

ROYAL AUSTRALIAN AIR FORCE

BACKGROUND

In 1942, at age 17, I joined the Air Training Corps, the RAAF cadets. We were issued with RAAF uniforms and had some evening classes and assembled on Saturday afternoons for marching drills. There were instructions in Morse Code, maps and compasses, aircraft recognition and other Air Force matters. Our officers and instructors were middle-aged men who had served in the Australian Flying Corps in Mesopotamia and France during the war of 1914-18. Aircraft recognition, the ability to recognise aeroplanes, just by their silhouettes in various flying attitudes, was important to aircrew personnel so as to know very quickly whether one sighted was one of ours or one of the enemy, German or Japanese. Then, and later in the RAAF, we learned the shapes of all of our aircraft and theirs.



Figure 1 RHC and Ross Ainsley at right Air Training Corp 1942

When the Second World War began with Great Britain deciding, in September 1939, that it was at war on Germany, the Commonwealth Government of Australia immediately decided the same. The AIF, the RAAF and the RAN began recruiting men and some women as nurses for

service. Very many enlisted, even though service was only voluntary, and the period of enlistment in each service was for the duration of the war and twelve months after. This period applied to all enlistments subsequently during the course of the war.

From the day when Japan attacked the American Naval Base at Pearl Harbour in the Hawaiian Islands, 8am Sunday 7th December 1941, Hawaiian time, which was Monday 8 December here, Australia was also at war with Japan. The Commonwealth Government then required every physically fit man between the ages of 18 and 43 years to join one of the three services or the Army Militia. The Militia was not required to go overseas like, if necessary, the AIF, RAAF and RAN. The exemptions for physically fit men were university students and men who were employed in "reserved industries", that is, those the government deemed essential to the national war effort, such as making necessary things like weapons, munitions or trucks, or in some food production, such as wheat growing.

For women, joining the services was only optional but many did; from 1939 nurses had joined the AIF and, mostly from 1942, women joined the Navy, Army and RAAF in many support functions such as clerks, mess orderlies, wireless operators and motor transport drivers. Women were not chosen or allowed to serve in any combat capacities and mostly did not serve in areas where there would possibly be direct enemy activities. They were also not involved in duties involving danger, with an exception. The RAAF used some nurses on transport planes carrying sick and wounded soldiers from the islands back to Australia and such flying did involve risks of accidents. There were several fatal accidents, crashes into mountains obscured by clouds in New Guinea and Bougainville.

The Empire Air Training Scheme or EATS was conceived at a conference at Ottawa in Canada in 1939 of senior government representatives from Britain, Australia, Canada and New Zealand. It was to provide trained airmen, pilots, wireless operators, navigators and air gunners, for Britain to use in the war against Germany, which was imminent. Britain considered that it would need many thousands of airmen for a long war, more than it had of its own, and lacked the necessary wide, open spaces for flying training. Australia and Canada had ample open countryside and much better weather. Consequently, scores of air force training stations were established and operated in Australia and Canada. During the entire war, most RAAF aircrew men, 27,300, were trained in Australia while 10,300 were trained in Canada.

The broad disposition of RAAF aircrew during the war was that slightly more than half served in the RAF in England, the Middle East and Burma and slightly less than half in the war in the Pacific. At the end of the war the RAAF had 15,000 aircrew in Britain, 1,100 in India-Burma and 14,500 in Australia and New Guinea.

Men and women aged under 21 years had to produce parents' permission before being accepted for enlistment. Some of my school friends had joined the army at 17 years and 6 months, which age was accepted, but only by the Army Militia. I had asked my father about that although I cannot think why I did as flying was the only activity that interested me. He said, "You should wait until you can join the air force. In the air force you can use your brains instead of your strength." I was not strong, although fit, and I am sure he immediately thought of how much hardship and suffering there had been for soldiers in the war of 1914-18. He did not want me to have to endure anything like that. Accordingly, I waited and, just before I became 18 on 1 March 1943, I filled in

and sent the RAAF Enlistment form, nominating Aircrew as my preferred mustering, Dad signed it and very soon after, I was called up to undergo a medical examination.

ENLISTMENT

Selection for Aircrew Training in the RAAF seemed to be made on the criteria of good intellectual capacity with the potential and willingness to concentrate and learn, being alert and having an outlook of optimism and readiness to accept duties and challenges with good sense. The RAAF was no place for larrikins. I have never seen any official criteria for aircrew selection but those qualities were the ones generally possessed by men I found myself with in the RAAF. There was no essential minimum level of education, even of having acquired the Intermediate Certificate. Histories reveal that the Commonwealth Government had found from enlistments that only 16% of men had the school Intermediate Certificate or better and therefore had decided not to insist on a certain educational standard. There was instead an interview by RAAF officers who assessed applicants by their personal characteristics and that interview was the method of selection.

There were age limits for selection, after entry, for training in each of the aircrew mustering: for those to be trained as Pilots the maximum age was 29 years and for others, Wireless Operators, Navigators and Air Gunners, 32 years. These limits concerned a man's physical abilities to maintain his essential flying functions, by staying conscious or being unconscious for the minimum time, and working effectively. Those abilities could be impaired if there were less than normal oxygen in the air or extreme "G" (gravity) force, but actually centrifugal force, stopping his blood supply to his brain caused by violent high speed movements of his aeroplane. Extreme G forces would occur when it was put through a sudden pull-up from a dive and a tight turn at high speed. RAAF Medical Officers had determined that in older men the arteries are slightly harder, which reduces the full blood flow.

There was a full medical examination, in a building at Woolloomooloo, which took several hours. Each man had to strip naked and stay like that for the entire time. The RAAF particularly wanted the highest abilities of eyesight, hearing, lung- power and perfect functions of hands and fingers. These were each tested in various ways. There were stringent tests of eyesight including "depth perception" and, for lung-power, I remember having to blow into a tube to keep a column of mercury up for a long time, perhaps a minute. Another test was to stand on one leg with my eyes closed and keep upright for about a minute. Finally, I had to show that my legs, arms, hands and fingers all worked properly. The Medical Officer told me to hold out my hands and to fully bend my fingers. I did so, but I couldn't properly bend the top joint of my right forefinger because it was still stiff after being bandaged for several weeks following an injury. That wasn't good enough for him and he sent me away to wait until it was right again. I went back after about four weeks and the MO passed me so I went into the RAAF in the next intake.

2 INITIAL TRAINING SCHOOL BRADFIELD PARK

In April 1943, at 18 years 1 month, I entered the Royal Australian Air Force as an Aircrew Trainee. The motto of the RAAF is, "Per Ardua Ad Astra", which is Latin, meaning, "Through Hardships to the Stars". The reasons I joined up were that Australia was at war and the nation expected every able man to do his part, so I, too, had the duty to do mine. However, I was also

looking forward to the adventures involved.

I went to 2 Initial Training School, or 2 ITS, RAAF Station at Bradfield Park, Lindfield, on 24 April 1943. It covered a very large area and is now occupied by laboratories of the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation. Beyond the fences surrounding the RAAF station was virgin bush and the upper Lane Cove River with deep water and a wooden wharf. There were scores of other newly eighteen year olds and we all spent the first day going through the induction process. We were lined up alphabetically and the RAAF gave me my number, 433574. The chap before me was Alex Carey, also from Sydney, who got 433573. The first two digits of my number denoted the year I enlisted. The RAAF had adopted this numbering method earlier in the war when the Empire Air Training Scheme commenced and it also distinguished RAAF men from those of the Royal Air Force in England and elsewhere which had a different system of numbering.



Figure 2 40 Course No2 Initial Training School, Bradfield Park, April 1943. RHC centre, second row from back

On enlistment in the RAAF under the Empire Air Training Scheme, each aircrew trainee was given the rank of Aircraftman 2nd Class, or AC2. This was lowest rank in the service. The next higher one was Aircraftman 1st Class or AC1.

On the first day at Bradfield Park I filled in many forms, one of which was a Will, and was issued with a Pay Book. After writing my new number on all the forms it was so impressed on my mind that I could never forget it. The next part of our induction was to be issued with our kit. For this, we were marched to the very big huts containing the Stores and walked in front of wide openings with wooden counters in the walls. Behind the counters was the numerous Stores staff that issued the all the things each of us was to get. The first was a navy blue canvas kitbag to put

everything in and next, 2 grey woollen blankets. For each item of clothing, the staff asked each new recruit his size, turned to shelves and got that, and then handed over the item. 1 pair navy blue woollen uniform trousers and 1 canvas braces to hold them up, 1 navy blue woollen uniform jacket with black buttons and a cloth belt, 1 forage cap, 1 brass RAAF badge for the cap, 1 Greatcoat, 1 pr navy blue overalls, 1 fur-felt khaki hat (the same as the Army), 1 brass RAAF badge for the hat, 1 navy blue woollen jumper, 2 sets of underwear, 2 shirts and 4 collars, 1 front and 1 back collar stud, 1 black tie, 2 pr black socks, 1 pr black boots, 1 pr black shoes, 1 pr Physical Training shoes (sandshoes), 1 pr khaki PT shorts, 1 towel, 2 enamelled metal plates and 1 mug, 1 steel knife, 1 fork, 1 dessert size spoon, 1 shoe brush, 1 tin black shoe polish, 1 Housewife (a little cloth roll containing spare buttons, thread and needle). I stencilled my name and number in white paint on the kitbag. RAAF Stores designated each piece of kit as, for example, "1, Coats, Great, Airmen for the use of" and I had to sign the list of everything I had received.

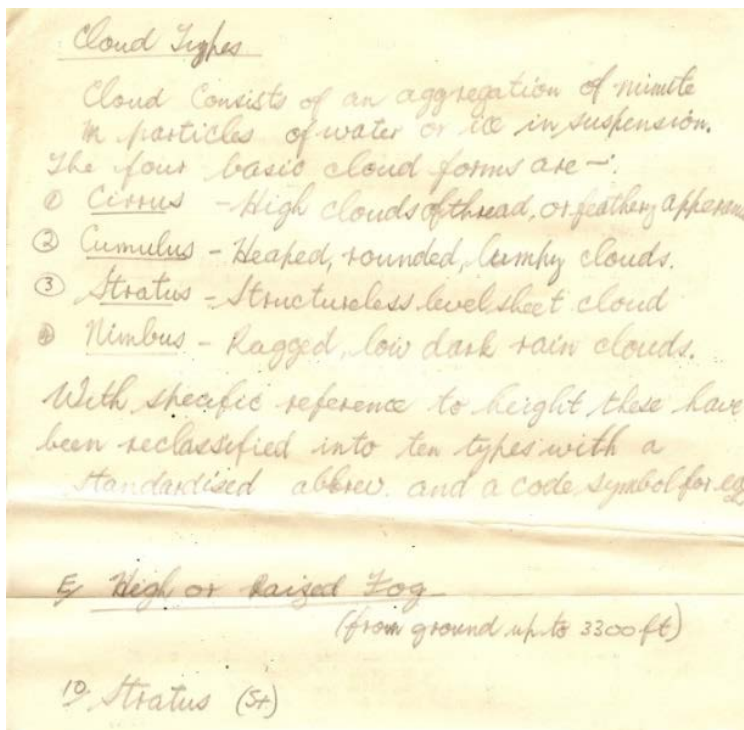


Figure 3 Notes made by RHC in classes at 2 ITC Bradfield

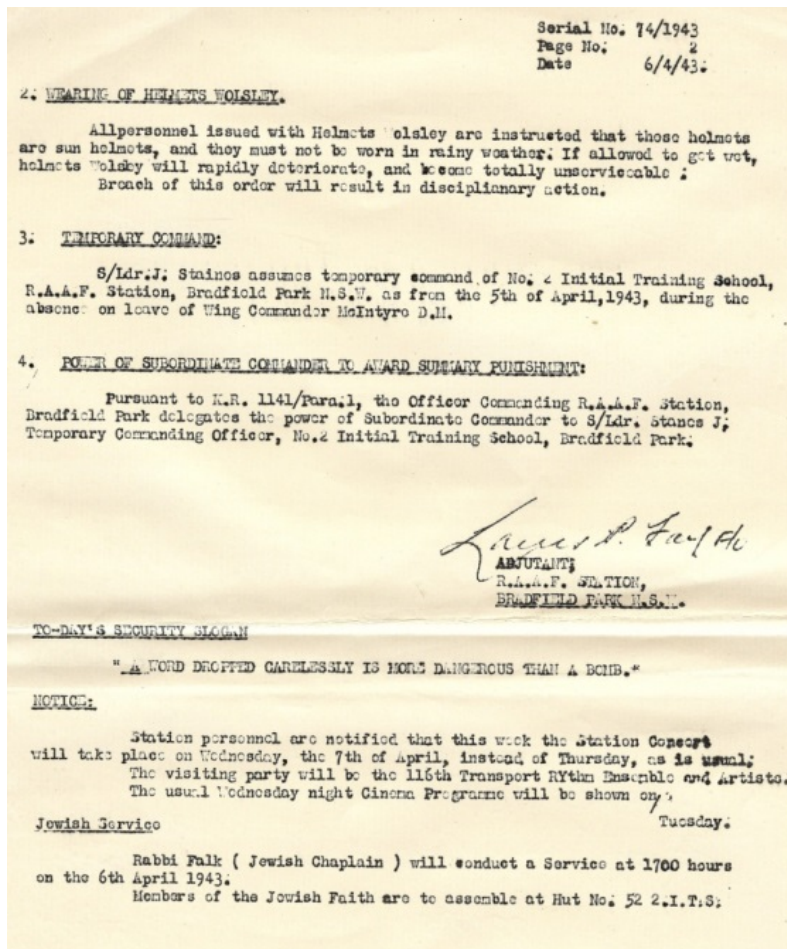


Figure 4 Reverse side of note paper supplied to recruits at 2 ITC Bradfield

My personal details were inscribed on each of two stainless steel Identity Disks, which I hung on a thin leather thong around my neck and down to the middle of my chest. One was octagonal with a hole on each side and the other was round with one hole and hung at the end of the thong. They showed, "433574 CARTER R H CE RAAF" and on the back, "04". "CE" stood for, "Church of England", which I nominated just because we were told to specify a religion. "04" represented my blood group. From that day on and throughout my service and travels until I was discharged, I always had the disks hanging on my chest. The reason for having two disks was so that one could be taken away from the corpse for recording purposes while the other was left on for subsequent identification, if necessary. Every Australian serviceman and servicewoman had them and they were referred to simply as ID. A jocular name for them was Dead Meat Tags and American servicemen called their disks Dog Tags.

Our intake was officially designated as 40 Course. We lived in huts. A standard RAAF hut was a long structure on low brick piers with a wooden floor and a door at each end with wooden steps. There were corrugated iron walls, many wooden casement windows along each side and a corrugated fibro roof. A hut accommodated about thirty men, fifteen along each side with beds at 90 degrees to the walls. A bed was made of pipe and thick wire mesh with a pailasse made of hessian and filled with straw. There was a steel locker with each bed but essentially a man lived out of his kitbag.

Meals were had in the Airmen's' Mess. This was a much larger hut with long wooden trestle tables and forms along each side to sit on. Each man took his two enamelled metal plates, mug, knife, fork and spoon and walked past the serving table where mess orderlies ladled out the food for that meal. Subsequently, he scraped his plates into a garbage bin and washed his utensils in a drum of hot water, both near the door. The meals were reasonably good, substantial and no-one expected better.

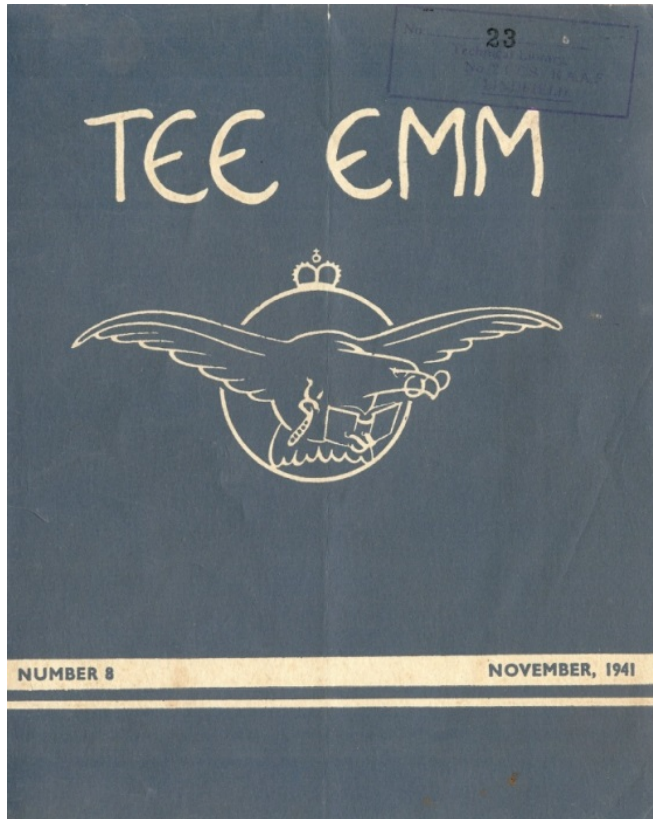


Figure 5 Cover of RAF magazine used by recruits at 2 ITC Bradfield in 1943. The stamp at the top right of cover indicates that it was from the Technical Library

LEARN FROM THE OTHER FELLOW'S MISTAKES

(Extracts from a report of a daylight attack by nine Blenheims
on enemy shipping)



P.O. Prune is toasting
it out.

"I fired my gun at the nearest flak-ship and found that one gun absolutely refused to fire and the other fired four rounds before giving up the ghost. This was my first attempt at using Browning guns and I took a very poor view of their performance.

