did not realise I was an RAF type, but ultimately I won the argument regarding the validity of the torch, and its dim illumination so we were able to continue merrily on our way. That occasion was the first and only time we visited Leicester, the majority of the pubs we graced with our presence put up the shutters shortly after nine pm, which was not very satisfactory from our point of view, so thereafter it was Nottingham for the odd night out, a much more lively city in respect of night life in those days.

I was not detailed for flying the next day, but had a double handful on Sunday 25th January. During that morning my name was listed for a cross country with Sgt. Hudson at the controls of Anson 9608 Z. During the course of this exercise the Marconi W/T set became unserviceable causing us to land at RAF Mildenhall, the time was 1 pm. While the set was being repaired by that units signals personnel our crew had lunch in their mess, and eventually took off for our own base at 4 pm just making it back to Cottesmore in time for tea. For me it was one hell of a rush as I had found out from the Watch Office, prior to going for tea, that I was also scheduled to fly a DR 3 cross-country with a P.O. Sanderson that same evening, phew, and they called this a "rest preferably I would much sooner be back on Ops. Nevertheless, I enjoyed my tea, and made it back to the Anson flight crewroom in time to join the waiting crew, we too

at 6.30 pm. After being airborne for four hours F.O. Sanderson executed a smooth landing, all the Sergeant trainees performed successfully. Bad weather now held up the OTU flying programmes, and these conditions persisted into the month of February so it follows that only spasmodic flying training exercises were carried out during those weeks. Snow then began to fall heavily, consequently there was no flying going on at all, but plenty of nights out with the boys. After a week of continual snowfalls flying was eventually resumed on a Sunday midway through the month of February, and my name was foremost on the list this time with an all trainee crew with myself as the safety link. The pilot was a Sgt. Cowell, and we took off in Anson 9718 at ten thirty in the morning on a DR 6 crosscountry exercise. As usually was the case we had two trainee navigators aboard, and it was the normal procedure for one of them to change over the petrol tanks in the old Anson when this became necessary.

In this aircraft the tank change over was accomplished by the lateral movement of two knobs which were situated on the right hand side of the fuselage opposite the navigators table position. At the time we had been airborne for slightly in excess of three hours when our pilot, Sgt. Cowell decided that the time was opportune for the tanks to be changed over. Somehow the trainee Observer Laddie, who had opted to do the job, did not perform the task correctly, and unfortunately his efforts caused an air lock to develop in the fuel system. Very soon afterwards both engines began to cough and splutter, to subsequently cut out. There I was with a sprog pilot who was about to experience his first emergency crash landing, poor old Sgt. Cowell, the unfortunate tank change "cock up" had indeed placed him in a precarious position. Our Avro Anson was at this point somewhere over the county of Leicestershire. The surrounding countryside below was undulating, though many flat fields were evident, but I could see that innumerable trees would have to be avoided. A "shaky" day was obviously in the offing, I had been through it all many times before, but the other lads had not. Nevertheless the three trainee crew members did not need any advice from me as they prepared themselves for a crash landing. In the crew compartment at our positions we sat, and braced ourselves holding on grimly, firmly supported to offset the impending impact, and the rough, jolting passage which would follow when the kite hit the ground. Our pilot, Sgt. Cowell, white of face, concentrating fully at the controls with no power available, put the nose of the Anson down to keep above stalling speed, he had to pick out his landing spot very, very quickly. The fields below which had previously been a patchwork of green squares, and rectangles now began to loom up much larger by far with the many trees now rapidly becoming obstacles in our path. In the difficult circumstances Sgt. Cowell did not panic, but kept his cool, I thought he did a good, workmanlike job, and while descending narrowly missed some telegraph wires as he endeavoured to place the Anson down safely. We brushed the tops of a group of trees to eventually crash land somewhat heavily amidst two unlevel fields where the old Anson then careered along vehemently on its belly to crash through, and demolish a portion of the hedgerows before slithering to a shuddering stop in the second field leaving behind a trail of ploughed up furrows along the grass. The poor old "Annie" looked a sorry sight with fuselage, wings, and props badly bent, a certain candidate for a "write off". Despite the severe jolting impact of the forced landing no member of our five man crew was seriously injured, except for many minor cuts and bruises plus a severe shaking up. We were indeed fortunate that the ever reliable Avro Anson was a comparatively safe kite with a low stalling, and landing speed. After the crunch it was five very relieved airmen who emerged from the crashed Anson to thankfully breathe in the very fresh country air, and surprisingly find themselves virtually intact except for some blood letting, and bruises galore. After a short space of time we had all regained our composure, and after a welcome smoke I decided to exercise my limbs to try and find a telephone box. Further down a nearby road I somehow managed to locate a telephone, and rang RAF Cottesmore to acquaint them with the news of our crash landing, and its approximate location. It appeared that we had crash landed near the town of Market Harborough, Leicestershire. Looking very forlorn we stood by our crashed Anson to await the arrival of helpers from our unit No. 14 O.T.U. It proved to be a rather prolonged stand by as the hours slowly passed, and it was late afternoon before a lorry arrived from our base, complete with a demolition crew.

