



## **Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity**

The Friends of Gibraltar Oral History Project (1930 to 1970)

**Mellor, Gordon (Ser 220 / IWM 028650R21)**

### Object description

British NCO served as navigator flying Wellington and Halifax with 113 Sqdn, RAF operating over North West Europe, 1942; shot down and successfully evaded capture using Comet Chain escaping via France and Spain to Gibraltar, 10/1942; served as Navigation instructor in GB, 1942-1946

### Content description

REEL 1 Recollections of background in Wembley area, London, 1919-1939: family background and social circumstances; education; officer work with glazing firm, estate agents and chartered surveyors, 1936-1939; interest in aviation and visits to Stag Lane and Hendon airfields; question of approach of war; background to application to join RAF Volunteer Reserve, 8/1939; air raid alarm on outbreak of war, 3/9/1939; working from home; volunteering to join RAF, 9/1939. Period at RAF Receiving Centre, Cardington, 9/1939: reception; educational tests; rejection on medical grounds. REEL 2 Continues: reactions to rejection on medical grounds; return to work. Background to call up and passing medical, 6/1940. Recollections of conditions of period at RAF Receiving Centre, Uxbridge, 6/1940-8/1940: educational and eye tests; selection of training as navigator/observer; return home on deferred service; recall on ground defence role, 8/1940; kitting out and adjustments to uniform; barrack accommodation; drill; vaccinations; PT; lectures; cleaning room; food rations; relationship with recruits and instructors. Period training for ground defence role at Bridgenorth, 9/1940: train journey and reception; hut accommodation and separation by training specialisation; guard duties and story of challenging officer. REEL 3 Continues: rifle training; cross-country runs; visits to Brigenorth; canteen; preparing for kit inspections; lectures. Recollections of period as Aircraftsman 2nd Class at Bircham Newton, 9/1940-12/1940: train journey; accommodation in gymnasium; question of volunteering for fatigue parties; assignment to armoury and ground defence role; weapons training on machine guns; duties in gun pits with tripod fixed machine guns; emergency landing of aircraft returning from night raid; aircraft operating from base; practice in deflection shooting against kite drogue on beach.

REEL 4 Continues: lectures in bombing and gunnery; manning Hispano anti-aircraft cannon mounted on lorry; recreations; story of missing gunpit duty; training on Morse code. Period at RAF Reception Centre, Stratford upon Avon, 12/1940: billets; progress of training; story of covering for friend visiting girlfriend. Recollections of period with 4 Sqdn, 6 Initial Training Wing, RAF, Aberystwyth, 12/1940-????: hotel billets; lecture halls; navigation training and equipment. REEL 5 Continues: Morse code and wireless theory training; recreations in Aberystwyth; mountain walking expedition; promotion to Leading Aircraftman on completion of course, 3/1941. Period at RAF Wilmslow, 3/1941. Voyage with draft aboard Royal Ulsterman and Derbyshire to Halifax, Canada, 4/1941: conditions and question of seasickness; transshipping to Derbyshire at Reykjavik, Iceland; conditions; naval and air escorts; arrival. Train journey to Goderich, Ontario, 4/1941. REEL 6 Train journey to Goderich, Ontario, 4/1941. Recollections of period training as navigator/observer on Anson at 31 Air navigation School, RAF, Port Albert, 4/1941-8/1941: reception; local café; flying gear; base layout; organisation into courses; programme of lectures; first air navigation training, 28/4/1941; nature of Anson; progression of training; cross country practice flights; relationship with pilots, navigation instructors and trainees. REEL 7 Continues: examinations and assessment; hut accommodation; food rations; daily routine; recreations and hospitality of Canadian civilians; stories of recreational visits to Niagara Falls and Toronto; astro-navigation and methods; use of photographic reconnaissance camera. REEL 8 Continues: river and lake recreations; night astro-navigation exercises. Recollections of attending course at Bombing and Gunnery School, Royal Canadian Air Force, Fingal, 8/1941-9/1941: train journey; nature of RCAF discipline; ground instruction on Vickers gas operated machine gun including deflection shooting, sights and firing on ranges; ground instruction on bombs, bomb sights and bomb racks; volunteering for participation in high altitude experiment in decompression chamber and effects of lack of oxygen; nature of Fairey Battle; air firing machine gun at air drogues; dropping practice bombs on targets in lake; sporting activities; promotion to sergeant observer at passing out parade, 9/1941. REEL 9 Journey via Toronto and Montreal to Halifax, 10/1941. Voyage aboard Andes to Liverpool, 10/1941. Period at Observers' Reception Centre, RAF, Bournemouth, 10/1941-11/1941: night vision test; leave. Recollections of period as navigator flying Wellington with 27 Operation Training Unit, RAF, Lichfield, 11/1941-5/1942: accommodation; forming all sergeant crew with Pilots Don Jennings and Ralph Longmuir, Rear Gunner Jimmy Crocket, Wireless Operator Ted Willey and Front Gunner Ralph Webb; conversion of pilots onto Wellington; navigators night familiarisation flights in Anson; nature of Wellington IC; training flights; use of astrograph navigational aid. REEL 10 Continues: photographic reconnaissance; bombing practice; lectures; recreations; opinion of Rear Gunner Sergeant Bill Godfrey; story of crash landing at Lichfield, 26/2/1942, including engine failure, impact damage, escape from wreck, fire, successful efforts to free Sergeant Bill Godfrey and his subsequent death; replacement crew members Sergeant Pilot Jack Murray and Rear Gunner Sergeant Jimmy Crocket; reactions to accident; resumption of flying; story of damage to undercarriage and