"We set a straight course for home from the scene of our bombing and that was our big mistake. A map will show that a straight course from Borkum to Norfolk takes you parallel to the enemy coast line. About an hour or more after our attack we were intercepted by two yellow-nosed Me. 109's. It appears certain that the enemy plotted our course and it was just too easy for fighter interception. No one but our observer seemed to know where we were flying;

judging by conversation later, everyone thought we were nearly home. I did.

"The enemy aircraft were about 800 yards away on our red beam when I first sighted them, and they, like us, were flying at sea level. The leading enemy fighter delivered his attack on the red quarter of the rear machine whilst his friend hung back to watch. I was flying with the new Marconi W/T set and had had twenty minutes instruction on it before the flight. I wasted valuable time changing from 'listening out' to intercommunication."

A fight then followed in which the Me. was put out of action and a Blenheim was hit. The report goes on:

"Fighting control was not used, as it has not been practised at this squadron, but it would have been invaluable. I badly wanted to bring our second section from echelon starboard into line astern but was unable to do so."

Now what do you learn from all this? Well, the following pertinent questions may well be asked: Why had not the gunner been given, or seen that he got, practice with the Browning guns? Was their failure at a critical moment due to his not having familiarised himself with them—or to insufficient maintenance inspection before setting out? Why did the navigator set such a dangerous course home, which resulted in the damage to a Blenheim, instead of heading out to sea? Should not the navigator have told the crew where they were; a gunner who thinks he is nearly home to Norfolk is probably not as keenly on the look-out as he ought to be for hostile fighters? Again, is only twenty minutes' instruction on a new W/T set the best preparation for a bombing sortie involving a combat? And should not the Fighting Control which "would have been invaluable" have been practised at the squadron?

All those who are even remotely concerned with such points in their own squadrons should pay attention to the above questions—and answer them for themselves the right way.

Figure 6 Page from Tee Emm. The title of the magazine comes from 'Training Manual'

TWO DOZEN DON'TS FOR PRISONERS OF WAR



1. Don't tell your captors anything except your name and rank.
2. Don't believe them if they insist you are bound by International Law to tell them your unit. That's just Lie Number One.
3. Don't believe Lies Numbers Two and Three, Four or Five: that they will ill-treat or penalise you if you don't talk; that they will give you good treatment if you do; that they are merely anxious for a friendly chat with a brave enemy; or that some friend of yours has already Told All. Your answer to these should be monosyllabic and plural.
4. Don't forget that everyone round you is an Enemy—till you know him for certain to be a friend.
5. Even then don't discuss anything with him.
6. In short, DON'T OPEN YOUR DARN MOUTH.
7. Don't forget the enemy want to know everything you can tell them, however apparently insignificant, about movements of units, aircraft, air stations, air tactics, defences, politics, morale, or even the weather.
8. So D.O.Y.D.M.
9. Don't forget they can piece things together; that papers, letters, diaries, practically anything in your aircraft or on your person from maps to tram tickets is capable of giving them information.
10. So don't forget to destroy your aircraft after you come down, and your tram tickets before you go up.
11. Don't think you've fooled them when they give up interrogating you, and start to chat on harmless topics. No topic is harmless when you're a prisoner.
12. Don't believe in anyone's protestation of sympathy or friendship, be they guards, fellow prisoners, kindly interrogators, or even pretty hospital nurses. It's just the good old confidence trick.
13. Don't imagine there isn't a microphone in your room because you can't see it.
14. D.O.Y.D.M.
15. Don't believe in either fairies or friendly neutrals. There ain't no sich thing.
16. Don't believe a *word* you are told by *anyone*.
17. Don't let yourself, above all, be deceived by the happy chance of meeting a friend after a spell of solitary confinement. You may be sure that walls have ears.
18. D.O.Y.D.M.
19. Don't be downhearted. Canaries sometimes sing: prisoners sometimes escape.
20. Don't write letters to friends giving anything away, either in the address or the contents.
21. Don't try to be clever under examination. You will end up by being too clever by half, which will be half as clever as the other fellow. He's an

Figure 7 Tee Emm extract



Figure 8 Back cover of Tee Emm. Note the caution about preventing this document from being accessible to the enemy

There were separate huts with concrete floors and rows of showers with thick wooden

gratings to stand on, which the camp had scrubbed every day to prevent Tinea and rows of lavatories. There were also hand basins and mirrors for shaving.

While on the RAAF station we wore navy blue overalls, with each man's surname printed by the wearer on a strip of white tape sewn on the top right side, boots and fur felt hats. We called the overalls goonskins because they were mostly odd fits and some were old, faded reissues. When going outside camp we wore our uniforms and small forage caps. The cap, which had a brass RAAF badge, was worn on the right side and had a small slip of white material in the front, which designated Aircrew Trainee.

Our days were filled with marching drills, physical training, Morse Code, explanations about the compass and magnetic north, classroom instructions about Air Force regulations and procedures, aircraft recognition and instructions on the American .303 Browning air-cooled, aerial machine gun.

There was a small firing range with about five Brownings side by side on strong steel stands and instructors took them apart and reassembled them for small groups of trainees to understand how the gun worked. One feature of it was that the barrel moved backwards and forwards about an inch with each shot to allow the next round, that is, cartridge with bullet, to be pulled into the breech. The instructors fired the guns one at a time. As the range was partly under an iron roof and was behind a high earth wall, both of which reflected sound, each firing for a few seconds caused an enormous blast of noise like a continual explosion such that we could not hear any separate shots. It was very impressive. Later on, when I fired the gun from an aircraft, separate shots were discernible even though too rapid to count.

Our Initial Training School course took eight weeks, interspersed with weekend leaves. At the end of the course each trainee was selected for particular training as a Pilot or Wireless Operator or Air Gunner or Navigator. A Category Selection Board of three senior officers who were experienced airmen made the selections and each trainee had to appear before them and answer questions. That was an official procedure with a small allowance of informality. A trainee, dressed in goonskins and fur felt hat, had to march into the room, halt to Attention with feet together and arms straight down and then salute the officers, who were seated. The most senior officer, in the centre, then told the trainee to Stand Easy, which meant relax with feet apart, arms behind him and hands clasped. One of the officers asked the trainee what category he preferred, his reasons and other officers asked other questions. The Board would have had the trainee's personal details and wanted to see and hear him, to assess his answers and judge his potential. When the officers had enough information the senior officer dismissed the trainee who then came to Attention, saluted again, about-turned smartly and marched out.

The Board's decisions were conveyed to the trainees next day and soon after that, movement orders were issued and drafts of men began moving out to go by railways to the various schools all over the country. Selection for one of the categories of aircrew was a very big deal for everyone because, provided he got through the appropriate course, it defined a man's future in the RAAF.

Becoming a pilot was a popular wish of aircrew trainees and was mine, but we knew everyone couldn't have that position and there had to be the other positions, as well, to man the

aircraft then used. For instance, a heavy bomber, like a British "Lancaster" or an American "Liberator" (B24) needed seven or eight men trained for different functions to fly it. An Air Gunner was often informally referred to as a "straight" Air Gunner, not meaning in shooting but just having no wireless work.

No-one knew how the Category Selection Board selected trainees, or the criteria, for the various flying categories. Most trainees' personal details would have indicated little, if anything, about their potentials as airmen and no trainee had been tested in any way for suitability for each of the musteringings. Nor had any trainees been tested in any of the various elementary matters covered in the course. The instructors dealt with our course as a body of up to about two hundred men and not individuals and they would not have observed and reported on each man. Therefore the officers must have judged intuitively each trainee standing before them and their intuition probably involved some broad, manifested criteria such as maturity, confidence in answering questions, alertness and even physical appearance. Other factors might also have applied, such as the numbers of trainees immediately required for each flying mustering because certain numbers of each were required as monthly batches to be sent to the various schools.

It seems, on consideration of the Category Selection Board's lack of knowledge about individual trainees and its inability to test them for aptitudes that, all in all, the selection consisted in intelligent guesses. The urgent needs of the training program for supplying airmen for the war didn't allow any better process. There was an element of chance involved and odd selections sometimes occurred. I read of a man, who was already a licensed civil pilot, being assigned to become a Wireless Operator and I met a chap who had been selected for training as a Wireless Operator but who became a pilot. He told me he was in a draft about to be sent to a wireless school when the draft of men selected for pilot training, which was also about to leave, was suddenly found to be one man short. The officer in charge of the drafts transferred the chap's name to the draft of pilot trainees and off he went. He subsequently became a pilot flying Beaufighters on 30 Squadron in New Guinea. Apparently there were no particular innate abilities involved in a man becoming a pilot, or a navigator, or a WAG, or an AG and most men could be trained in any of those categories. We simply accepted the officer's decisions about our futures in the RAAF because that was the way of things and obeying orders was the rule.

However, being selected for particular training in one of the aircrew musteringings was not the end of things. Each then had to make satisfactory progress and reach the required standards of proficiency in the course he was sent on or he would be dropped from it. "Scrubbed", was the slang term and it didn't take much in the way of any trainee's slow progress, mistakes or misjudgements for the axe to fall. This occurred to more than a few, at the different kinds of schools, because instructors judged some trainees' progress to be too far below par. The RAAF required at least reasonable competence in the air in the appropriate skills. Scrubbed trainees were sent for different air training at another kind of school. This mostly occurred with those who had been doing pilot training at Elementary Flying Training Schools and such fellows went to navigation, wireless or air gunnery schools. If a trainee became permanently medically unfit through some accident or illness, which would have been very rare, he would be re-mustered to a ground staff job.

Aircrew trainees were proud of their status, wanted to succeed in their courses, get their

wings, and ultimately do their stuff in the war. Being scrubbed was very disappointing for those who suffered it.

I was to become a Wireless Air Gunner, or WAG. I would be trained to understand and operate the main wireless receiver and the transmitter, which were used in each multi engine aircraft. I would also learn all about aerial machine guns and air gunnery, thus two functions, which on bombers were alternatives according to needs in the air. At this stage we were all promoted to the rank of Leading Aircraftman or LAC, which was designated by a small emblem, a two-blade propeller of light blue woven material sewn horizontally on each arm of the tunic. This brought us a small increase in our daily rate of pay.

Immediately afterwards, the eighty or so of 40 Course WAGs-to-be were assembled on the Parade Ground and told that twenty volunteers were wanted to do their further training in Canada. They should take one pace forward. This was a very popular option so everyone, in whole lines, stepped forward. The officers then said that, as too many had volunteered, the oldest would be sent. As I was one of the youngest, I had to stay. After that, we were given the options of doing our wireless training at either the No.2 Wireless Air Gunnery School, RAAF Station, Parkes, NSW, or at No 3 WAGS, RAAF Station, Maryborough, Queensland. I chose Maryborough as I liked the prospect of going to the warmer climate and of seeing something of Queensland. I had not been outside NSW and, in fact, had never travelled further from home than to Canberra, as an infant, and to Scone as an adolescent.

3 WIRELESS AIR GUNNERS SCHOOL MARYBOROUGH

Sixty-six trainees set off by steam train from Sydney Central on 19 June, 1943, and arrived next day at South Brisbane Station, the terminus of the NSW gauge line. Then, with our kit bags, we went by covered motor trucks across to Roma Street Station and boarded a Queensland train on the narrow gauge line to go to Maryborough. The whole journey, which took about two days, was tedious and dirty because of cinders, smoke, and soot from the steam engines. 3 WAGS RAAF Station was about two kilometres north of the town, in flat country. We from NSW and a few from Victoria were joined by thirty-one from 3 ITS, RAAF Station, Sandgate, QLD, and five from Service Training Schools. Of those five, some could have been transferred from pilot and navigator schools because of not satisfying requirements of courses and thus being scrubbed, and some from other kinds of schools. Our living conditions were RAAF standard, the same as at Bradfield Park. At the time, I didn't know those numbers of men; I found them, quoted from official records, in the booklet that was produced for a reunion in 1996 of all RAAF who had been at Maryborough during the war.



Figure 9 Maryborough Qld June 1943. Dress 'winter uniform and Field Service cap of navy blue wool. Black leather shoes. White flash on cap designates Aircrew Trainee

Concerning the hut I was in, after a short time someone suggested we all put in and buy a second-hand mantle size wireless set for the hut for music and most fellows thought that would be alright. The set was bought and installed but it turned out to be a nuisance; it was never silent, always going until lights-out time, 10pm.

Our training consisted of instructions in wireless theory and learning to use Morse Code. The wireless theory was mainly about receivers but also covered transmitters which were much simpler, and concerned circuits, resistances, capacitors, condensers and valves and how all those things combined to receive a signal at radio frequency and convert it to a lower frequency and finally to audio frequency. The valve was the critical part of a wireless set or radio, the American term. It consisted of a glass vacuum tube, similar in a crude way to a lamp globe but a straight tubular shape, with a metal base, which fitted into a socket in the set. Americans called them "tubes". Inside the valve was a low tension or LT element, which heated and after half a minute glowed red. Also in the tube was a high tension plate or wire, HT, close to the LT element and the radio frequency signal went between them.

We had to learn Morse and to receive it, slowly at first and finally at 22 wpm. Morse consists of dots and dashes for each letter of the alphabet and for each number from 0 to 9. A . - B _... C _ . _ . D .. E . F .. _ . G --. H I .. J .--- K -.- L .-. M- - N -. O --- P .-. Q --.- R .-. S ... T- U ..- V ...- W .-X -.- Y -.-Z --..

- 1 .---- 2 ..--- 3 ...-- 4- 5 6 -.... 7 ----. 8 ---. 9 ----. 0 -----

In training, we referred to a dot and dash as a "dit" and "dah", the onomatopoeia of the high pitch sounds made by a Morse buzzer. There is a proper pattern that specifies the relative

lengths of a dit and a dah and of the break between each letter or number regardless of the speed of sending. The dah should be twice the length of a dit and the break should be the period of a dah. We spent seemingly hundreds of hours over very many weeks in special classrooms set up with desks and headphones, listening to Morse by an instructor using a Morse key at his desk, learning to receive Morse Code and write it down in block letters. In the RAAF, for learning purposes, Morse was in groups of five mixed letters or letters and numbers. In practice, it could be a message in plain language or in one of several other codes employing Morse as their bases.

We also learned to send it using Morse Keys. A Morse Key is a metal arm about five inches or twelve cm long hinged at the end furthest from the operator and an electrical contact point underneath about half way along. There is a broad knob at the near end, which the operator holds between his thumb and first finger. To make a dit or a dah he presses it down using wrist action against the light pressure of a spring and then lets it up momentarily before depressing it again. The movements down and up at the contact point can be made very small, only a millimetre or two for an expert operator to send fast or slightly larger for a learner to send slower.

The receivers and transmitters we learned to use were very old British made sets, the R 1082 and the T 1083 which the instructors said quickly as “Art-n-eighty-two” and “Teet-n-eighty-three”.

Then, to learn to operate the equipment under less than perfect conditions, we went in panel vans driven around the countryside, sitting in the back with a receiver and transmitter and keeping contact with base. We also used a Direction Finding loop aerial above the roof to determine the direction of base at any time. The vans were called “Outstations” and operating in them was more difficult than in a room.

The final stage of our course, in November 1943, was to learn to operate the equipment in the air. A new *“OBSERVER’S, AIR GUNNER’S AND W/T OPERATOR’S FLYING LOG BOOK* (20 x 13 cm, hard cover, blue) was issued to each man. This would be each man’s record of his flying for the rest of his flying service in the war. Details were entered in columns headed: *Date Hour Aircraft Type and Number Pilot Duty Remarks (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises etc.) Flying Times Day Night.*

For our flying training we wore khaki denim (close-woven cotton), flying suits over our usual overalls, and denim helmets with earphones. Proper flying boots and gloves against cold were not needed so ordinary black leather working boots and bare hands sufficed.



Figure 10 In the Queensland sun, 3 WAGs Maryborough November 1943

Trainee WAGs first flights were in a De Havilland 84, a two-engine bi-plane with fabric-covered wings and body, a type used in commercial passenger flying before the war. This was equipped with three sets of receivers and transmitters for three trainees to use and an Instructor accompanied the trainees. We flew out over Fraser Island, north to Bundaberg and around the countryside receiving from base and sending messages to base. Those flights were the first we had experienced. The aircraft used to bump, drop and sway with every different air current it encountered. In centre of the floor of the cabin where the trainees sat was a circular opening about two feet in diameter that gave a view of the countryside far below but the hole's function was a mystery. It brought plenty of wind into the cabin and we stepped around it very carefully whenever we had to move about.



Figure 11 Ted Summerson, Allan McLean, Unknown 3 WAGs Maryborough 1943



Figure 12 RHC outside living quarters hut 3 Wireless Air Gunners' School Maryborough Qld August 1943

Subsequent flights in the course were all in the Commonwealth Aircraft Corporation "Wackett", a single engine, low-wing training plane with fixed undercarriage. The pilot sat in the front seat and the trainee WAG sat in the rear seat. There was a sliding Perspex canopy over both. After getting in, it was necessary to buckle into the harness of the parachute pack, which filled the especially deep seat, and then buckle into the safety harness of the seat. In front of the trainee were the receiver and the Morse key and a small flat space to write on. The transmitter was above

the receiver. Down on the left side of the fuselage was the winding handle of the trailing aerial, about 60 metres long, which the wireless operator let out for low frequency wireless operations and wound in again before landing. The normal, high frequency, aerial was a wire above the cockpits, permanently fixed between a short mast in front of the pilot and the top of the tail fin.

We found that operations in the air, with tremendous noise, vibration, radio interference, and bumping of the plane were more difficult again than operating in a panel van on the road. Changing to a different frequency band required taking two coils, in small cardboard tubes, out of the receiver and transmitter, selecting different ones from a small wooden box and then inserting those in the holes where the others had been. This was very old technology. We dared not drop anything in a Wackett as there was no floor; it would fall to the bottom of the fuselage several feet out of sight and reach. It was therefore essential that the wireless operator tie his pencil with a long piece of string to a button on his flying suit.