The crash site scene was soon a hive of energetic but noisy activity as the badly battered Anson was more or less cannablisised, everything detachable was stripped, and in turn loaded on to the wagen. The interior of the kite was well, and truly cleared with me joining in to give a helping hand to detach the whole of the Marconi W/T installation. The job in its entirety took quite some time to complete, and it was almost nine p.m. when our whole party arrived back at RAF Cottesmore, albeit minus one Avro Anson mark 1. Of course when such ~~incidents~~^{incidents} as the demise of an aircraft took place in the wartime RAF someone was always earmarked to carry the can, and logically I could not see how in this instance it could be possible for me to be designated as the fall guy. How wrong I was with that assumption. The ensuing postmortem, or should I say inquiry, placed the onus on me, the poor old staff wireless operator, being the only man aboard the plane with experience I was held responsible for the calamity, and in due course I received a red endorsement in my flying logbook. Needless to say I was flabbergasted, words failed me then, they do now. Amazed though I was, the endorsement did not in any way dampen my enthusiasm, and with a shrug of the shoulders I immediately erased it from my mind.

Another notable event during my early months at Cottesmore was my selection one day to perform the duties of Station Orderly Sergeant, which was a job not normally carried out by aircrew personnel. I had never done the job before, and thankfully was not called to do it again afterwards. On the day in question, smartly uniformed with the necessary addition of a blue webbing belt, and holstered side arm my duties commenced very early in the morning. My first job was the daily ceremony of raising the Station Union flag an operation which could prove to be very baffling at times as it was so easy to fix the flag upside down, but all was well I had done my homework. Afterwards I accompanied the Orderly Officer on his early morning rounds . . . throughout the Station, I cannot recall there being any complaints. I had been informed previously by a ground staff Sergeant that as Orderly Sergeant one could be in store for a really hectic twenty four hours of duty, as my stint proved to be.

During the very late evening it was just my luck to be disturbed from my reverie in the comfort of the Sgts Mess as I received a call from the Guard Room. They had asked for the Orderly Sergeant, and as such I had to look after the needs of five new arrivals who had just then reported to the Guardroom. I then proceeded to see to their comfort, and find them accommodation for the night, yes being Orderly "dog" was educational, if nothing else. From mid February onwards proved to be a very busy period for 14 OTU as the different courses had now quite

a lot of leeway to make entirely to the inclement weather of the previous weeks, and consequently I found myself airborne every day looking after my charges as the flying tempo increased. After a few weeks of nonstop flying activity in the Anson flight I was ready for a spot of leave, which was in fact due, and subsequently I spent a portion of it with Bob, and his wife up at Edinburgh, a lovely place. When I returned to the field at Cottesmore I found out, much to my surprise, that the system, which we in the

Instructors Pool had been formerly involved in, had been changed. Hitherto I had been performing flying instructional duties only, but this new system meant that I would have to participate in both flying, and ground instructional duties. All the screened Wop/Ag's in the Flying Pool were affected by this change over. Each morning we had to report to the Ground Training Centre, and help to install

what were generally known as, and called "Harwell" boxes, named as such after the RAF station who thought up, and introduced the idea in the first place. These were individual wooden cabinets in which a Marconi 1154/1155 W/T set would be installed together with the respective Morse key attachments for ground instructional working use by Wop/Ag course trainees when completed.