consequent crash landing, 2/4/1942; insistence on always checking ability to open astrodome before flights. REEL 11 Continues: flight with Squadron leader Banford, 3/4/1942; replacement Wireless Operator; operational night training flight dropping propaganda leaflets over Lille, France, 27/4/1942; leave. Recollections of conditions of service, lifestyle and daily routine during operations flying Wellington and Halifax with B Flight, 103 Sqdn, RAF, Elsham Wold, 5/1942-10/1942: reception; assignment as crew to Sergeant Staniland; account of 1000 bomber raid over Cologne, Germany, 30/5/1942, including notification, prior air test, attending navigators' briefing, navigational instruments, course turning points, meteorological data, working out course and timings, question of secrecy, main briefing and reactions to 1000 bomber concept. REEL 12 Continues: account of 1000 bomber raid over Cologne, Germany, 30/5/1942, including main briefing, incendiary bomb load, meteorological briefing, visual beacons, Verey signals, opinion of Group Captain Hugh Constantine accompanying raid, crew meal, flying kit, flight office, crew room, MT lift to aircraft, role of ground crew, question of superstitions, preparing maps, astrograph, question of using bearing from wireless beacons, parachute storage, checking astrodome exit, take off routine, setting course and flying independently within bomber stream, calculating wind speed and course revisions, monitoring progress and doglegs to adjust timings. REEL 13 Continues: account of 1000 bomber raid over Cologne, Germany, 30/5/1942, including gunner's extra role monitoring ground position, question of windows for navigator, question of amphetamine pills and food, ELSAN latrine provision, unofficial stints taking over controls, route, German anti-aircraft fire and night fighters, approach to target, acting as bomb aimer and use of Mark IX bomb sight, method of arming and dropping bombs, view over target and German AA fire, attitude to German civilian casualties, maintaining course prior to taking photograph to record bombing results, continued threat from German night fighters, propaganda leaflets dropped over Munchen, route back, circuiting airfield, landing routine, taxiing to dispersal zone, story of landing with hung-up incendiaries, dropping flying kit in flight office lockers, debriefing in operations room and crew breakfast. REEL 14 Continues: sleep; training flights with GEE navigational system; method of carrying out searches over North Sea; unofficial training on Link Trainer flight simulator; nature of sergeants' mess; recreations including visits to pub and concert parties; aspects of various raids and minelaying missions; conversion of unit from Wellington to Handley Page Halifax at Lossiemouth, 7/1942; detachment to practice use of GEE with 102 Sqdn, RAF at Pocklington, 7/1942. REEL 15 Continues: opinion of Halifax Mark II and crew dispositions; question of operational use of intercom; view of Halifax crash landing; formation of new crew with Pilot Warrant Officer Kenneth Edwards, Flight Engineer Sergeant George Green, Wireless Operator Flight Sergeant Don Macdonald, Rear Gunner Sergeants Norman Macmaster and Stolz Page, Font Gunner Sergeant Robert Hawthorne and Mid Upper Gunner Sergeant Harry Richards; painting chess symbols on aircraft; resumption of bombing operations over Germany; problem with jamming of GEE beams. Account of being shot down during raid on Aachen, 5/10/1942: briefing and unusual route; thunderstorm threat; German AA fire tracking course for night