To tune the receiver to a particular frequency required setting the knob to the exact calibration, tuning it slightly and then listening, with the volume right up, to recognise the Morse call-sign of the sending station. This was possibly something like WS7 and I would then listen out for a message and write it down. To send a message, I would switch on my transmitter which started up with a whine from the generator and set the exact frequency by turning calibrated knobs. This could be a different frequency from the receiving frequency. It did not transmit until the Morse key was pressed down. I would then use the key to call WS7 from my call-sign, say KMC6. My signal would thus be; WS7 v KMC6 ("v" meant "from") and I would repeat it until WS7 acknowledged receiving me. Then I would send whatever short message was necessary. If I expected the other station to reply to me I would finish my message with a "K" which meant, "Go ahead and reply".

When the key was down and the transmitter was making a signal, the receiver was cut off from the wireless operator although it was still switched on and receiving. When the key was up, the transmitting stopped and the wireless operator heard any tiny fragment of a signal coming into the receiver. Thus the operator would hear a signal from his receiver in the split seconds that he was letting the key come up as he was keying dots and dashes of a message. It was a useful device because it allowed the operator to hear something, realise a signal was coming from elsewhere, possibly intended for him, and to cease transmitting and listen out for his own call-sign.

We also learned the Phonetic Alphabet to use in voice radio or RT (Radio Telephone) communication. It had a designated word for each letter of the alphabet beginning with Able, Baker, Charlie, Dog, Easy. The Phonetic Alphabet was used to express Call Signs, for example, "C D A" would be spoken, "Charlie Dog Able"; it was not used for every letter in the text of a message but would be for some vital parts. Also there were standard words to denote other things, such as, "Over", meaning "I await your reply"; "Out", meaning "This is the end of my transmission"; "Roger", meaning "Your message received and understood; "Wilco" meaning " Will Carry out your Order". I didn't, in fact, ever use RT and the phonetics.

There was only one flying accident at Maryborough while I was there and it happened in November, 1943, when our course was in its last month and doing its flying. A Wackett with a pilot and trainee WAG had taken off but was not very high above the ground beyond the north end of the strip when the engine stopped. The pilot kept the plane straight ahead and brought it down in

long grass and bushes. It was damaged but did not catch fire; neither of the men was hurt and climbed out, but the trainee was, naturally, in such a hurry that he missed stepping on the reinforced part of the wing and put his foot right through the fabric. Not that it mattered. He was a fellow I knew, Chilvers, from Manly.

As recorded in my Flying Log Book, flying was only a very small portion, 13 hours, in daytime, of the course at Maryborough, which totalled about 5 months and then we received our Wireless Operator badges. This badge was of a hand grasping red sparks and one badge was sewn on each upper arm of the tunic.

In October, Stores issued everyone with khaki cotton drill uniforms for summer wear. These were of the same pattern as the navy blue woollen uniforms and we wore the same forage cap.

1 BOMBING AND GUNNERY SCHOOL WEST SALE

After a short home leave, on 11 December 1943 we went by railways and truck to No.1 Bombing and Gunnery School, or 1 BAGS, as it was known, RAAF Station, West Sale in Victoria to learn aerial gunnery. There, we had instructions in the Browning machine gun and gun turrets. The Browning fired .303 bullets at the extremely fast rate of 1,200 per minute. The barrel moved back and forth slightly with each round fired and at that rate of fire, when a bullet was leaving the muzzle the next had just started to leave the breach. The gun was designed to spread the bullets in a cone about 15 feet diameter at 200 yards as that spread and high rate of fire was more effective in aerial gunnery than fine accuracy. We had to know all about its workings so as to be able to load it and clear a jam in the air.

The turret, which the gunner sat in, moved around hydraulically and the two guns moved up and down by the gunner moving two short handles, like bike handlebars, with the triggers on them. There was a safety mechanism that prevented the guns from pointing to the wings and tail of the gunner's own plane and this device was incorporated in all bombers. Aiming the guns at an attacking fighter required sighting through the ring sight, of several concentric rings, which enabled the gunner to estimate the deflection necessary according to the relative movement of the fighter. His aim should be slightly ahead of the direction the target is moving.

We flew in Avro "Anson", two engine, fabric, low-wing planes, very slow. An Anson had a turret of two guns. Some of our flights were out over the sea and we fired the guns at a long, narrow target of canvass, called a "drogue", towed a long way behind another plane and sometimes we simply fired a "sea splash" into the sea or at some target on the firing range on the ground. The ammunition we used was solid or "ball" type, which was standard everywhere, in belt form. Each round, that is, cartridge and bullet, was held to the next by a metal clip and every third bullet, called a "tracer", had a small button of phosphorous in its base. This ignited when the cartridge fired and the phosphorus burned with a red glow as the bullet sped, at terrific velocity, far away. The gunner could thus see the course of his burst of fire and correct his aim at his target. Tracers for daylight firing had more phosphorous, to burn brighter, than those for night. Spent cartridges and clips from each gun were ejected out of the aircraft through a small chute.



Figure 13 Avro Ansons used at the No. 1 Bombing and Gunnery School (BAGS) East Sale Victoria

The gunnery course was only one month with 16 flying hours, as in my Flying Log Book, making a total of 29 flying hours for wireless and gunnery. This didn't constitute much practice and experience for new flying men but it was all that the RAAF was allowing before sending them on for final training in Operational, that is, combat aircraft.

Then we had a Passing Out Parade and received our wings, that is, our half wings, with the insignia "AG" for Air Gunner. The AG was white on a dark background at the base, the half wing was white with a straight top and it was worn just above the centre of the left breast pocket so the tapered end pointed towards the left shoulder. Navigators also had half wings, with, earlier in the war, O, for Observer and, later on, N, for Navigator, after completing their courses. The RAAF's half wing looked odd, an incomplete emblem of a flyer. The other Empire air forces also issued half wings for aircrew members other than pilots, a practice that began in WW1.

Pilots received complete wings, also white, after their training, which took months longer. They began at an Elementary Flying Training School, or EFTS, by learning to fly Tiger Moth biplanes, wood and fabric, two seat, single engine, propeller, very slow and stable. Then they were posted to Service Flying Training Schools or SFTS for advanced training, either single engine, in planes such as the Wirraway or Wackett, or multi-engine training, in planes such as the Avro Anson or Airspeed Oxford, both two-engine but slow and stable. All flying schools for pilots, WAGs, navigators and gunners were in flat country areas with clear skies, such as at Cootamundra, Maryborough, Narrandera, Parkes, Sale and Temora. The RAAF chose such areas because of their safe flying conditions; no dangers of hills and virtually no thick clouds or fogs for novice airmen.

At the completion of our training the RAAF promoted nearly all WAGs to Sergeants as it did for trained Pilots, Navigators and Air Gunners. We kept the same uniforms and clothing as we already had, the standard kind, and added the insignia of three light blue and white stripes in a large V above the elbows on each sleeve. This was the second lowest rank, after Corporal, of Non-Commissioned Officer or NCO.

A few of the trained WAGs, Pilots, Navigators and Gunners, were selected by some mysterious criteria to become commissioned officers of the lowest rank, that is, Pilot Officers but this was not because they were more proficient in their duties. Just why the RAAF appointed some of the newly trained flying men as officers, I don't know, and I can only surmise that it wanted to preserve a balance between commissioned and non-commissioned men and to provide officers for future higher duties. Commissioned officers' uniforms and clothing were of fine quality. The

insignia of a Pilot Officer was a thin light blue stripe around each sleeve near the cuff and a peaked cap with a royal crown above small wings, which were surrounded by curved wings. A Pilot Officer received much more pay than a Sergeant.

Thus, all trained aircrew started as either Sergeants or Pilot Officers. Our subsequent promotions, also, were automatic; six months later we became Flight Sergeants, with a small crown added in the V of the stripes, and twelve months after that we became Warrant Officers, the stripes removed, a bigger crown by itself and a peaked cap. "Warrant Officer" was the highest rank of Non-Commissioned Officer in the RAAF (as it also was in the army). Similarly, Pilot Officers were promoted automatically after six months to Flying Officers but there they stopped unless an individual merited further promotion to the next rank, Flight Lieutenant. Higher than that were the ranks, in order, Squadron Leader, Wing Commander and Group Captain and then the "Air" ranks, beginning with Air Commodore. Each promotion brought an increase in pay, which was an amount per day, the method also used in the Army and the Navy.

These mass promotions on graduation and automatic promotions subsequently were unique to the RAAF, RNZAF, RCAF, and RAF, all of which had NCO's and Commissioned Officers in far greater proportions to ordinary servicemen than had the respective armies and navies. Another unique feature of aircrews' service was that they, NCOs and Officers, lived and carried out their duties almost exclusively among their own kind, obeying orders from more senior officers and not themselves commanding anyone. Aircrew had no more than slight contact with non-flying air force personnel. This was not by choice but was just because that dichotomy was the way the air forces were organised. From the time I first entered the RAAF and until I was discharged nearly three years later I had virtually nothing to do with anyone other than fellows like myself.

2 EMBARKATION DEPOT BRADFIELD PARK.

The date was now January 1944 and we were ready, after some home leave, to be sent somewhere else. That somewhere turned out, on 7 January, to be 2 Embarkation Depot, situated immediately inside the main entrance to the large RAAF Station at Bradfield Park, Lindfield. We Wireless Air Gunners then found ourselves with Air Gunners, Pilots and Navigators from other training stations. Eric Dick and Sid Holmes were there among the WAGs. The Stores issued each of us with two more kitbags and more gear; woollen gloves, scarf, long woollen underwear, a sheepskin vest and a balaclava and flying clothing for a cold climate. The flying clothing was a leather helmet, a thick padded, woven flying suit, long artificial silk gloves, short chamois leather gloves, leather gauntlets, long woollen socks and black, leather, wool-lined flying boots, which came well up the calf, with zip fasteners at the front.

We had nothing to do every day but wait, knowing only that we would soon be put on a ship. There was great secrecy about all shipping and overseas movements of personnel. Individuals were not told until they were about to go. The RAAF allowed us several weekend leaves and I went home to Asquith. The first time, I took my newly issued things home to show my parents as having the flying gear was a novelty. Although they were interested to see it they were not as enthusiastic about it as I was, which was understandable. I could tell them only that if I didn't appear on a weekend hence, that would mean I would be on my way, probably to England I guessed.

Then the Embarkation Depot suddenly stopped all leave and we realised we were very soon to go. During the next few days the staff called us out on parade to answer roll-calls about every four hours throughout the day and night. I think that was to make sure we were all present, that no-one had skipped off, gone AWL (Absent Without Leave).

ON THE "NEW AMSTERDAM". DESTINATION UNKNOWN

On Thursday morning, 27 January 1944, we had to pack all our kitbags, keep the largest, and trucks took away the rest. Then double-decker buses arrived, we boarded, and they took us to Woolloomooloo. We then hoisted our kitbags on our shoulders and walked on to the east side of the wharf and up a gangway and into an enormous ship, the New Amsterdam, a modern Dutch passenger liner. The wharf was deserted but for a few RAAF officers watching. The ship's departure was necessarily as secret or at least as unpublicised as possible. Some wharf labourers appeared and moved the gangway clear of the ship and without any ceremony or delay the New Amsterdam cast off. Tugs towed it out from the wharf and then the ship went under its own power along the harbour, out through the Heads and turned south. Everyone had stayed up on the open decks to see the last of the harbour. We didn't know where we were going, although we reasoned it wouldn't be Canada, and guessed our destination must be England.

My thoughts during that short period were that this movement by the RAAF contrasted dramatically with other movements, which were just train trips to peaceful places in other states. This time we would cross several oceans with dangers all the way. I presumed that after arriving in England there would be circumstances and events, as yet unknowable but sure to be very purposeful, which would involve me closely in the war, but things didn't turn out that way. I briefly wondered what lay ahead and hoped I would ultimately get back to sunny Australia. My youthful confidence overcame any worry

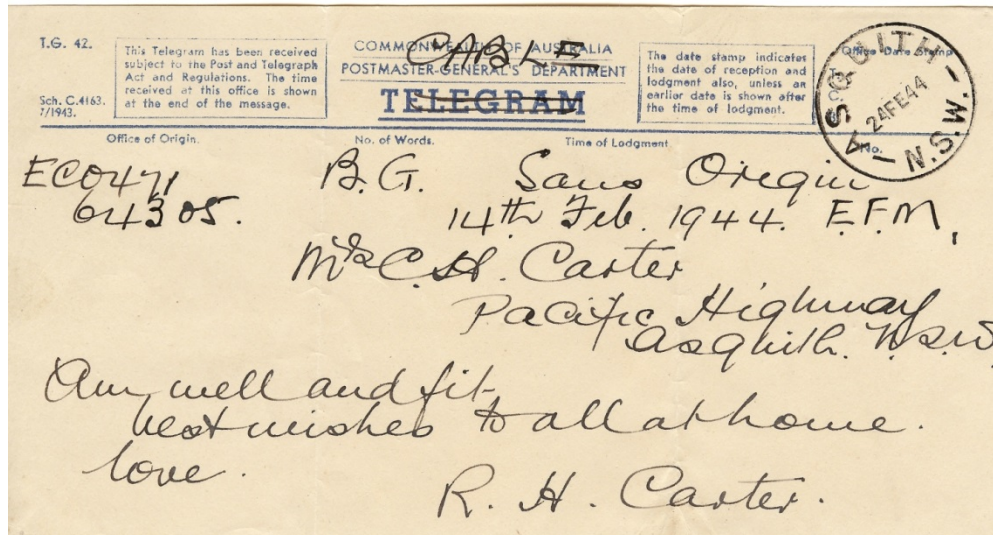


Figure 14 Telegram received at home after embarkation. No advanced notice was provided for families regarding the departure of servicemen and women.

s to the contrary and I'm sure most of the other fellows thought much the same. We naturally assumed we would continue under control of the RAAF and didn't know it would be the Royal Air Force of Great Britain, which would control our lives once we reached England.

We occupied cabins, each one accommodating four men in two-tiered pipe and wire-mesh bunks where previously two passengers had been in beds. There was a shower and toilet in the cabin and although a bit cramped, we were reasonably comfortable. Meals were provided in the main dining hall or "saloon", to use the shipping term, which had the original light fittings and decorations. There were so many RAAF on board that there were First and Second sittings. In the usual manner, each man took his enamel mug, plate and "eating irons" with him. On finishing a meal, washing them was just a matter dipping them in a large steel drum of boiling water near the door but taking care not to drop anything in.

We were free to wander over most of the ship. Lifeboat Drill was begun next day. When the emergency alarm was sounded, each group of men went to a particular part of the boat deck. A man had to wear, in addition to whatever he was wearing at the time, his greatcoat and fur felt hat and carry a full water-bottle. The water-bottle was made of light steel and held about a pint or half a litre. It was held in canvas webbing and had a webbing shoulder strap. These extra things would improve a man's prospects of survival in a life-boat if the ship were to sink.

After a day or so we found ourselves in the port of Melbourne. There, as many more again RAAF aircrew of all kinds boarded the ship and on the same day we were again out in the ocean, this time heading south west. Throughout the whole voyage the ship always went fast, perhaps at 25-30 knots, and changed course slightly about every half mile in a zigzag fashion. That was to prevent an enemy submarine from accurately aiming a torpedo at it. No rubbish was thrown into the sea to avoid leaving a floating line of it, which could indicate the ship's course. No personal wireless receivers were permitted because a receiver has a circuit that emits radio frequency waves, which would betray the ship's presence to a submarine. None of my friends had one and I doubt that anyone did as even the smallest receivers were bulky and needed heavy batteries. The ship went well into the Southern Ocean and one day we passed within a few hundred yards of what seemed to be the steep top of a mountain which rose about two hundred feet above the sea. The RAAF ordered everyone to attend a mass briefing by Medical Officers on the dangers of catching venereal diseases and their strong advice to stay away from prostitutes. The MOs described the manifestations in gruesome details intended to frighten but I doubt any of the inexperienced eighteen and nineteen years olds, who were nearly all of their listeners, would in any case have gone near such women.

After about a week at sea we arrived at Durban in South Africa. We disembarked there and went by train to a Clairwood Transit Camp on the outskirts of the city. Clairwood was enormous, seemingly covering a square mile and the biggest camp I ever saw. It consisted in large brick huts and was used for all kinds of servicemen travelling to and from the various theatres of the war. It had its own hospital. We had some leave to visit Durban and saw some of the main things. We had a ride in a kind of rickshaw pulled by a very strong Negro in decorative dress with many feathers. In parks, buses and on the railways there were separate seats for whites and blacks and separate carriages. We were amazed at the enormous numbers of black people in contrast to the numbers of whites. After ten days or so we carried our kitbags back to the train, travelled back to the port, and embarked again on the New Amsterdam to resume our voyage. Several hundred British servicemen and some servicewomen from the camp joined the ship. From the day we left Melbourne we didn't know what was going to happen next or where we were going.



Figure 15 Clairwood Transit Camp
Durban February 1944



Figure 16 Rickshaw
Man Durban
February 1944

The voyage was, of course, a novelty for everyone but there was nothing for anyone to do other than to look at the sea, wander about the ship or play cards, mostly as gambling. Two-up schools and card games were common. Officers of the ship's crew, often in pairs, did a lot of walking on the long Promenade Deck to keep their leg muscles in trim for when they would be on shore. They went right around the ship many times and they did this especially during the days prior to arriving in a port. It is a common practice of seafaring men. Some of the RAAF fellows did the same but more as something to do.