A rota system was arranged, so as far as we were concerned it was fixing up the "Harwell" boxes during the morning, and flying on crosscountry exercises during the afternoon or vice versa. On top of this we still had to perform the usual quota of night flying details, altogether a situation which we four expired Wop/Ag's were not very happy with.

Fortunately this new working procedure did not affect me for very long as I was moved out of the Instructional Pool, to be transferred over to our satellite airfield at Saltby which was situated a few miles to the north, near to the A 1 main road

A flight of Hampdens were based here which were used by senior course trainee crews during the final part of their OTU training syllabus. My main function in this respect was to look after, and maintain in good working order all the wireless equipment in these aircraft which included the Marconi W/T set plus the TR 9 air to ground R/T set. Conditions were really rough at Saltby, the weather was still very bad and the whole place was literally a morass of mud with gum boots being the order of the day. In places the mud was six to nine inches deep, it had even penetrated the inner sanctum of the Sergeants Mess. Suitably rubber booted I slithered my way around to report to "C" Flight, and afterwards found sleeping accommodation in one of the cold and damp Nissen huts. This environment was somewhat on the primitive side compared with the home comforts of RAF Cottesmore, which of course was a modern, brick built permanent station. However, on the bonus side of things at Saltby I was left to my own devices, additionally there was a distinct lack of "bull" too. Contrary to my earlier expectations I really enjoyed the W/T maintenance work on the Hampdens, six of which were under my charge, and despite the very cold, and at times snowy weather plus the glue-like underfoot conditions I kept all the equipment in good working order. A Daily Inspection was carried out on all six kites every morning, and at odd times I even calibrated all the Marconi W/T set transmitters in order to make the Wop/Ag's job that little bit easier than it normally would have been, all in the days work I know it was appreciated by the boys.

On the 6th March another birthday had dawned, my 22nd actually, and the day turned out to be a very busy one for me, and "C" flight, as all the available Hampdens were airborne, some on circuits and bumps whilst some of the senior course trainee crews were engaged on cross country trips. I had been busy all morning going over all the kites to make sure all the W/T equipment was in good nick before flying commenced. Saltby was not far from the Great North road (A1), and myself and a few "oppos" had intended to celebrate my birthday with a few drinks in Grantham, but to my disgust the bus was cancelled at a late hour. Collectively we were not dismayed, and the celebrations went ahead ~~as planned~~ only the venue was changed. It had to be the Sgts Mess, and although the beer on sale was not very potent, it proved to be good singing ale. We congregated around the piano in the Ante room, and throats were continually lubricated as we boisterously sang our way through the whole, vocabulary of the popular RAF ditties with an air of gay abandon. We were accompanied by a couple of crates of Nut Brown, admittedly not very strong stuff but it did wonders for the old vocal chords. At a late hour the now very depleted stock of bottled Nut Brown was increased by courtesy of one of the course Wop/Agūs, a Canadian lad, who had just received the happy news that he had become a proud father, and as he chuffed, he really let himself go and joined in the proceedings, so the singsong went on and on as the tunes rolled out "Eskimo Nell" "Mobile" "The bloody great Wheel" "Salome" the list could go on and on. All these tunes got the full treatment, our own versions of course, until the early hours of the morning when inevitably the booze ran out, and throats ran dry as one by one we drifted off to our huts for a few hours kip. On the following Sunday I was informed by the Station Signals officer, S/L Wakelin, that I was to report back to Cottesmore the next day, my short stint at Saltby was at an end. Despite the rough and ready accommodation, and the muddy conditions I was really sorry to leave, I had anticipated at least a four week stay. I left Saltby the next day, Monday, when my relief arrived on the scene to take over my job. I had a very welcome surprise when I recognized an old mate from Wireless and Gunnery school days namely "Chick" Morris. He had recently finished his first tour with 49 Squadron, a Hampden outfit at RAF Scampton, Lincs. Needless to say before I left we had a good natter, and arranged to continue it at a later date, which we did. Later that day I arrived back in the fold that was Cottesmore, muddy but unbowed, and the following night a Sgts Mess dance saw me and Chick Morris continue our conversation, we had a lot to talk over. It proved to be a good "do", these functions always were, and a bit hectic too consequently Chick and I finished up slightly the worse for wear. The following morning,

or was it the later hours of the same morning, I was the possessor of a really thick head, and was in no fit condition for "dicing" on the early detail. However adverse weather conditions came to my aid, and fortunately all morning flying was scrubbed.