fighters; view of Northern Lights. REEL 16 Continues: confusion during approach to target; dropping bombs; repeated attacks by ME110 and resulting engine and wing fires; bailing out at 2,000 feet; nature of parachute jump. Account of period evading capture and escape from Belgium, through France to Spain, 10/1942: parachute landing in orchard near Maastricht; decision to head south; distant view of Halifax crash site; loneliness of situation; walking across fields and down country lanes; hiding during day in copse. REEL 17 Continues: hiding during day in copse; escape kit; uniform worn; nearby tram; decision to head for Spain; opinion of Second Pilot Sergeant Mark Mead on first flight; route and passing through Millen; shelter during day in cave near Haut Vinave; locating position on map; failed attempt to get river water; foraging for food on route to Lantin; story of close escape from discovery; shelter during day in derelict house; thunderstorm; contact and assistance from Belgian family near Lantin. REEL 18 Continues: arrival of Belgian cleric and necessity of moving to his house at Alleur; prior close escape passing by German AA Bty; stay at Belgian cleric's house; check on authenticity as RAF evader; story of tram journey to safe house in Liege; reception and meeting with escaped RAF POW Sergeant Michael Joyce; meeting with female courier from Belgian Resistance and further checks on authenticity; back garden escape route; photographs taken for identity cards and work permits; civilian clothes; taking tram to Ans; train journey via Leuvan to Brussels accompanied by Belgian woman; periods waiting in park and shopping centre in Brussels on arrival. REEL 19 Continues: movements to safe house and flat in Brussels; suspicion generated by braces marked with police insignia; move to safe house; story of passing through frontier customs during train journey via Lille to Paris; reception on arrival in Paris; story of seeing escaped Russian POWs in Lille; stay at safehouse flat with Robert and Germaine Ayle; nature of Comète escape organisation; kiosk photographs for identity cards; story of sightseeing trip with Robert Ayle around Paris. REEL 20 Continues: story of sightseeing trip with Robert Ayle around Paris; **contacts with other RAF evaders;** intelligence activities of French woman; move with RAF evaders, Russian POW and Andree de Joyce to station; train journey via Bayonne to St Jean de Luz; situation on arrival and reception; period in safehouse flat; meeting Janine de Greef; walk to Francia Usandizanga farm used as base for Spanish frontier crossings in Urrugne; preparations; night walk with Basque guide across frontier; crossing River Bidassoa marking Spanish frontier; avoiding Spanish border guard post. REEL 21 Continues: avoiding Spanish border guard post Recollections of journey through Spain to Gibraltar, 10/1942: background to avoidance of Spanish frontier guards and patrols; cross country route; fog; reception at farm; return of guides; journey by car to San Sebastian; reception at safehouse; journey in British consul car to British Embassy, Madrid; reception; presence of other evaders and escaped POWs of various nationalities; documentation in false identity; train journey to La Ligna; bus journey across Gibraltar frontier, 26/10/1942. Period in Gibraltar, 10/1942: kitting out; meeting friend at Coastal Command base; separation from Russian evader; recreations; telegram to family. Flight in Dakota to GB, 1/11/1942. REEL 22 Initial period following return to GB, 11/1942-12/1942: reporting to London Central Transit Centre, Great

Eastern Hotel, Paddington; checks by RAF Special Police; reception from mother; debriefing interviews; reporting to Airt Ministry; request for pilot training; leave; visit to 103 Sqdn, RAF at Elsham Wold including extract from account of visit in 'No Moon Tonight' by Don Charlwood and state of unit. Recollections of period as navigation instructor with 6 (Observer) Advanced Flying Unit, Staverton, 12/1942-7/1943: prior decision to abandon flying training and to apply for advanced flying training; promotion to flight sergeant; role organising training flights and exercises; flight in Anson; joining Caterpillar Club; news of fate of crew, 4/10/1942; marriage, 7/1943. Recollections of attending staff navigation course at Central Navigation School, Cranage, 7/1943-10/1943: married accommodation; nature of course. REEL 23 Continues: nature of course; Recollections of period as instructor at 1 (Observer) Advanced Flying Unit, Wigtown, 11/1943-10/1945: relationship with instructors; developing ground instruction; prior promotion to warrant officer; improvements to navigational exercises; developing direct reckoning ground simulator; commission as pilot officer, 4/1944; nature of officers' mess; experimental pier heads intended for mulberry Harbour installations; attending course at Flying Training Central Instructors' School, North Luffenham, 6/1944, including news of D Day, 6/6/1944, question of attention span of pupils and improved lecturing techniques; question of second operational tour; rented married accommodation; VE Day celebrations, 8/5/1944; closure of station, 10/1945. REEL 24 closure of station, 10/1944; leave. Recollections of period at Chipping Warden and Swanton, 11/1945-5/1946: arrival and immediate move to Swanton; formation of RAF Escaping Society; problems during prior attempt to train personnel for Far East service; establishing direct reckoning ground simulator; promotion to flight lieutenant, 3/1946. Demobilisation, 13/5/1946. Post-service career: question of remaining in RAF and diminishing requirement for navigators due to electronic guidance measures; completing training and career as chartered surveyor; effect of wartime experiences; membership of RAF Escaping Society, 1946-1995, including dinner to celebrate George Medal awarded to Andree de Joyce, efforts to assist people who had assisted escapers and evaders and discovery of fate of various members of Comet chain; membership of British Bomber Command Assoc.

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