Out in the ocean at about 8 o'clock one morning there was an unusual incident. The ship was going at full speed in a calm sea when it turned to starboard and kept turning. Everyone wondered what was up and started to watch the sea. The ship kept up its speed and then completed a full circle of only a few hundred yards diameter. It was as if to look for a man overboard and a rumour went around soon after that that had happened. A prisoner, a British Army deserter who was being taken back to England, had jumped out of a porthole into the sea. The ship resumed its course, the circle having taken only 10 minutes or so. We did not see anyone in the water. Apparently the ship's officers followed a safety rule that the ship must not stop its progress and heave-to for any reason at all so as to avoid making a stationary target for a torpedo from a German submarine.

The ship maintained lookouts on high parts to watch for submarines and I did a few hours of that work late one afternoon very high up, abaft the port side of the bridge. I wore my greatcoat as I was exposed to the strong, cold wind from the south-west and fortunately I did not see any periscope. If one had been there it would have been very difficult to spot it in the waves and spray among the high rollers of the ocean. Some days later the ship reached Freetown in Sierra Leone, on

the west coast of Africa. It anchored in a kind of harbour a long way from the land for several hours but no-one went ashore. Some small boats manned by Africans came out and probably provided vegetables and fruit to the ship. Then the ship weighed anchor and went out to sea again on a course north-north west in the Atlantic Ocean.

IN ENGLAND

After a few days we arrived at Greenock, Scotland and we were glad to be safe on land again. This was 12 March 1944 and the climate was very chilly. The RAF then put us on a train and after many hours travelling and a change of trains, arrived at 11 Personnel Despatch and Reception Centre at Brighton in the south of England. We were accommodated in two old holiday hotels, the Grand and the Metropole, situated together on the sea front and used for RAAF aircrew personnel awaiting postings. I was in the Grand Hotel. We were allowed some leave and scattered all over the country, mostly guests in English peoples' homes; the family I stayed with lived a few miles further along the south coast and were very hospitable even though food was rationed. I had to give them food coupons, which the RAAF had supplied for my leave. Back from leave, we explored Brighton, the English countryside and quaint English pubs with warm beer. The beaches were stony and had small waves. There were long piers, which had previously had all sorts of amusements on them but were then derelict, having been partly demolished years before in case of German invasion. Also there were concrete and steel anti-tank barriers and long low walls of barbed wire. We were to wait for postings to RAF training stations.

While at Brighton I went, with other RAAF chaps, to dances at several halls and struck up acquaintances with some English girls. One was a local girl whose name, Ellen Steer, I remember, but nothing more. The other was from London, whose name I have long forgotten, but I remember she was in Royal Navy uniform, I think that of the Womens Royal Naval Service or WRNS, and looked very smart. There were so many different services and acronyms that it was difficult to know exactly what they all were.

There was one RAF activity that they gave us while waiting at Brighton and this was clay pigeon shooting with shotguns, for WAGs and Air Gunners. We went to the top of some low cliffs further west along the coast where a shooting range facing the sea was set up. Below the cliff was a mechanism, operated by men on orders from an officer on the top, for throwing clay pigeons high out and across our line of sight. A clay pigeon is simply a disk like a bread and butter plate and it flew horizontally. It is black so that the shooter can see it distinctly against the sky. For handling the shotguns, we followed a certain protocol of safety. On the officer's orders, a man would raise his gun and the pigeon would be thrown up. As it went across the sky high above the sea, he tried to follow it in the gun's sights, then aim slightly ahead of its movement and then squeeze the trigger. This shooting practice was particularly appropriate for air gunnery. I cannot remember my score of hits, but probably very few.

Under the agreement in 1939 between the Empire countries and Britain for the former to supply airmen for Britain's air war against Germany, the status of all Royal Australian Air Force men in England and the Middle East was that they served under the direct control or at least the ultimate control of Britain's Royal Air Force. This was also the case concerning men of the Royal New Zealand Air Force, the Royal Canadian Air Force and the South African Air Force in those broad

theatres.

In England and the Middle East the RAF formed only a small number of RAAF squadrons, about eight at any one time, although Article XV of the EATS Agreement allowed for eighteen. These few were allotted "400" squadron numbers, such as 454 Squadron. There were perhaps two RNZAF squadrons manned by RNZAF men although the agreement allowed six.

The rest of RAAF and RNZAF servicemen, the very large majorities, were integrated into Royal Air Force squadrons all over England and the Middle East. Men were posted individually and flew in planes manned by mostly RAF airmen, such that a Lancaster bomber could have one or two Australians and the rest English making up its crew of seven. The crew compositions were simply the results of how squadron vacancies were filled by postings by RAF administrators, and the RAAF had no say whatever in where RAAF men were sent. As an example of RAF squadron formations and postings throughout the war, in April, 1945, 1,488 RAAF men were in RAAF squadrons compared with 10,532 in RAF squadrons. Refer J. McCarthy, [A Last Call of Empire](#), Australian War Memorial, 1988, a critical analysis of the Empire Air Training Scheme.

A strange effect for the majority of RAAF men was that during their time in England, individuals saw only a very few of their compatriots. Australians who were dispersed in RAF squadrons over the length and breadth of England were never all brought together. When I was in England from April to November 1944 I didn't know there was anything like the huge number of Australians there, over 12,000 RAAF men, and when I read the book, above, I was astonished that there were so many. It contrasted with men of the AIF overseas, who were always together and with their own officers of all ranks. Australians generally got on well with Englishmen of the RAF but the situation, especially by being commanded by English officers, was odd.

The Royal Canadian Air Force, on the other hand, which, incidentally, provided Britain with about twice as many airmen as the RAAF, had insisted from the outset that its men would be kept together in their own squadrons and they were not scattered.

The RAF did not allow the RAAF, RNZAF and RCAF to have their own senior officers in England in positions of high command involving them in decisions concerning tactics or strategies and which would put them in command of members of the RAF, that is, Englishmen. There were a few senior RAAF officers in London attending to RAAF administration matters but the RAF didn't keep them properly informed about what it was doing with the thousands of RAAF airmen. All RAAF and RNZAF airmen on RAF squadrons were completely controlled by the RAF and were subject to RAF decisions concerning postings, leave, discipline, promotions and even releases from RAF service to return to Australia. The most senior RAAF officer trained in the EATS was a Wing Commander in charge of an RAAF squadron. For RAAF men to be subject to RAF decisions concerning all those functions, especially releases to go home, seemed wrong. Ibid.

All this was because in the negotiations in 1939 with British government and RAF senior officers, the Australian government representatives had, by their own omissions and because of misleading advice and arrogance on the part of the British, ceded complete control to the British. The Australian representatives failed to insist on RAAF senior officers being in England commanding RAAF squadrons and retaining authority over their own servicemen.ⁱ

The RAF had complete control over all operational flying and every detail of how it wanted

to use the Empire airmen. Therefore the Empire airmen, having none of their own senior officers who might have guarded their men in high-level decision-making about the kinds of flying operations against Germany, were subjected to reckless decisions, which sometimes occurred and the consequent excessive losses of young men's livesⁱⁱ.

Major air operations against Germany were ultimately decided by Air Marshall Harris, also known by airmen including the RAF, as "Chopper" or "Butcher" Harris because of those losses. As history shows, he was fanatical in prosecuting the air war against Germany and therefore was sometimes irrational. His kind of leadership prompts the old adage, "Beware of the zealot".

I hope that future Australian Governments will be aware of our war histories and the mistakes of the past. In any future overseas war operations they should preserve Australian servicemen's autonomy.

The RAAF issued us with "battle-dress" which was trousers and blouse style jacket of RAF blue, more like grey in comparison with RAAF deep blue. The RAAF had its own of the same style in deep blue style but many RAAF men in England wore the battle-dress of RAF blue. This was of the same weight material as RAF uniforms and was the working dress although it could be worn off RAF stations. We sewed on to the new jackets our sergeants' stripes, sparks badges, AG wings and, with national pride, our "Australia" on each shoulder. We continued to wear our RAAF blue forage caps.

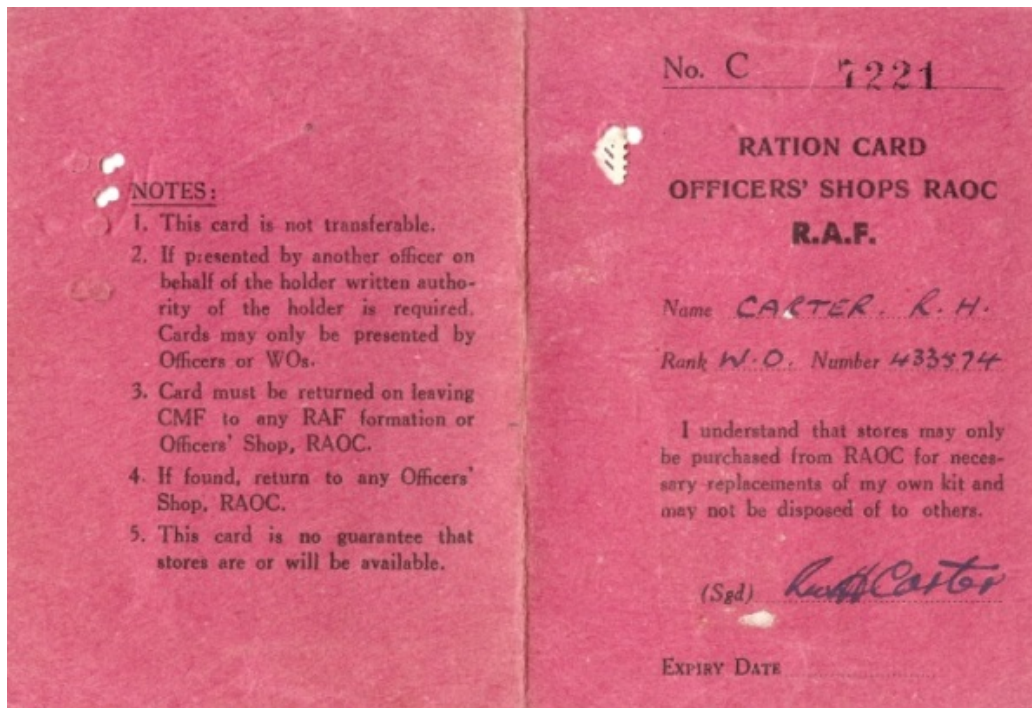


Figure 17 Clothing Ration Card issued by the RAF

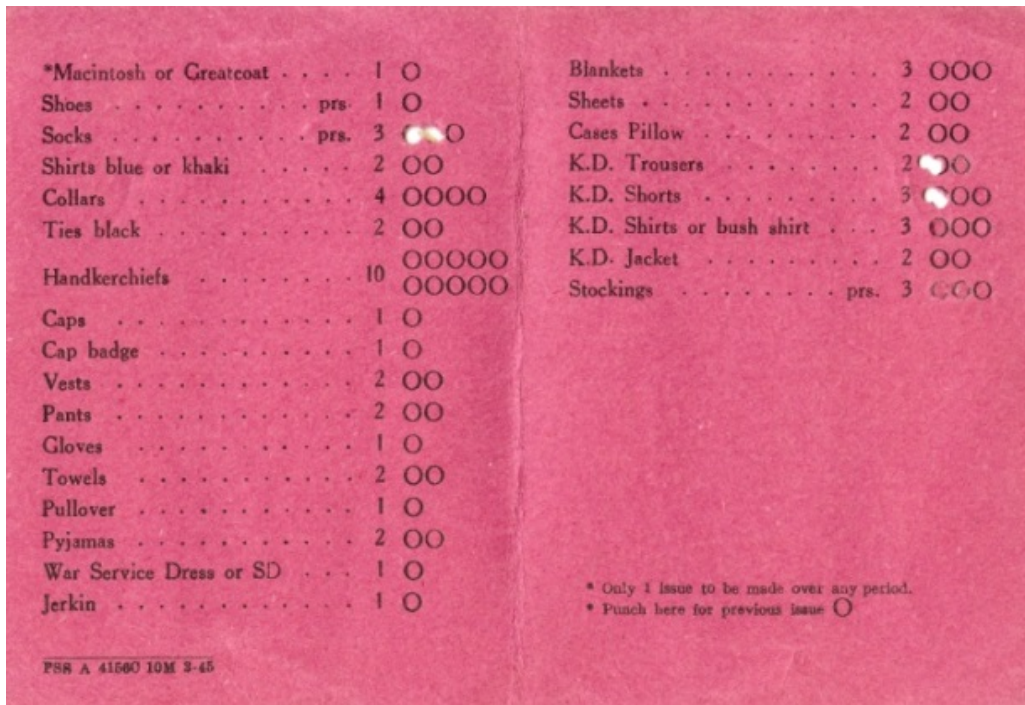


Figure 18 Items issued were punched on the card, hence the white holes in the document

During the months after arriving in England we were posted for short periods to several RAF training schools in other parts of England. I went to Whitely Bay, Durham, near Newcastle-on-Tyne, for map reading and learning to use small arms, that is, revolver, Sten sub-machine gun, rifle and grenade.

Firing those guns was carried out on a firing range, of course, where shots went to bullseye targets fixed in front of a high mound of earth. The calibres of the revolver and Sten were smaller than the rifle, which was .303, and the shots of all of those guns seemed puny compared with the blast of fire from the Browning .303 used in the RAF at 20 shots per second.

Throwing a live grenade was a potentially dangerous act as the explosive force is right with the thrower if something goes wrong. The drill was to hold the grenade with the throwing hand and put the forefinger of the other hand in the ring of the safety pin. As the throwing arm and hand are moved right back for the throw, the other hand holds the ring of the safety pin and the pin comes out. The lever is then held against the casing only by the fingers of the throwing hand. The throwing arm is then moved forward in a big upward and over sweep rather like bowling a cricket ball. When the grenade leaves the thrower's hand, the lever flies up and the fuse starts to burn with a delay of five seconds before it explodes. The essential thing was not to drop the grenade after the pin was pulled out and only the thrower's fingers were holding the lever down. It was essential to get the grenade safely away and over the safety wall in front of the trench we stood in. We dared not drop it or let it hit the parapet and bounce back. We each went through that routine and, happily, all threw successfully. The pattern of square indentations on the casing of a grenade is to cause it, on exploding, to break into many small pieces for maximum effect.

We also fired a grenade from a rifle fitted with a grenade-launcher, a small cup-like cylinder fitted to the end of the barrel, with the butt of the rifle on the ground and the barrel pointed up at

an angle. We were on a cliff top for this and were able to see the grenade explode with a deep red flash in the air a long way off.

I was also posted to 2 Radio School, RAF Yatesbury, in Wiltshire, for wireless operating in the air. I flew in small single engine trainer plane, the Percival "Preceptor", which carried just a pilot and a trainee. We flew over farming country of low hills and seemed to bounce all over the sky. This was just practising to keep our skills up to scratch and I flew 5 hours, which brought my total flying hours to 34 in my Flying Log Book.

While at Yatesbury I was sick with a respiratory infection and was put in an isolation room of the station hospital. When the Medical Officer discharged me and I left the room, an Orderly went in, scattered the bedding around at random and sealed the windows with adhesive tape. He then placed a saucer of sulphur in the middle of the room, lit it with a match and went out, locking and sealing the door after him. The sulphur would burn for many hours and provide fumigation, which would penetrate everything and kill the germs.

Then I was sent to an RAF station at Padgate, Warrington, in Lancashire, with Sid Holmes and Eric Dick but did not do particular training there. A number of fellows of the Royal Canadian Air Force arrived just after us. They were very friendly but we were not together long enough to get to know them.

We found from our experiences in England that men in all ranks of the Royal Air Force were very disciplined and indeed all British servicemen were. The British civilians were obedient, too. Australians, Canadians and New Zealanders were much less inclined to discipline as a way of life and often let the Poms know. Once, at Padgate, there was a parade of RAF on the Parade Ground and some RAAF men were watching it from the windows of huts nearby. The commanding RAF officer, a Wing Commander, full of authority and importance, started to give an order to the assembled lines of men when an Australian voice rang out loudly from one of the huts, "Pull your bloody head in!" The Wing Commander got a terrible shock; such insubordination in the RAF was almost a hanging offence. He and his next in command, a Squadron Leader, shouted orders to the Warrant Officer who shouted to the airmen nearest to him, to go at the double and catch the offender. Several underlings immediately ran off to find that audacious colonial but of course they didn't. Some other Australians and I saw it all from a window in the adjoining hut and we all cleared out, fast, as the Poms would have grabbed any Australian who was there.