I cannot say that I was overjoyed to be back in the old routine, but the choice was not mine, I had really relished the free, and easy independent role I played at Saltby, short and sweet as it was. Reverting to my former dual role of ground instruction, and flying I had now returned to the Ground Training Centre to look after a new intake, the Wop/Ags of No. 42 course. As each course progressed along the way another new one would commence ensuring continuity, a veritable human conveyor belt which turned out fully trained

crews to fill the squadron gaps. No. 42 course trainees at that time were busily engaged in the Ground Centre ensconced within their "Harwell" boxes performing W/T exercises using their respective Marconi 1154/1155 sets, practice would make perfect. Several of the operators required some practical advice, but on the whole they did not give me much trouble during the early weeks of their course.

On the 16th March a bad crash occurred near the airfield when an ex 106 squadron Hampden went in, and all four crew members were killed. Ironically, this kite AD 988 was the Hampden I had flown in when I made the journey from Coningsby to Cottesmore on my posting at the end of the previous year.

This crash was not exceptional by any means, it was a hard fact that flying training accidents

at the many Bomber Command Operational Training Units happened fairly frequently, and my unit No. 14 O.T.U. had its fair share with almost 30 Hampdens, and 7 or 8 Wellingtons, with respective crew members, being involved in major accidents, during the year of 1942. Most of these calamities occurred during either take offs or landings at both the aerodrome, and the satellite at Saltby.

~~One~~ One of these unlucky Hampdens was my old faithful AD 802, the kite in which I had flown almost all my operational trips whilst serving on 106 squadron at RAF, Coningsby. After sterling squadron service, a very large number of operations, AD 802 had been relegated to a "workhorse" OTU role which tragically ended during the month of June 42 when the kite crashed. At the time its pilot was attempting a landing, all the crew were killed, a sad ending. During those days RAF, Cottesmore was generally known in local aircrew circles as the "Valley of Death". A layman might have thought that a rather macabre title, but statistically between sixty and seventy aircrew bods were killed during training at RAF Cottesmore. The year of 42 was undoubtedly a very busy period for 14 OTU, and altogether well over a thousand pilots, navigators, Wop/Ags etc were trained during that time, so the station played a more than useful role in the general scheme of things.

Several of my pupils lost their lives during their later crew training period at Cottesmore. One of these was a R.C.A.F. Sgt Wop/Ag who hailed from Newfoundland. I knew him very well he possessed a smart tailor made uniform which I had often admired, and indeed had told him so on many an occasion. In my usual jocular fashion I had often requested him to put my name down for the said uniform if and when he discarded it, physically he was the same build as myself. He always gave me the same answer, quite seriously too, which in effect meant that I could have the uniform if anything happened to him whilst training at Cottesmore. Naturally, the thought never entered my mind that anything would, but one night the Hampden in which he was flying with his pilot, crashed while practising night landings, and unfortunately both were killed. I duly took over my friend's best blue tailored uniform, red silk lining and all, for my own. I would lay particular emphasis on the fact that there was nothing cold blooded about this action for, more especially on an operational squadron, it was an unwritten law amongst aircrew friends, and mates that if one got the "chop" his pals were entitled to help themselves to what they fancied from what was left behind, except, of course, personal items pertaining to next of kin. My Canadian Wop/Ag friend would not have wanted it any other way, regardless of the fact that our verbal agreement was made in a light hearted fashion.