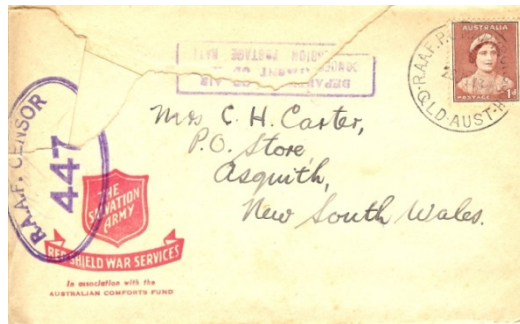
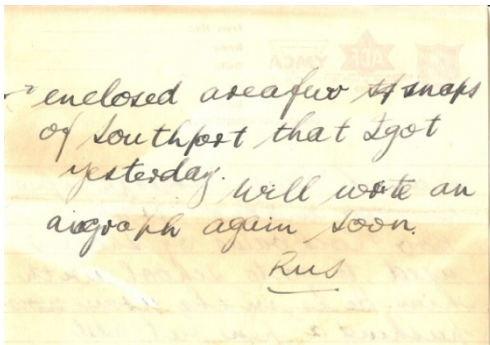
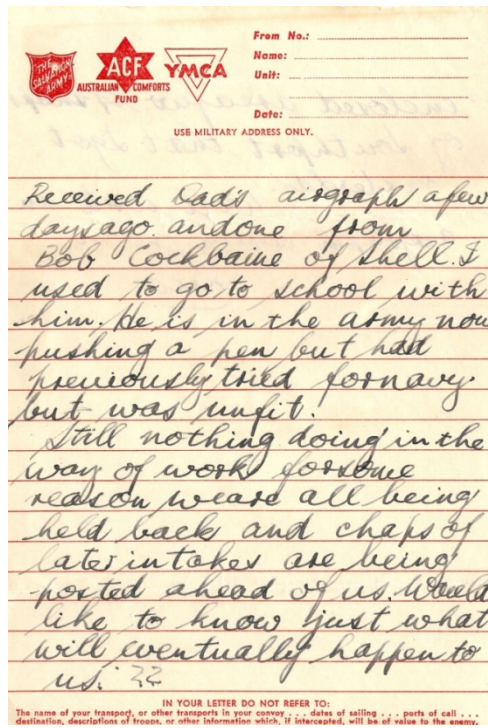
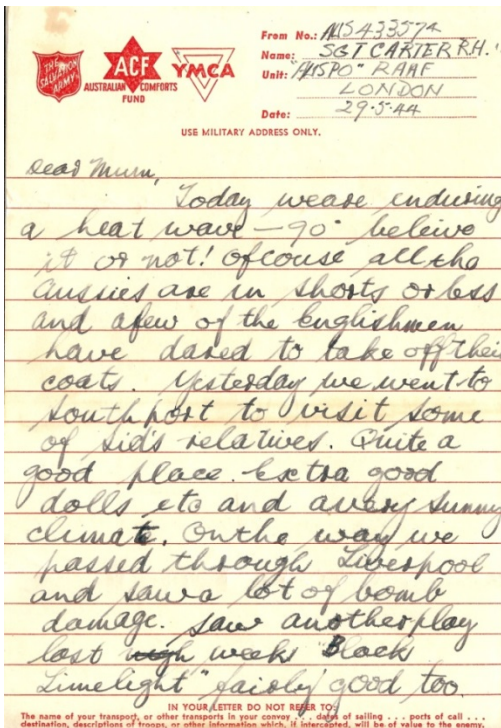


Figure 19 Letter home from RHC while stationed at RAF Yatesbury. Note the reference to his father's experience of the weather while in camp at Parkhouse on the Salisbury Plain with the 1st AIF in 1917.

Late one afternoon Eric, Sid and I decided to get away from the RAF station, which was a boring place, and go riding into the country on some bikes we had borrowed. As we had no leave passes we had to go AWL and therefore didn't go out by the main gate but through a gap in the chain wire fence. We rode until we came to a small pub and stopped for several beers. Then on for a mile or so until we found another pub and stopped for several more. There, we joined in with locals in a sing-song around a piano. Getting back to the station became difficult as by then it was dark and we had trouble riding straight. We sat on a stone wall for a rest and Eric fell off backwards into a resident's garden bed. Fortunately the lady of the house came out and gave us help and directions. After a long ride we arrived back at the gap in the fence and got in again without any guards seeing us.

We occasionally had Leave and went on the train to Warrington, a short distance away. Coming back on the train one afternoon, Sid and I met two attractive and friendly English girls of

about our age who were in the Land Army working on local farms and wore grey riding pants or jodhpurs. Sid and I chattered with them and each arranged to meet them again on the next weekend. The girl I was to meet again was Dulcie, from Yorkshire I think, who had a particular accent; she spoke the vowel as in “book”, meaning the vowel as in “up”. When we met again, Doolcie had put aside her uniform for a pretty frock but she didn’t want to go to a pub or even to a tea shop.

“Coom on Roossell, we’ll go oop that lane and out in the fields”, she said.

I thought some rural surroundings would be just the shot.

“OK”, I replied, “You know the way around here and that’ll be good.”

“Mind the poodles”, Dulcie said, as we walked along the lane. Then we went along paths on the edges of fields of wheat in the country air away from the haze of the town. The clean and quiet atmosphere of the countryside was refreshing.

“Let’s sit here for awhile”, she said, at length, and, when we were settled, asked, “What’s it like in Oostralia?” I started to tell her but soon realised Dulcie was not really interested in that.

The RAAF had a surplus of aircrew available for operations in England and we were being moved all around the country to keep us occupied. This was better for us than having to stay in one place. We enjoyed seeing different parts of England and observing the British customs but the seemingly endless waiting became boring. Naturally, we wanted action so when we arrived back at Brighton a group of us, including Sid and Fred Marsh volunteered to be sent to the Middle East, that is, Egypt or Palestine. Eric had been posted to an RAF station in England. We thought the Middle East offered us better chances of being posted to squadrons in action in Italy and there would be different and interesting things to see and a warmer climate.



Figure 20 RHC Bill Burton and Bruce Evans at Morecombe near Liverpool before embarking for Middle East November 1944



Figure 21 Cairo Street Scene 1944

Meanwhile, we were given duties of manning anti-aircraft machine guns set up on the flat roofs of the hotels we were billeted in. The Luftwaffe or German Air force was sending over single aircraft on nuisance intrusions along the coast at low altitudes at night so there was the need for defence against them. I was assigned to a roof near the Metropole where there was a pair of two .3 Brownings mounted on a swivel pointing obliquely upwards. During the nights I was on duty with the guns I watched the sky intently but no aircraft appeared. Then we heard that one German twin-engine fighter had been over a place not far away and it had been shot down. That was by a proper ack ack battery of heavier calibre; I doubt that the fire-power of the guns we had would have been so effective.



CANBERRA,

August 5th, 1944.

Dear Fellow Australian,

On the eve of the Referendum vote it is our duty—on behalf of the Australian Government—to ask you to vote "Yes". By voting "Yes" you will give your National Parliament the powers required to make laws for post-war reconstruction and the rehabilitation of our gallant Forces.

The Australian Parliament is your Parliament. You elect the Members of it and therefore in voting "Yes" you will in reality be giving additional powers to yourself.

We shall win the war but unless these powers are granted we are in grave danger of losing the peace.

The risk of poverty, unemployment and post-war depression is a real one. We must rehabilitate and protect the service men. We must guarantee stabilised prices to the man on the land. We must give the small business man a fair deal. We must improve the housing of the people. We must undertake a great works programme. We must prevent profiteering and we must provide work for all.

Depression's vicious circle—no jobs—no money—no purchasing power—no sales—no jobs—must never come again.

The fourteen powers contained in the proposals were all endorsed by Commonwealth and State leaders of all parties at the Constitutional Convention, including the Premiers of all six States, viz.: Messrs. McKell, Dunstan, Cooper, Playford, Willcock and Cosgrove.

[P.T.O.]

Our Prime Minister, John Curtin, has led Australia magnificently through the crisis of war and will lead us to victory if you vote "Yes". You can place absolute trust in him to guide you through the dangerous post-war period.

A "No" vote is a vote for unemployment and depression and a "Yes" vote will be a positive contribution to full employment and prosperity.

A "Yes" vote is a vote for Australia.

Yours truly,

Treasurer and Minister for
Post-War Reconstruction.

Attorney General and Minister
for External Affairs.

Figure 22 Letter to all servicemen about a referendum on post-war provision for returned servicemen

IN EGYPT AND PALESTINE

On 23 October 1944 about thirty of us, WAGs, Air Gunners, Navigators and Pilots, were given our movement orders and were soon on our way to the Middle East. The RAF sent us by train to 2 Personnel Despatch Centre at Morecambe, a seaside place on the west coast of England, where we were billeted in private holiday boarding houses of three storeys, our accommodation paid for by the RAF, about 10 men to a house. The owners were an RAF corporal, who was away on duty somewhere, and his wife who managed the house and cooked meals for us. He came home on leave while we were there and some of our lot took him out to a pub for several wild evenings, which worried his wife. He had not been in the company of young Australian sergeants before and seemed to like our company and our casual attitude to the formalities of rank. That home leave he had was one he would well remember. On 13 November we left and went by train to the vast area of docks at the port of Liverpool and boarded a ship. For the voyage, we were issued with side arms, some sub-machine guns and mainly revolvers, and ammunition, so that if we had to land somewhere on the way we would have at least small weapons to defend ourselves. The voyage took us south from England, past Gibraltar, through the Mediterranean Sea and then through the Suez Canal. It took twelve days.



Figure 23 Travelling by semi-trailer on top of our kitbags. Suez to Cairo November 1944 RHC 3rd from right



Figure 24 A picture for the troops. Miss Egypt peddled in Cairo 1944

We disembarked at the port of Suez, in Egypt, on 25 November 1944 and went by truck to Cairo. The RAF gave each of us a booklet of advice about living in the Middle East. It contained strict warnings about the prevalence of diseases and precautions to observe, such as not go to prostitutes, not drink any water while away from RAF quarters, not have any ice in drinks and not wash in, let alone fall in, any canals, especially the one ironically named the Sweetwater Canal. We were then at 5 (Middle East) Aircrew Reception Centre in the Palace Hotel at Heliopolis, which had been taken over by the RAF. It was a good place to be as there was plenty of food to eat and Egyptian servants waited on us, day and night. We had to be careful not to leave any valuables about, however. We had plenty of leave in Cairo and visited places of interest, such as the Pyramids and Sphinx. We climbed to the top of the main one, Cheops. We also went to one or two night cabarets but found them very rough. Cairo was a dangerous place for a lone, unwary person. Like many other fellows, I bought a pair of camel skin boots, which looked like suede, with thick rubber soles. These were known as desert boots or “brothel creepers” although no-one I knew did any such creeping.

After some weeks, on 6 January 1945 some of us were sent by train, in goods trucks with sliding doors, and then by motor trucks, to 1 (Middle East) Aircrew Reception Centre at Jerusalem, in Palestine. There, we were accommodated in the former Italian Hospital, near the Old City. We walked through that and also went to Bethlehem and the Dead Sea. Near that we went to see a “kibbutz”, a farm community. There was nothing for us to do other than to see the sights. After a few weeks we were sent back to Egypt, to 22 Personnel Transit Centre at Almaza, large camp in the desert beyond Heliopolis, to await postings, and there we lived in tents for the first time since enlisting. One night, while we were out of camp in Cairo, there was a prolonged storm with heavy rain and when we got back to the camp we found it all washed out and our tents submerged in mud. We slept the rest of the night on tables in the Sergeants Mess and next morning had to dig with shovels to find our kit bags and gear.



Figure 25 Sid Holmes, Ernie and RHC at Allenby Bridge, Palestine January 1945. They in RAAF navy blue uniforms and I in RAF grey-blue battle dress issued in UK



Figure 26 Travelling by rail. Sid Holmes and RHC at El Kantara, Egypt. To Palestine, January 1945

MARTIN "BALTIMORE" BOMBERS. OPERATIONAL TRAINING AT SHANDUR.

On 4 March 1945, eight men, enough for two crews and then a short time later another eight, were posted to No 70 Operational Training Unit, at Shandur, an RAF flying station, situated near the Canal. We were all to learn operational flying in American Martin "Baltimore" Mark V bombers. The Baltimore was a 1940 style medium bomber with two engines with three blade propellers and had a narrow, deep, rather slab-sided fuselage. It had two large main wheels and a small tail wheel so while on the ground the body was pointing nose up at about 18 degrees and the tail close to the ground.



Figure 27 A 30 Martin Baltimore

The specifications and details, contained in John F. Turner, British Aircraft of World War II, Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd, England, 1975, were:

- Engines: Two 1700 hp Wright GR-2600-A5B5 Double Row Cyclone 14 Radial piston engines.
- Wingspan: 61 feet 4 inches (18.6m)
- Wing area: 538.5 sq ft (50.03 sq m)
- Length: 48 feet 6 inches (14.6m)
- Height: 14 feet 2 inches (4.3m)
- Weight empty: 15,460 lb (7,013 kg)
- Weight maximum take-off: 22,600 lb (10,521 kg)
- Crew Number: 4
- Max Speed: 320 mph (515 kph) at 15,000 feet (4,572m)
- Service Ceiling: 25,000 feet (7,620m)
- Normal Range: 980 miles (1,577 kilometres)
- Armament: 12 machine guns : up to 2,000 lbs bombs (907 kgs)
- The Baltimore was a medium bomber acquired for the Royal Air Force.
- Although designed and built in the USA, the aircraft never went into service with its country of origin. The considerable top to bottom depth enabled its crew to enjoy good contact internally.
- 4 guns in the wings and 4 firing to rear. 2 in top turret. 2 through bottom hatch.
- Flown in bombing and reconnaissance roles in Mediterranean and Middle East 1942-45.
- Total Production: 1,575

The author's reference to its crew enjoying good contact internally is an overstatement as only the WAG and the Air Gunner had that. I was able to move forward about 5 feet to reach a small window behind the left side of the pilot's head but I could not talk to him as I had to disconnect my intercom cord to get there. Getting there was a stooping, sideways squeeze through the very narrow space between the port, or left, side of the fuselage and the starboard, or right, side, where there was radio gear and other equipment. My flying clothing and 'chute harness caught on every projection as I moved. The pilot and navigator only had voice contact by the intercom although the nav could reach back and up to touch one of the pilot's boots. The machine

gun armament in the Baltimores we flew was greater than stated in that book. See below.

The Baltimore required a crew of a pilot, navigator, wireless operator and gunner. The pilot sat in a single narrow cockpit. The navigator sat lower down in the nose, which had Perspex windows at the front, sides and the floor at the front, this last one being for the bombsight as he was also the bomb-aimer. When flying, neither of these men could move out of their positions except to escape by parachute. The wireless-operator sat in the centre of the fuselage well behind the pilot on the same level and the air-gunner sat in the gun-turret at the top of the fuselage above and behind the wireless operator. Both could move about in the rear section. Because of this internal layout, if the pilot or navigator were wounded no one else in the plane could go to his aid. In larger bombers all crewmembers could move about, give aid and take other places in an emergency, as sometimes occurred.

The Baltimore carried a maximum bomb load of 2000 pounds, of variable sizes. It took off and landed at about 110 mph and cruised at about 180. Top speed in level flight was over 300 mph. Its total fire-power was tremendous; there were four .303 inch Browning machine guns (two fixed in each wing) to fire forward, set so as to make the bullet streams converge at about 200 yards at ground targets, four .303s, mounted two on each side, inside the fuselage, one above the other, to fire backward through small ports, as defence against an attacking fighter, two .30s together on a manually operated mounting to fire down and back through the bottom hatch at a fighter or a ground target and two .5 inch guns together in the electrically operated turret at the top of the fuselage for defence against a fighter. The four guns in the wings were fired by the pilot pressing a button on his control column. The four fixed guns pointing backwards were fired by the air-gunner, sitting in the turret, pressing the toes of his boots on small levers mounted on both sides of the fuselage.

The Browning .5 had an effective range of 800 yards, twice that of the .303 although its rate of fire was much slower, only about 600 rounds per minute. Its much longer effective range and heavier and bigger bullets made the Browning .5 aerial machine gun a superior weapon to the .303. The American Air Force used the .5 exclusively on all its bombers for defence against German fighters while the RAF and RAAF had it only on Baltimores and had Browning .303 guns for defence on their other bombers, such as Lancasters. The .303 guns did not have a long enough effective range against German fighter planes, which used 20mm cannon. Those fired shells of that diameter that exploded on impact and the cannon had an effective range of about 800 yards.

The Baltimore was strongly constructed, completely of Duralumin, and was reliable. Like all military aircraft of WW2, it was painted in camouflage. As it was used mostly in daylight and low-level operations its tops and sides were painted in ground colours of brown and green but underneath surfaces, wings and body, were light blue and grey. The paints were pastel shades and all surfaces were coarse, visibly and to touch, because of tiny grains of something in the paint. There were no smooth metallic surfaces, which could shine in the sun and thus reveal its presence in the sky to the enemy. It had a second hydraulic system installed in case the first became damaged or failed and had disc brakes on the two wheels of the landing gear which was advanced technology for those times.

Concerning wireless equipment there were three sets in all. The main equipment comprised the American Bendix receiver and transmitter for communications over long distances,

which the WAG used. The receiver was in a metal box about 40cm wide, 24cm high and 26cm deep and the transmitter was also in a metal box but slightly smaller and the front of each had tuning knobs, switches and little dials. These were installed up in front of the WAG's small swivel chair. A very small flat space was provided for the WAG to write, with pencil and paper, code messages received or to send by Morse code and just above it was a very small angle lamp for night work. Of the other two wireless sets, one was for the pilot, a small receiver and transmitter on pre-set frequencies, which he operated simply by pressing buttons, for short-range 'phone or voice messages to and from airfield Control Towers.

The third radio set was a radar transmitter designed to identify the aircraft as Allied (British or American) by a special and secret signal, which would be picked up by Allied anti-aircraft batteries on the ground. The radar set was called the IFF, which stood for Identification Friend or Foe and every Allied aircraft had one. It was contained inside a locked duralumin box about 30cm wide, 30cm high and 15cm deep, which in Baltimore bombers was fixed inside the starboard side of the fuselage at the back, near the bottom hatch. The electrical components of the set, which determined the frequency and pattern of the radar image transmitted, were secret and a small explosive charge was incorporated permanently inside the box to destroy the components to prevent them being understood by the Germans if the aircraft came down in their territory. There were two ways of causing the explosion. One was by an inertia switch that would operate by the heavy impact of the aircraft crashing. The other was manual, by one of the crew pressing with his fingers two red buttons simultaneously, set a few inches apart and recessed in the outside of the box. Presumably, the explosion would be contained inside and not affect the man whose fingers did the job.

On the outside of the aircraft were aerials for the radios and radar. They were short metal rods beneath the fuselage for the radar and short-range pilot's radio and a long wire above the fuselage, between a short mast in front of the upper gun turret and above the main wireless gear position and the top of the tail fin, for the main wireless gear.

Also, directly above that position and above the fuselage was a metal loop aerial of about 30cm in diameter, which was a DF or Direction Finding aerial that was connected to the main wireless receiver. The loop aerial had a shaft extended down below the top of the cabin, above the main wireless gear, where it had a compass ring and a circular handle for turning the loop and the ring. This enabled the Wireless Operator to turn the loop to receive the strongest signal from a radio beacon or another transmitter on the ground at a known location and, by also alternately switching in and out another aerial on the short mast of the aircraft, determine the true direction of the beacon by reading the points of the compass on the compass ring instead of its reciprocal, which would be 180 degrees different.

The loop aerial thus provided a good guide for navigation because compass directions to two or more beacons then plotted by the navigator, by lines he would draw on a map, could determine the aircraft's position. That would be where the lines crossed. The pilot could also fly directly to, or "home in", on a beacon by turning the aircraft directly on to the course indicated by the WAG reading from the compass ring on the loop aerial. The WAG then centralised the loop and the pilot listened to the signals transmitted by the beacon and adjusted the heading of the aircraft left or right to keep the strongest signal in his headphones.

There was also a very long, flexible wire aerial that was, until needed, kept wound on a reel with a winding handle at the Wireless Operator's position. This was the Trailing Aerial that was necessary for low frequency reception and transmission. The Wireless Operator would wind it out until it trailed horizontally a hundred yards or more behind the aircraft and when he had finished his operations on it he would wind it in again.

The aeroplane was very manoeuvrable in that it could do the aerobatics of a fighter plane such as a Spitfire. We did some, although we did not know all of its capabilities. I now know that others before us did loops, a stall at the top of a steep climb, a high speed stall, a roll off the top of a loop, inverted flying and a full power vertical dive reaching 480 mph. These capabilities were unique for a bomber and were attributable to its two very powerful engines, good wing area, strength and good overall design. Refer, HISTORICAL ADDENDUM TO 1997 BULLETIN, 454/459 SQUADRON ASSOCIATION in my RAAF Papers.

At Shandur there were also men of the South African Air Force who were training to fly in Martin "Marauder" bombers. This plane also had two engines but had a round fuselage and was more modern, larger, heavier and faster than the Baltimore. It had a tricycle undercarriage such that there were two large wheels like the Baltimore and a smaller wheel under the nose so that the Marauder stood horizontal on the ground. It had two pilots, side by side and a navigator, a gunner in the turret and a wireless operator, comprising a crew of five.



Figure 28 Leaflet issued to aircrew



Figure 29 Reverse side of leaflet issued to aircrew for use in the event of the need to surrender

We Non-Commissioned Officers, Australian and South African, lived together in Nissen huts which had walls and roof of corrugated iron, all in one continuous half circle, and a concrete floor.

As in the camp at Heliopolis we had our meals and recreation in the Sergeants' Mess and were waited on by Gypo servants. The officers in our crews lived in Officers' quarters and had their Officers' Mess. This was a queer bit of air force organisation and it applied everywhere we went in the RAF and RAAF. On fighter squadrons, however, there were Aircrew Messes for officers and sergeants. 30 Squadron, RAAF Beaufighters, on which Harry Suthons served at Milne Bay and Ward's Strip, Port Moresby, in New Guinea, also had an Aircrew Mess for NCOs and officers.



Figure 30 Souvenirs from leave in the Middle East 1945

We RAAF men in each batch of eight formed ourselves into two crews, according to the RAF custom, in England and the Middle East, of mutual selection in that men were allowed to choose who they preferred to fly with, from those available at the time. Not that there was much scope for each for us to choose as no one of the eight knew anything of the others and there was no time to mix with them and think about it. I simply preferred to be in with only Flight Sergeants but even that wasn't possible because the RAF had included two officer Navigators in the eight airmen and each crew had to have one of them. Our crew was; Pilot, Flight Sergeant Garth Bear, Melbourne; Navigator, Pilot Officer Owen Sneddon, Belmont, NSW; Wireless-Air Gunner, Flight Sergeant Russell Carter, Asquith, NSW; Air Gunner, Flight Sergeant Joseph Torpey, Muswellbrook, NSW. We called Garth Bear, "Ted". Owen Sneddon had originally been a trainee pilot at an Elementary Flying Training School but he had been scrubbed, that is, judged unsuitable, before finishing the course and had then been sent to a navigators' school. The other crew was Pilot, F/S Mick Ivisevitch, Perth ; Navigator, P/O Harry Pettett, Sydney; Wireless Operator, P/O Ted Short, Brisbane; Air Gunner, F/S Chuck Stuber, Perth.



Figure 31 Baltimore crew prior to departure for Italy L to R Flt Sgt R Carter WAG, Flt Sgt Joe Torpey AG,, PO Owen Sneddon Navigator, .Flt Sgt Garth Bear Pilot

After the war, Garth Bear became a farmer near Seymour in Victoria. We visited him and his family there in 1969 and they stayed briefly with us at Gordon in 1972. Owen Sneddon studied Medicine at the University of Sydney but gave it up. He became a picture theatre manager and then a clerk at Hornsby Shire Council. He lives in retirement at Port Macquarie and came to Sydney each Anzac Day until he could no longer do that. Joe Torpey took over his father's bakery business at Muswellbrook and conducted it for many years.

Form 667 B.

**SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS FOR
USE IN WAR :**

1. This card is to be retained by the individual to whom it is issued and produced on the occasion of all issues and returns of flying clothing. All issues are to be signed by the recipient and all returns by the equipment officer receiving the equipment. Exchanges of flying clothing are not to be recorded on the card.
2. In the event of an officer or airman being unable to produce his card its loss is to be reported to the accountant officer for action under A.M.O. A.1161/42. The loser of a card is liable to be charged for any deficiencies in his equipment according to the scales appropriate to his duties.
3. Articles lost on active service through the exigencies of the campaign, or whilst actually flying, or destroyed in a flying accident, will be replaced free provided a certificate, signed by the officer commanding the unit in which the loss or damage occurred, is produced.

(*12800) WL 22512-2130 225M 8/43 T.S. 700

NAME CHATER R.H.
RANK & No. Sgt. 433574

**ROYAL AIR FORCE
FLYING CLOTHING CARD**

1250 No. 1002983

Date of Issue and Unit Stamp

EQUIPMENT SECTION
31 MAR 44
R.A.S. G. ... DISTRICT 1

[Signature]
Signature of Equipment Officer.

Figure 32 RAF Clothing Card. The RAF provided all the training and equipment to aircrew. All Australian aircrew were under the command of the RAF

3 Reference Number	ITEM. Description	ISSUES.			RETURNS.	
		Quantity issued	Date	I.V. Number	Date and I.V. Number Received by (Signature of Recipient)	Confirmed by (Signature of Equipment Officer)
	Helmets, flying, Type AC (Without Mask, Oxygen)	1	20/1/44	7152	Rud Carter	C.R.U. 1072 15/6/42: Harris for R/44
	Masks, Oxygen, Type D. ...					
	Masks, Microphone, Type E. (Non Oxygen)					
	Masks, Microphone, Type E. (Oxygen)					
	Receiver, telephone, head, Type C. ...					
	Pistol, revolver No. 125877	1	21/10/44	5949	Rud Carter	CV 695 B. Ashman 27.11.44
	Pistol, automatic, -455 No.					
	Magazines, -455 ...					
	Brushes, cleaning ...					
	Rods, cleaning ...	1	20/10/44			
	HELMETS TYPE D	1				
	WHISTLES A/G	1				

No. 454 SQUADRON
9/8/45
R.V. 133
Equipment Officer
FORE

Figure 33 Equipment issued RHC and other aircrew

ITEM.		ISSUES.			RETURNS.		
Reference Number	Description	Quantity Issued	Date	I.V. Number	Received by (Signature of Recipient)	Date and I.V. Number	Confirmed by (Signature of Equipment Officer)
	Boots, flying, knee ...	1					
	Socks ...	1					
	Bag Kit	1					
	Cap, flying	1					
	Suit, sleeve 1/2	1					
	Earpieces, Type B	1					
	Suit, trousers 1/2	1					
	Ring, earpiece securing	1					
	Socks, Woollen	2	29/12/44	7172			
	Cap, blank	1					
	Gauntlets, flying, left hand ...	1	1/44				
	" " right hand ...	1					
	Linings, gauntlets ...	1					
	Gloves, silk ...	1					
	Suits, flying, Collars ...	1					
	" " Linings, inner ...	1					
	" " Suits, outer ...	1					

Figure 34 RAF Clothing card recording clothing issued to RHC

ITEM.		ISSUES.			RETURNS.		
Reference Number	Description	Quantity Issued	Date	I.V. Number	Received by (Signature of Recipient)	Date and I.V. Number	Confirmed by (Signature of Equipment Officer)
	HAIRCOST 2/1 COMB	1	24/1/44				
	TORCHES ELSEC	1					
	MASKS OXYGEN	1					
	SMIRKS COMMON	1					
	COLLARS - 1/2 -	2					
	SOX 1/2	1					
11/1996	SHIRT 1/2	1	29/1/44	2064			

Figure 35 Equipment issued to RHC and other aircrew

The other two aircrews, who were a few weeks ahead of us on the course at 70 OTU, were; Pilot, F/S Viv Webster, Adelaide; Navigator, P/O Noel Townsend, Sydney; WAG, F/S Fred Marsh, Perth; Air Gunner, F/S Ken Touhey, Adelaide. Pilot, F/S Eddie Gaskell, Sydney; Navigator...; WAG, F/S Harry Keelan, Glen Innes; Air Gunner...

Harry Keelan became an accountant and taught accountancy at the TAFE College at Newcastle and then at Broken Hill. He became the Accountant for the Broken Hill Council and later became the Town Clerk. He died in 1985 at Broken Hill on the eve of retiring from full time work.

Fred Marsh became a primary school teacher and went to Canada as an exchange teacher for a year in 1961. He visited us at Gordon in 1973 and became head of a teachers' college in Perth. We last saw him, at Lindfield, in 1986. He stayed a single man and died in April 2000.

Eddie Gaskell became a teacher and ultimately Principal of Mullumbimby High School. He lived in retirement at Mullumbimby and died there in October 2000.

The RAF and RAAF followed the practice of having a small minority of aircrew at commissioned officer rank and the majority of aircrew at NCO rank. The commissioned officers ranks gave them no authority, per se, in the air and they had, practically, no scope for exercising their authority on the ground. In England, the Middle East and Italy they lived and travelled separately from NCOs. Having these ranks never involved the commissioned officers or NCOs being in charge of anything or of commanding anyone else on the ground in all our time and travels in the RAAF. The only circumstance that involved authority was flying and then the pilot was in command even if he were a sergeant in a crew including an officer. This was often the case and was for us. This dichotomy of ranks did not cause resentment, however, as NCO aircrew accepted it as an immutable fact of air force life. There was only tacit awareness of its oddity while being concerned with necessary practical things.

In the Royal Air Force, in England, the officer class seemed to be on a very high elevation; to some of them, their commissions were like halos, which conferred omnipotence and demanded subservience. However, they lost most of their imperious attitude when they were far away from home in the Middle East and Italy and especially when in the company of Australians.

At Shandur, and later on the squadron in Italy, for daytime flying at up to about 10,000 feet we wore denim flying suits, ordinary shoes, chamois gloves, and denim helmets. Garth at first thought we ought to have our flying goggles with us, flipped over out of the way on the backs of our heads, and our large leather gloves handy, all in case of fire. We tried it but we found those things a nuisance and we gave it up. The helmet had a rubber mask fixed to the left side and held over the mouth and nose by a clip on the helmet's right side. The mask incorporated a microphone and an inlet hole about an inch in diameter for a soft, corrugated rubber oxygen tube to be connected when needed. The helmet also had circular rubber flanges at the sides, which held small earphones. The microphone and earphones had leads covered with woven cotton, which were joined into a pencil shaped jack, which the wearer plugged into a socket at his position in the aeroplane and thus joined in the intercommunication system. The microphone was always switched off until the wearer had to speak because if left on it would pick up engine noise into the whole system that would interfere with other crewmembers' use of it. Crewmembers only used the intercom when it was necessary to say something concerning their jobs. For my operations of the wireless gear I had to flip a switch to disconnect from the intercom so that I could hear Morse code signals and vice versa.

We familiarised ourselves with our positions in the Baltimore and our equipment. For Garth to get to the cockpit he climbed up several foot holes in the port side of the fuselage behind the wing, then up on to the wing and stepped in and sat on his parachute pack, his seat being constructed deep enough for its bulk. Behind the vertical back of his seat was a sheet of armour plate steel for his protection. He closed and latched the Perspex cover, which was hinged on the starboard side, over the cockpit, clipped on his parachute harness and then his seat harness.

Parachute and seat harnesses were thick and strong strips of canvas webbing about 2 inches or 5cm wide with steel tips, which went over the wearer's shoulders and across his thighs and clipped into a flat steel lock on about his abdomen. The lock could be opened to immediately release the harness strips simply by banging hard against it with his fist. Owen's position was in the nose. He donned his parachute harness, unlatched the floor of his compartment and let it down. It had foot holes by which he climbed up, and when in he pulled the floor up and latched it shut. He then sat in his seat and clipped on his seat harness. His parachute was, like Joe's and mine, in a pack that was kept on the wall of his compartment. He lowered his map table, which was hinged and folded up to the left side of his compartment.

Joe and I put on our 'chute harnesses, crouched under the fuselage near the tail, climbed in through the bottom hatch and turned the handle of a little winch to lower it closed and then latched it shut. It was a slightly curved frame of duralumin about 80cm long and 60cm wide with four Perspex panels to allow a view through it. I walked, stooped, to my position, which faced forward, with the radio receiver and transmitter in front of me, and my seat, which was a small swivel chair, and clipped on my seat harness. Joe climbed up into the turret and did the same. Our parachutes were in separate canvas packs each about 30 cm wide, 17cm thick and 22cm deep. This kind, a chest pack, had two small oblong steel rings at the back and a canvas flap with press-studs at the front that covered the large oblong steel handle, which one would pull as the ripcord. These packs were stowed against the wall of the fuselage by thick elastic cords.

In the event of Owen, Joe and I having to escape, each would grab his pack from the wall and push its two rings into two steel spring clips at chest height on the front of his 'chute harness. Emergency exit for each of us would be by the way each entered but would have to be very much faster. For Joe and me, by winching up the bottom hatch to open it and going out feet first or head first. For Garth, by opening the Perspex cover of the cockpit and stepping out on to the port wing. For Owen, by unlatching his floor, which would fall down and be forced back by the slipstream, and diving out headfirst. When clear of the aeroplane, each would open the flap (on the chute harness worn by Garth), grab the oblong handle and pull it. This would pull out a small spring loaded metal frame, about a foot square, under a small "pilot" 'chute which would fly out, catch the strong slipstream, and thus pull the parachute out behind it. All of these procedures were theoretical and we never thought about them because they were obvious. They would be practical in good conditions, that is, the Baltimore being high enough for a parachute to open in good time and, particularly for Joe and me, it being right side up and stable, a lot to expect in a disaster.

We each plugged-in to the intercom system. I checked that the receiver and transmitter were working and we each told Garth we were OK. I had an American Bendix receiver and a transmitter. British bombers, such as Lancasters, had the British Marconi equipment.

Owen Sneddon, Joe Torpey and I flew on a few conversion flights with staff pilots and Garth Bear had similar flights with an instructor pilot. The pilot instructor sat in the navigator's compartment, lower and in the nose, which had some duplicate flying controls. There was a control column, which was hinged so that normally it was positioned out of the navigator's way against the port side of the compartment, and rudder pedals. On the port side of the compartment there were a duplicate airspeed indicator, a compass and an altimeter, which were necessarily provided for the navigator. The pilot instructor's contact with Garth Bear was by voice via the

intercom system. The Baltimore having dual flying controls in another compartment was unique; I know of no other bomber with that arrangement.

Then we all flew together. Flights were in the Nile Delta area, practising flying in formation with other Baltimores and practising navigation, wireless operations and bombing and gunnery. These flights were in daylight at heights of 5,000 or 6,000 feet for bombing and at low level, 500 feet for air to ground gunnery, both operations at the Bombing and Gunnery range at El Shatt. Owen used his bombsight to drop, for example, a group of 6 x 250 pounds live bombs.

For air to ground gunnery, Garth lowered one wing and Joe dipped the turret guns to their maximum to make them aim at the ground and let off some long bursts of the .5s at a long row of groups of old white-painted 44-gallon drums on the ground.

Another air to ground gunnery exercise was to use the two ventral (lower or underneath) machineguns. In preparation for the run over the drums targets I rotated the winding handle and wound up the back hatch to its fully open position. This allowed a huge draft of air to swirl into the back of our plane and raise dust from the floor. Then I swung the two .3 Browning machineguns, as one, on their mounting, from the starboard side of the rear fuselage where they were kept secured until needed, so that the breeches were over the open hatch space and the barrels and muzzles were well down through the opening and thus pointed down, outside our aircraft.

I plugged my intercom jack into the intercom port on the rear fuselage so I could talk to and hear Garth, our pilot. I knelt on the floor facing backwards and grasped the two short, vertical handles, which had the triggers in place for my forefingers. Armourers at Shandur had fed belts of ammo into the breeches but they had left the guns uncocked for safety and I had not cocked the guns while they were still pointed inside the rear fuselage so as to not risk an accidental firing into our tail. Cocking a machinegun meant pulling back the cocking lever, which pulls another round into the breech and readies the gun to fire and that was what I then did.