Two days after this unlucky crash I was scheduled for a daytime Anson flight, but it was cancelled, and instead I found myself detailed for that same night as W/T instructor on a DR 3 crosscountry exercise with P.O. Clarke as pilot aboard Anson Z 9608. The weather on that particular night could only be described as vile, but by the time our five man crew left the flight crew room to clamber inside our Anson no cancellation order had been forthcoming. The visibility was really dim, and seemed to be getting worse, nevertheless we were permitted to take off, and proceed with our training flight. My own opinion was that it should have been a "scrub". Some time after we had set course on the first leg of the exercise the weather deteriorated even further with the fog ever thickening, the visibility was then almost nil. In the circumstances I relieved the pupil wireless operator, and took over the W/T set. Within a few minutes I had received a BBA (return to base) signal. I informed the pilot at once, and somewhat relieved, he banked the Anson to turn on a reciprocal course in the general direction of our base. I was now acting as the safety link, in our situation D/F bearings were now imperative, and in this respect I was busily engaged at the Marconi 1154/1155 set. Within the ninety minutes or so of our return journey I had obtained no less than six QDM's (homing bearings) which enabled the pilot to steer the correct course back to base. After being airborne for just over three hours we arrived on the Cottesmore circuit. P.O. Clarke was soon in touch with the Cottesmore R/T control to receive landing instructions, but the extremely foggy conditions would make it a real test for our pilot, even though he was only "driving" an Anson training aircraft.

The thick swirling 'clag' was almost down to the deck, and inevitably the combined elemental factors would bring out the best or otherwise in the flying qualities of P.O. Clarke. He experienced great difficulty during his many attempts to get us down on terra firma making six approaches before at long last he managed to scrape in by the skin of his teeth, and land the Anson heavily but safely. P.O. Clarke coped very well, but that was certainly one training flight that should never have been allowed to leave the deck.

During the next two months I was kept busy following the usual pattern participating in the very busy nonstop course schedules on day and night crosscountries keeping a watch on the progress of the trainee W/Ops, and giving help and advice when needed. As the courses commenced, and in due course departed countless fresh faces were imprinted visibly on my memory, apart from RAF lads the others hailed from all parts of the Commonwealth plus quite a few Americans who had enlisted in the RCAF. They all progressed to amalgamate as crews on Hampdens, and then went on to achieve operational status in different squadrons of No. 5 Group at that particular period of 1942.

During the time I spent in the Flying Pool as staff W/Op in the Anson Flight, I flew somewhere in the region of forty hours per month on average, and looking back on those OTU instructional days I cannot but wonder why the number of mid air crashes was so few during constant night flying over the blacked out countryside, as we flew at varying heights in such a congested air space which got even busier during the following years. Naturally the operational air space of Lincolnshire, and East Anglia was for the most part avoided in the preparation of the training cross country exercise routes, but there was still a hell of a lot of other bomber OTU's training aircraft airborne almost every night. I must admit that such thoughts never entered my mind in those days, as I blissfully unaware? No. I do not think so, I was aware alright, I had been involved for too long a period in the "dicing" stakes to be otherwise. However, as time went by, and the longer one survived the ever present defensive mechanism at the back of the mind

continually produced the belief that "It can't happen to me, only the others", but the truth was that it could, and did happen to many, whether "sprags" or "old Hands", the net was large.

The many pilots I flew with on the Anson trips were a mixture of good, bad, and indifferent but on the plus side the Old Anson was a very safe kite, easy to fly it was usually airborne just above sixty mph, but generally was reluctant to land as it tended to float for an abnormal length of time. During my daylight trips I had several moments at the controls performing nothing complicated, of course, just straight and level flying only.

Not all the Anson flight pilots were exoperational, as one or two of them had been taken off Hampdens having crashed once or twice before completing their OTU course. I knew one of them, a Sergeant pilot, who had completely written off three Hampdens, however he was safe enough flying Ansons.

On Monday 13 April I received a telegram from home informing me that my cousin Bill had been killed on active service. He had been flying in a Wellington bomber his crew being engaged at the time in a fighter affiliation exercise. Disastrously both aircraft collided in mid air, and all were killed. Bill was on his OTU course, a Sergeant Wop/Ag, and he was one of the eight thousand three hundred aircrew killed during non-operational flying training throughout the course of the war.

In the circumstances I was granted a forty eight hour leave pass to attend my cousins funeral, and immediately left the Station to make my way towards the Great North road with the intention of hitching a lift to Harrogate. Following a varied number of rides, mainly in lorries, I eventually managed to reach my destination, but, although I made fairly good time, sadly arrived at my Aunt's home too late, and therefore missed the funeral service. It was a great disappointment, nevertheless I was glad I had made the effort to be present to offer my deepest sympathy to all, and of course to meet the rest of my family, a sad day for all concerned.