Garth, our pilot, told me on the intercom when we were close to the target and it was about to pass under us. Then, as each group of target drums whizzed into my view I moved the guns, which were mounted together, and tried to get the ring sight on the target group. I squeezed both triggers and fired a burst at each group. Each lot of drums was, in my restricted field of view, speeding towards our rear for only about 2 seconds and then sped out of my sight again, too quickly, because our ground speed was probably about 150 mph and our plane was flying at only about 200 feet.

Practising air to air gunnery, potentially the most important kind because the real thing would involve our survival, consisted in firing the two .5 inch Brownings in the turret at a drogue towed by another aircraft flying at the same height and parallel with ours several hundred yards away. Joe and I had done this at 1 BAGS at West Sale but it was far too easy, our plane and our target being stable. The circumstances of hostile gunnery, say against an attack by a German Messerschmitt fighter, would have involved violent, desperate aerobatics by our plane to escape and our target would have moved extremely quickly and unpredictably across the sky. A successful defence would have been very difficult indeed, really impossible, as our Fighter Affiliation exercises clearly showed. At 70 Operational Training Unit we had one FA exercise but we had lots of them on 454 Squadron.

On another run on the firing range Garth lowered the nose of our Baltimore in order to aim his four wing guns at the drums on the ground and then pressed the Guns Button on his Control Column handle to fire them. This was just as a fighter pilot would strafe a ground target.

Bombs and ammunition for the guns of our Baltimores were loaded by Armourers, a technical mustering of ground staff. They took the bombs on little trolleys to the aircraft, opened the bomb doors using the controls in the cockpit, hoisted the bombs up mechanically and fixed them in position. The bombs were not armed at that stage and, presumably, would not explode if accidentally dropped. They were armed only when the crew was ready to drop them over the target and the navigator pressed a switch so that the safety pins were mechanically pulled out of the noses. The Armourers also took the steel-clip belts of .5 and .3 machinegun ammunition rounds (cartridges with bullets) to the different parts of the aircraft where the guns were installed, placed them in position for each gun and inserted the first round of each belt in the breech of each gun. They cocked the forward guns in the wings because those could not be done later but didn't cock the .5s in the turret or the .3s in the back as it was safer not to and those could be cocked later, in the air by the crew.

Other technical musterings were, for example, Airframe, Wireless and Engineering. Those men serviced the aircraft and kept them flying. They were as important for flying operations as aircrew because so much, including our lives, depended on them. Ironically, they worked and lived separately from aircrew and this, unintentionally, prevented off-duty mixing.

Early in our flying, when Garth was getting used to the plane and its characteristics, on one of our take-offs it swerved alarmingly, first to port and then to starboard as Garth corrected it. He said this was because the flat-sided body tended to catch the air as the plane neared its take-off speed of about 110 mph, if the pilot didn't keep it absolutely straight. However, it did not seem to have any other vices and was very manoeuvrable in the air for an aircraft of its weight.

Finally, we did night flying exercises. Flying over the desert in Egypt was safe in that there were no high mountains and the weather was usually clear. These conditions were in contrast to those in England where there were lots of mountains and hills and much bad weather, both of which caused many flying accidents there. We also flew at about 12,000 feet that required us to wear our thick flying clothing and to breath pure oxygen via our masks.

Before the high flying exercises the instructors gave us a session in a Decompression Chamber to make us aware of the effects of lack of oxygen and our need to use it. The RAF said aircrews must use oxygen at the height of 10,000 feet and above. The chamber was a cylindrical room of steel equipped with bench seats along the sides and oxygen masks, tubes and small wheel-valves. We sat with pencils and paper and with an instructor who controlled all activities.

Several students were to do simple tasks such as adding a series of numbers and writing their names while he gradually reduced the air pressure and hence the amount of oxygen in the chamber. For a while their tasks went well. At the equivalent air pressure of 10,000 feet the instructor and the others donned their masks and breathed oxygen while those without carried on with their pencils. As the simulated height increased and the air pressure and oxygen were reduced, the maths and names became erratic and as the height increased still further the maths became wild and the names just incoherent scribbles. For we who were just watching, their efforts

were a bit hilarious. At that stage the height was approaching 20,000 feet and the next effect on the students would have been unconsciousness. Then the instructor gave masks to the writers and gradually increased the air pressure in the chamber and brought it up to normal. The students without the oxygen supply had thought that they were doing their tasks properly and it was only after they had returned to normal and reviewed their work that they realised how mentally impaired they had become. Then we who had watched the first lot and thought we would do better, had our go without oxygen and the results were the same. Some chaps said the experience was like being drunk. Service flying has greater than normal flying risks as well as exacting tasks and we were impressed, as the RAF intended us to be, by the insidious effects of lack of oxygen.

The Baltimore, like most other service aircraft, was bare metal inside with no insulation against noise or cold, the air pressure and temperature inside were the same as outside and the noise from the two engines was deafening and completely enveloping. When flying at night the interior of the plane was dark as the only light available to me was a tiny, weak angle-light that I could switch on over my very small desk top for writing messages. There was a similar light in the navigator's compartment over his map table.

On one night-flying exercise we had to drop a parachute flare. This was a metal cylinder containing magnesium, about 35cm long and 14cm diameter, with a short cord attached. The cord was to pull out the small parachute and to start a short fuse to ignite the flare after leaving the plane. It would illuminate the ground below as it slowly descended. The flare was to be launched through the flare tube situated in the floor next to my seat, so that was my job. According to the instructions, I opened the lid of the tube and put the flare cylinder in it. I then clipped the cord to a ring on the top of the tube. When the pilot told me through the intercom that our plane was at the right point to launch it I pushed the lever that opened the bottom of the tube to allow the flare to fall out. I also put my hand in and pushed the flare down and out to make sure it went immediately on its way. The instructor at the OTU had advised this as the flare had the explosive-burning force of a small bomb and on a previous occasion it had become stuck in the tube with a disastrous result. I wanted to be sure of getting rid of it.

There was only one flying accident at Shandur while we were there. It occurred when a Baltimore returned from an exercise with almost no gasoline left in its tanks, the gauges showing practically empty. The plane was in the landing circuit and the pilot had done most of his landing drill. He was concentrating on getting it down on the runway while expecting one or both of the engines to cut out at any moment. The automatic audible warning sounded in his cockpit because the wheels were not lowered at the very low height but he did not notice it. He then brought the plane down expecting it to run on its wheels but it sank down until the bottom of its fuselage went on to the bitumen and it then skidded along until it stopped. There was no fire and none of the crew was hurt. The plane had been the one that the Wing Commander normally flew and he was furious about it being damaged and, of course, about the pilot failing to lower the wheels.

There had been a fatal accident just before we arrived. An RAF pilot who had not flown for a long time was flying a Baltimore solo and attempted a steep turn very low near the strip. However, he didn't prevent the plane, which was quite heavy, in that attitude of the wings being nearly vertical to the ground, from losing height. The tip of the lower wing struck the ground and caused the Baltimore to crash.

Another accident occurred when a crew of RAAF men from Shandur were on a low flying exercise over the desert. They should have stayed at the altitude of 500 feet but they went lower and the bottom of the Baltimore struck the top of a sand dune. Their plane bounced and then came down on the dunes and skidded but stayed upright, not very badly damaged. Fortunately there was no fire and only one man had to be carried away, on a hand cart provided by some Egyptians.

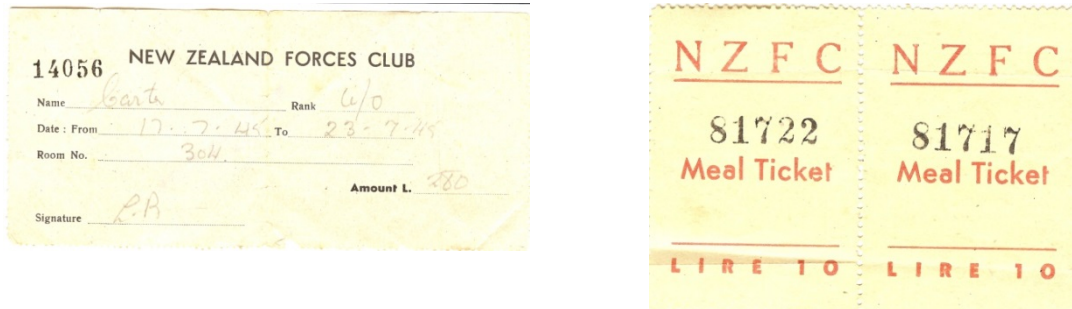


Figure 36 Memorabilia surviving from RHC's time in the Middle East

My Flying Log Book shows my flying hours at Shandur were: A Flight (Conversion), Day 9.15, and E Flight (Operations) Day 28.35 and Night 19.15 Grand Total 47.05. The officer who made those entries added the hours incorrectly; the Total should have been shown as 57.05. The term, "Conversion", meant our crew converting to the Baltimore by learning to fly it. "Operations" meant learning to fly it on different kinds of purposeful squadron operations, such as low level flying and night flying, as we might be required to do against the Germans. The Log also shows I fired 2000 rounds at targets but I think that number was an exaggeration as I don't remember doing that much shooting.

The summary of flying hours was signed by a Major as OC (Officer Commanding) E Flight, by a Lieutenant Colonel as CI (Chief Instructor) of 70 Operational Training Unit and a Group Captain as CO (Commanding Officer) of 70 Operational Training Unit. The ranks Major and Lt/Col were army ranks so those officers must have been of the South African Air Force, which wore khaki uniforms, and which, as I have mentioned, had its own aircrews alongside we Australians at 70 Operational Training Unit at Shandur. Group Captain L.S. Snaith, who was the CO at Shandur, was of the Royal Air Force. When Garth, Owen, Jack and I had completed our course there my total flying hours had increased by 47 to 81.

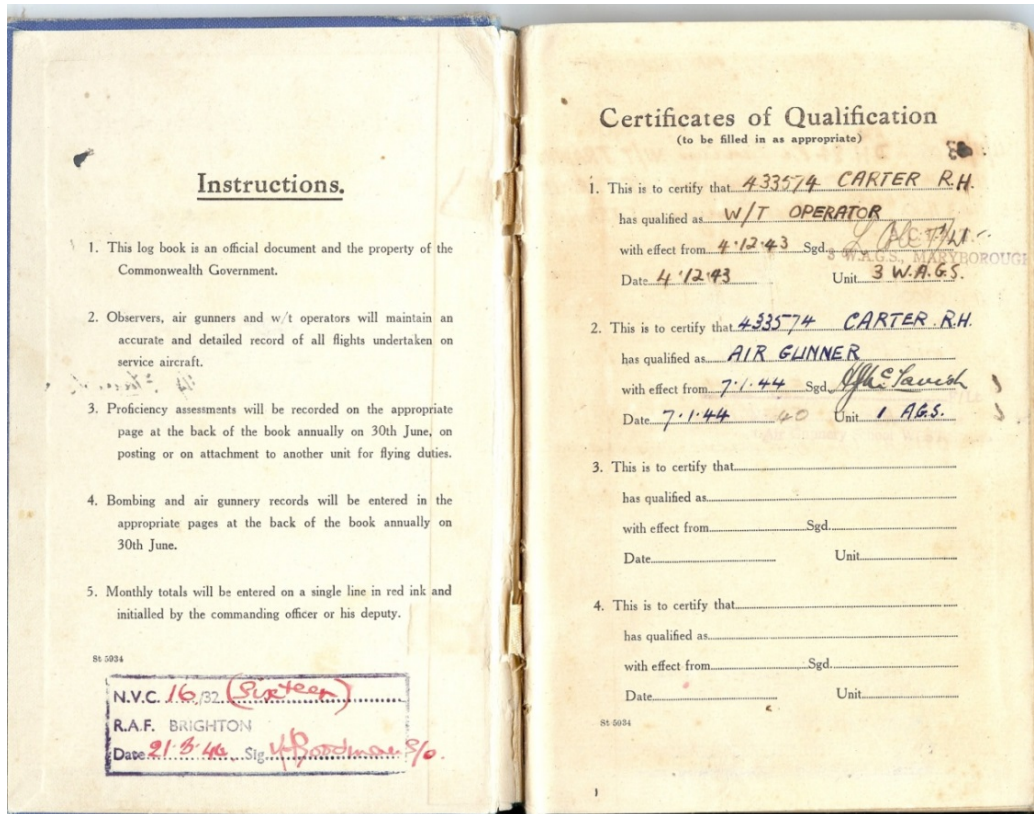


Figure 37 Flying Log

85 5034 NO1 AIR GUNNERS SCHOOL					85 5034 WEST SALE VIC. Time carried forward: 13:40		
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
17.12.43	13:45	ANSON LV 156	SGT EAGLE	AIRGUN TRNG.	BBT NO ROUNDS FIRED NO1,2	1:40	
20.12.43	08:55	LV 998	FSGT LEWIS	" " "	" " " OVER BREACHED	1:55	
23.12.43	13:05	LV 998	" " McDONALD	" " "	" 200 " "	1:35	
29.12.43	08:50	LT 735	P/O BECKE	" " "	FR.B.T. 200 ROUNDS FIRED	2:15	
30.12.43	10:00	LT 155	" " "	" " "	" " " " " "	1:55	
31.12.43	10:15	LT 155	" " "	" " "	AIR TOWATER 200 R. FIRED	1:35	
2.1.44	15:10	LT 157	F/SGT HASLAM	" " "	FR.B.T. NO ROUNDS FIRED OVERBREA	1:55	
3.1.44	15:00	LT 154	" " BUTLER	" " "	" " 200 " " "	1:50	
5.1.44	08:10	LT 783	" " LAMBERT	" " "	AIR TO GROUND 200 R. FIRED	1:30	
<i>Total Time on Completion of Course</i>						16:10	16:10
<i>Total Time on Completion of Course</i>						29:50	
<i>[Signature]</i> Flight Lieutenant Officer Commanding A Flight (Gunnery)							
TOTAL TIME							

Figure 38 Flying Log Gunnery

81 5934 70 O.T.U. SHANDUR EGYPT					Time carried forward: 34.50		
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
		BALTIMORE		W/OP			
20.3.45	0640	79	F/O MITCHELL	W/T EXERCISE	NC1 NILE DELTA AREA	1.40	
22.3.45	0915	79	F/O MITCHELL	W/T "	NC2 " " "	1.30	
24.3.45	0635	70	P/O McDONALD	W/T "	NC3 " " "	1.45	
24.3.45	1055	70	P/O McDONALD	GUNNERY "	" 7 AIR TO AIR	.50	
27.3.45	0640	70	F/O HAYES	" "	" 6 AIR TO GROUND	1.05	
27.3.45	0930	70	W/O RICHARDSON	W/T "	" 4 BOMBING EL SHATT BRANGE	1.10	
29.3.45	1030	69	P/O McDONALD	GUNNERY "	" 5,8 AIR TO AIR, FIGHTER AFFIL.	1.25	
3.4.45	0730	56			TOTAL TIME CONVERSION FLIGHT	9.50	
3.4.45	0730	56	F/S BEAR	NAROP 1	NAVIGATION EX. NILE DELTA AREA	2.35	
4.4.45	1145	66	"	" 2	" " " "	2.10	
5.4.45	0630	69	"	" 4	BOMBING AND FORMATION " "	2.20	
6.4.45	1000	75	"	" 8	" EL SHATT RANGE	1.00	
6.4.45	1145	75	"	" 9	" " " "	1.00	
7.4.45	1200	66	"	" 6A	AIR TO GROUND 400 ROUNDS	1.00	
10.4.45	1100	75	"	" 7	BOMBING AND FRONT GUN FIRING	1.25	
11.4.45	0655	48	"	" 5	FORMATION AND STICK BOMBING	2.00	
12.4.45	1205	52	"	" 10	BOMBING 6 X 250 lbs EL SHATT	1.15	
13.4.45	1030	68	"	" 6	DROGUE FIRING 400 R '5	.45	
16.4.45	2355	71	"	" 12	NAVIGATIONAL EX AND BOMBING	2.50	
17.4.45	1435	58	"	" 11	QGH	.40	
TOTAL TIME						60.15	2.50

Figure 39 Flying Log 70 OTU RAF Shandur Suez Canal Egypt

81 5934 454 SQDN JULY 1945					Time carried forward: 81.50 19.15		
Date	Hour	Aircraft Type and No.	Pilot	Duty	REMARKS (including results of bombing, gunnery, exercises, etc.)	Flying Times	
						Day	Night
		BALTIMORE					
7.7.45	0955	E	W/O BEAR	WOP TRNG	NAV. NOS AND BOMBING	3.40	
10.7.45	0905	B	"	" "	FIGHTER AFFILIATION (MUSTANGS)	1.25	
11.7.45	0905	D	"	" "	PHOTOGRAPHY	1.20	
13.7.45	0905	C	"	" "	COASTAL COMM EXERCISE-ADRIATIC	2.10	
14.7.45	0910	C	"	" "	X COUNTRY GENOVA-TURIN	3.30	
16.7.45	0900	O	W/O GASKELL	" "	FIGHTER AFFILIATION (SPIT)	1.40	
25.7.45	0900	E	BEAR	GUNNER	" " " " (")	1.40	
27.7.45	0905	F	"	W/OPERATOR	LOW LEVEL CROSS COUNTRY	2.00	
30.7.45	0900	X	HOBAN	GUNNER	FIGHTER AFFIL. (MUSTANGS)	1.50	
17.7.45	0940	H	F/L GILLINGHAM	W/OPERATOR	X/COUNTRY - ROME	1.30	
SUMMARY FOR JULY 1945						TOTAL FOR JULY	20.45
UNIT: 454 SQUADRON						TOTAL OPS HRS " NIL	#
DATE: 31.7.45						TOTAL ON BALTIMORES	87.00
SIGNATURE: <i>Russell Carter</i>						TOTAL HOURS	121.50
<i>W. J. ...</i>						TOTAL TIME	

Figure 40 Flying Log 454 Squadron RAAF Villa Orba near Udine, northern Italy

IN ITALY. 454 SQUADRON AT VILLA ORBA

When our course at Shandur was finished, on 6 May 1945, Garth, Owen, Joe and I were posted back to 22 Personnel Transit Centre at Almaza, Egypt. There, we learned that we were posted to a squadron in Italy but that was all we were told.

On 16 May we flew as passengers in an RAF Transport Command DC3 overnight along the coast of North Africa and across to Malta where we stopped briefly. We then flew on to Naples, on the west coast of Italy. We arrived there in the early morning and were taken by truck to 56 Personnel Transit Centre in the city. Our quarters were in an old apartment building used by the RAF as a part of the Transit Centre for transient aircrew and stayed there for several days. Naples was dirty and dangerous place with many people in poverty, and beggars. We went to see Mt. Vesuvius and climbed in loose sand and ash to the rim of the crater. We also went to Sorrento and saw Capri. Then the RAF told us we were going to join 454 Squadron, RAAF, Baltimore bombers, which was in north Italy and we were glad to resume our journey. We travelled by truck to Brindisi on the east coast and then by a small coastal ship north to Ancona. From there we went by truck through mountains and then along level country, to the north east of Venice.

On 21 May 1945, we arrived at 454 Squadron, which was camped on mostly open farming country, close to the small town of Villa Orba. Further away was the large town of Udine. This was the place to which the squadron had moved forward when the war in Italy ceased two weeks earlier. The other RAAF Baltimore squadron, 459, had been moved back to England for conversion to Wellington bombers. 454 and 459 Squadrons had been together in the preceding years in the Desert Air Force in North Africa, originally flying Lockheed Hudson bombers. However, the personnel had continually changed during all that time and when we arrived at 454 it was mainly of those who had been replacements for the war in Italy. Near Villa Orba there were several RAAF and RAF squadrons of Spitfire fighters and of Mosquito light bombers.

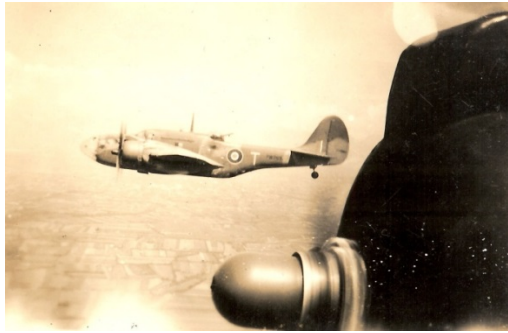


Figure 41 Baltimores with 454 Squadron
Villa Orba North East Italy July 1945



Figure 42 454 Squadron flying from Villa
Orba Nth East Italy July 1945



Figure 43 454 Squadron Baltimores flying from Villa Orba NE Italy July 1945

The countryside was flat, partly cleared and partly with trees and was irrigated by small channels of cold water from the Italian Alps. These high mountains rose sharply from the plain and were topped with snow, in clear view only a few miles away to the north. They were a spectacle. All personnel, equipment, stores, etc., were in tents on grass and the fields where the aircraft were parked and flew from were just grass. The Luftwaffe, the German Air Force, had been established in the area but the only evidence of that where we were, were a few pits in the ground containing remains of aircraft engines. With warm and dry weather, life there under canvas was pleasant and we had little to do.

SEEING THE SIGHTS: ROME, TRIESTE, VENICE AND VILLA ORBA

Garth, Joe, Owen and I were given a week's leave and, as well, a Baltimore for a pseudo courier trip and we flew to Rome. We landed at a busy airfield of several concrete strips (the name, "airport", was not to be invented for another decade or two) very close to "The Eternal City" as Rome is romantically termed. An RAF jeep came out to where we had stopped, to guide us in to where Garth had to park our plane. The jeep had a large sign on it facing back, "FOLLOW ME". It drove slowly away and Garth taxied our plane carefully behind it until the jeep stopped and we parked. We climbed out with our bags, walked to some central buildings and we found a truck that gave us a lift into the city. Then we found a hotel with large room and stayed there. During the following days we roamed about and saw the main sights; the Colosseum, the Vatican Museum, St

Peter's and the Pope, himself, who gave an audience to servicemen in a special room on a certain morning each week.

If a General Mobilization is ordered, every airman on leave or pass must return immediately to his Unit without waiting for instructions.

Sub Form 295
PERMISSION TO VISIT ROME
Alley

HAS NOT PERMISSION TO WEAR PLAIN CLOTHES

ROYAL AIR FORCE

Temporary Leave Form
Unit 454 SQ RAAF Station

Official No. A433574 Rank W/O Name CARTER R.H.

has permission to be absent from his quarters, from 08.30 hours on 17.7.45 to 23.59 hours on 24.7.45 1945

for the purpose of proceeding on leave

Chapman
Commanding Officer

Date 17.7.45



Figure 44 Leave pass to visit Rome July 1945

Figure 45 Owen Sneddon and RHC Rome July 1945



Figure 46 St Peters Rome. RHC front row third from left

Owen Sneddon and Joe Torpey were keen to go, being of that faith, and Garth and I decided to also go as seeing the Vatican and the head of the entire Catholic Church organisation would be a special experience. The practice was to take little religious artefacts to be blessed so I bought some rosary beads. At St Peters we joined a group of about forty servicemen and women wearing uniforms of a dozen or so countries; we were amazed at the variety. Ushers directed the

large group up several flights of stairs and into a large red-carpeted room with a wooden rail across one end. Then the Pope entered from a door behind the rail with his entourage of three or four religious assistants, all dressed in their ecclesiastical clothes and a few Swiss Guardsmen in their red and yellow striped medieval uniforms, armour and pikestaffs. Instantly, all of the audience knelt on the floor, excepting Garth and I who were taken unawares. However, we quickly realised that that was the protocol so we got down, too, not wanting to appear discourteous. The Pope then addressed the gathering. He spoke for about five minutes in English, Italian, Spanish and at least another language, about everyone's service far away from home and concluded by blessing all the servicemen. As he spoke, many of them held up the little things they had brought along. The rosary was in my pocket but it was, nevertheless, blessed. When ultimately I returned home to Asquith I gave it to Mrs Hagney, my mother's weekly helper in the house, who was a Catholic. She greatly appreciated it. At the end of our leave we hitched a ride back to the airfield, climbed into the Baltimore and flew back to our squadron on the grass near Villa Orba.

On other occasions we went on leave by truck to Trieste and also to Venice. Trieste was a picturesque place, a small city at the base, and on the side of, a mountain. Venice was, of course, full of ancient architecture, palaces and other similar buildings, canals and small bridges. From there, we went by launch across the largest canal to the Lido. This was large pleasure resort with a sandy beach on the ocean and we stayed in a small hotel building that the RAAF had taken over for men to spend their leave. The water was calm and not very clean but we had a swim and met some young Italian women wearing two-piece swimming costumes, which were very brief and covered only the fine essentials. The Italians were years ahead of the rest of the world in beach fashion. The RAAF fellows there who were running the leave accommodation had a military panel van, painted khaki, which they were driving here and there. It looked official, with a number painted on the front bumper, but actually wasn't. They had obtained it by mysterious means and repainted a fictitious number.

There was, for us, very little news about the state of the war against the Japanese in South East Asia and the Pacific Ocean and we only knew it was still going on. The RAAF kept us in training with flying exercises of various kinds.

FLYING IN ITALY AND AEROBATICS

We went on a lot of flights around Italy; Naples, Rome, Genoa and Turin, northern Italy, and over the Adriatic Sea, on formation flying, navigation exercises, bombing, cross-country and Fighter Affiliation. Some cross-country flights were low, at 500 feet, but above electric power lines hanging between high steel pylons. Flying in June and July, summer months, meant flying in fine, sunny weather, which was very pleasant. Each of us practised our jobs in the plane, which for me was keeping in Morse Code contact with our base or other RAF radio stations and occasionally getting compass bearings from them and using our Loop Aerial to get compass bearings with radio beacons. Garth and Owen did some simulated bombing by taking photos of selected targets with a camera built-in our aircraft. On one flight we took two New Zealand Army men with us. It was unofficial. They had come to where our squadron was camped hoping for a flight because neither of them had ever been in an aeroplane before. When we were at a few thousand feet I helped each get up into the turret for an unusual perspective of our plane and the sky and Joe opened the

back hatch for another view. They enjoyed the flight in a bomber despite the discomfort of noise without helmets and earphones and no seats.

Fighter Affiliation flights, at altitudes of at least 6,000 feet, involved our plane in some aerobatics. These flights were for fighter pilots to practise attacks and for bomber crews to practise evasive tactics. As Spitfire or Mustang fighter planes of other squadrons, including an RAAF squadron, simulated attacks on our Baltimore formation, each of our planes took evasive action. This was for the pilot to immediately put the nose down and go into steep diving turns, turning to the side the fighter attacked from, according to a corkscrew, the name given to this manoeuvre. If diving in this manner did not get us away, he would then pull our plane up into a steep climb and keep to this pattern of turning. The drill was that if the fighter attacked from our rear the gunner in the turret had to speak through the intercom to tell our pilot, who could not see the fighter, where it was. The gunner had to report its height and angle in relation to us, when to begin the manoeuvre and then keep telling him what the fighter was doing.

In my normal position, in the middle of the Baltimore, my only views of outside were through two small windows, one on each side of the fuselage over the wings so I usually did not see much at all during our flights. However, when we flew on one Fighter Affiliation and we did a vertical corkscrew, I occupied the turret on top of the fuselage and I had a panoramic view of the sky.

A Spitfire came from our rear port quarter and higher than us. I told Garth this and he turned our Baltimore to port and dived. The fighter came closer and turned with us. We kept to the dive, turning, for about ten seconds and then pulled up with excess G force, still turning, with the fighter still close. Its propeller seemed only about twenty-five yards away from our tail. I gave Garth a running report on the fighter's position and he kept our Baltimore climbing. It reached vertical but the Spitfire stayed close behind. Garth then put the nose down so that our plane went over in an arc upside down. At the top of the arc I floated from my turret seat, because the seat harness across my legs was loose, and my head pressed against the plexiglass dome. I wondered whether the glass would fall out. I was without my parachute pack because there had been no emergency. If I had clipped it on at my chest beforehand I would not have been able to even get up into the turret, it was so cramped, let alone operate its control handles. Then the Spitfire quickly slipped away to starboard and disappeared from my view. Its pilot must have at last decided that he had better get clear of our plane quickly as he could not predict its next movement. I wished he had gone sooner. Garth made our plane dive vertically, gather speed and gradually come to its right side up in a long zoom. I started breathing normally again and Owen and Joe came on to the intercom with rich expressions of relief. We were all glad that Garth had kept control of the Baltimore through those extreme movements. Joe said later that a canvas cushion he had been sitting on had floated out through the bottom hatch, which, inexplicably, he had left open. He was lucky not to have gone out with it. It was very unusual for a bomber to virtually do a loop.

Garth Bear was a careful and confident pilot. When we arrived at the squadron he had flown about 60 hours on Baltimores from our few weeks at the Operational Training Unit at Shandur. These aircraft were very much more advanced than the simple training planes like Avro Ansons, on which he had originally learned two-engine flying. The Baltimore's pilot sat alone in a cockpit crammed with instruments and controls. Like most American bombers, Baltimores were

heavy aircraft and although they had powerful engines, the high wing loading (total aircraft weight to wing area) meant they needed considerable care in critical flying situations where height or airspeed had been reduced to the minimum needed for safety. Our virtual stall at the end of the vertical climb was one of the latter. Garth's landings were safe; nothing dicey about them.

My flying on 454 Squadron in Italy amounted to 40 hours, making my official total flying hours in the RAAF 121.50. That was very few, indeed, in contrast with the hours of many other men who had been on operational flying, and who had hundreds of flying hours. My contemporaries and I had naturally been keen to fly more and to fly on operations but individuals in the services in wartime cannot order things and that was all the RAAF gave me.

AWARDS FOR FLYING AND GALLANTRY

Many awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross were made to officer pilots but very few awards of the DFC and Distinguished Flying Medal were made to other bomber crewmembers so that there seemed to be something missing in the scheme of things. Although a pilot's flying abilities were naturally essential, other crewmembers' skills, also, were important for particular functions in flying operations. Accurate navigation was one of those and not a few losses of aircraft and their crews in the RAAF, the RAF and the United States Air Force were caused by navigation mistakes. Harry Suthons was a very skilled Navigator on 30 Squadron, Beaufighters. His navigation led the squadron on flights from Milne Bay and Wards Strip near Port Moresby over the Owen Stanley Range to Japanese targets on the northern coast of New Guinea and in the Bismark and Solomon Seas. Some of the pilots he flew with, one being "Torchy" Uren, were awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross but Harry's achievements were not officially recognised in that way.

It was, and maybe still is, a manifestation of elitism in British and Australian services concerning awards for gallantry that "other ranks", that is, ordinary servicemen and non-commissioned officers up to and including the rank of Flight Sergeant were awarded medals while Warrant Officers, the next higher rank, and commissioned officers were awarded crosses. Thus, aircrew non-commissioned officers could be awarded only the Distinguished Flying Medal. Concerning aircrew in the RAF, RAAF, RNZAF and RCAF, there were many more NCOs than commissioned officers, the ratio being about four to one, and yet the award of the Distinguished Flying Medal was rare. On the other hand, the Distinguished Flying Cross was awarded so plentifully, at least in England, that it became almost common. It seemed that some squadrons recommended it for officer pilots as a matter of course after a tour of duties, rather than for a special flying achievement against the enemy. I remember seeing, in a book on RAF wartime history, a photograph of an investiture of awards by King George VI to aircrew men in a hangar of a bomber squadron in England. The king awarded firstly the Distinguished Flying Cross to each of about thirty officers and then the Distinguished Flying Medal to just one Flight Sergeant. The 454 Squadron history, Mark Lax, Alamein To The Alps, self published, Canberra, 2006, lists under Honours And Awards, 14 awards of the Distinguished Flying Cross and only 1 award of the Distinguished Flying Medal. As a matter of historical interest, the Victoria Cross, the highest British award for gallantry, was awarded without discrimination by ranks, to men of the lowest ranks and non-commissioned officers as well as to commissioned officers.

RETURNING TO AUSTRALIA AND HOME

After about three months at Villa Orba the higher command ordered the squadron to disband and leave. Lots of stores were burnt or thrown into a river and some officers and sergeants collected souvenirs in a large box to take back to Australia for the War Museum. The squadron left its fifteen Baltimores, each complete with its twelve machine guns, parked on the grass, their fate unknown. I obtained two steel cases that had contained .5inch machine gun ammunition and put most of my gear in them to be sent home, including a German soldier's steel helmet as a souvenir.

Transit Centre at Almaza, near Cairo.

We waited there until 12 October when we boarded another ship, the “Stirling Castle” which would take everyone back to Australia. We embarked at Alexandria and went slowly through the Suez Canal, stopped for a few hours at Port Suez on 14 October and then went into the Red Sea. On the 21st we crossed the equator and in the morning of the 29th arrived at Fremantle. All West Australian men disembarked with their gear and everyone else left the ship for the day and went to see Perth. I remember my first impressions of Australia as being a very green place in contrast with the barren, brown, desert landscapes of Egypt.

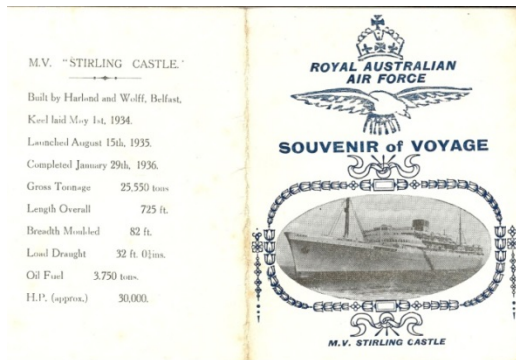


Figure 50 Stirling Castle souvenir voyage itinerary Sept 1945

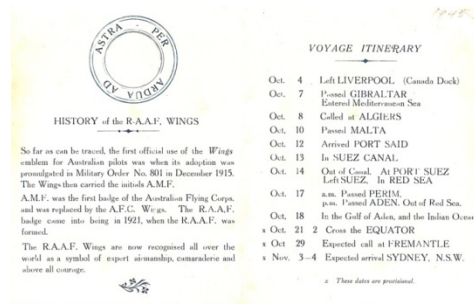


Figure 51 Voyage itinerary Stirling Castle Sept 1945

The ship sailed from Fremantle that same evening and proceeded to Sydney. It arrived on 4 November 1945 and berthed at the long wharf at Woolloomooloo where we had originally embarked and sailed away to places unknown. There was a convoy of double-decker buses to take everyone back to Bradfield Park and then to immediately go home. I phoned home at Asquith to tell them I was back and Dad and Harry came in the Ford ute to get me. Although still in the RAAF, I had leave and stayed at home. Later on the RAAF ordered me back to Bradfield Park for a final medical examination, which found me completely fit. This done, the RAAF gave me my Certificate of Discharge on 29 January 1946.

I had served in the Royal Australian Air Force by becoming trained for flying duties, then on active service overseas wherever and doing whatever it and the Royal Air Force ordered. In those circumstances and a few personal choices, it was just fortuitous that my service turned out as it did.

The RAAF flying personnel comprised men who were capable and had the spirit of duty and determination. The service demanded exacting performances from them but it provided for them well with good ranks and good living conditions and I was proud to have served in it.

ⁱ McCarthy, J. A Last Call of Empire, Australian War Memorial, 1988

ⁱⁱ *ibid*