



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

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

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Object description

British aircraftman served as rigger with Special Operations Maintenance Party, RAF aboard HMS Eagle and HMS Furious in Mediterranean, 1942; served with 3207 Servicing Commando, RAF in GB and English Channel, 1943-1944; served with 420 Repair and Salvage Unit, RAF in North West Europe, 1944-1945

Content description

REEL 1 Background in Sawbridgeworth, GB, 1921-1941: family; education; employment; reasons for enlistment in RAF, 1941; German bombing in Sawbridgeworth area. Aspects of enlistment and training with RAF in GB, 1941- 1942: call up for RAF service, 5/1941; pattern of training as flight mechanic, then fitter; posting to 604 Sqdn, RAF at RAF Middle Wallop, 1942. Recollections of period as aircraftman with Special Operations Maintenance Party, RAF aboard HMS Eagle and HMS Furious in Mediterranean, 1942: journey to Liverpool via Kirkham; voyage from GB to Gibraltar aboard MV Cape Hawke carrying Supermarine Spitfire Mk Vs; arrival in Gibraltar, 21/2/1942; organisation of Spanish workforce in Gibraltar; opening crates containing Supermarine Spitfire Mk Vs; loading of Supermarine Spitfire Mk Vs aboard HMS Eagle at Gibraltar, 23/2/1942-25/2/1942; getting used to naval routine aboard HMS Eagle; ground crew work on Supermarine Spitfire Mk V; aborting of voyage to Malta, 27/2/1942 to Gibraltar, 28/2/1942; fitting of long range tanks to Supermarine Spitfire Mk V. REEL 2 Continues: fuel transfer problems and repair of long range fuel tanks; flying off of Supermarine Spitfires from HMS Eagle, 7/3/1942; what he learnt of Operation Spotter from Stan Grant; return to Gibraltar to prepare further Supermarine Spitfires for flight to Malta; unloading of crates; security measures taken to avoid spying on aircraft; further despatches of Supermarine Spitfires to Malta; method of setting flaps on Supermarine Spitfire Mk V for carrier take offs; his return to GB aboard HMTS Narkhunda, 7/1942; embarking aboard HMS Furious at Gourock, 8/1942; character of HMS Furious; work aboard HMS Furious; problems of lack of fresh water aboard HMS Furious; participation in Operation Pedestal, 8/1942; sight of sinking of HMS Eagle, 8/1942; return of HMS Furious to Gibraltar; loss of Supermarine Spitfire into sea, 17/8/1942; return to GB, 26/8/1942. Recollections of period as rigger with 3207 Servicing Commando, RAF in GB and English Channel, 1943-1944: joining unit at RAF Tangmere,

1/4/1943; role of servicing commandos. REEL 3 Continues: organisation of unit; amphibious training at Inverary; in tented camp at Ivyfield; organisation of unit at Ivyfield; nature of mobile exercises; amphibious exercise at Tenby; origin of unit member's nicknames; arrangement for leave and investigation by Military Police in London; memories of George 'Screwball' Beurling; Christmas at RAF Manston, 12/1943; character of Rolls Royce Sabre engines on Hawker Typhoons; how kitchen duty spoilt his Christmas dinner at RAF Manston; news of D-Day, 6/6/1944; lecture from Harry Broadhurst in concentration area near Portsmouth; embarking for Normandy; torpedoing of his landing craft in English Channel, 6/6/1944; rescue of some of landing craft occupants by Motor Torpedo Boat, 6/6/1944. REEL 4 Continues: his rescue by US Coastguard boat; return to RAF Calshot, 7/6/1944; anxiety to get back to his unit. Recollections of period as rigger with 420 Repair and Salvage Unit, RAF in North West Europe, 1944-1945: role of unit support 132 and 135 Wings, RAF; his joining unit in Normandy, 8/1944; composition of the salvage team; salvage work with unit; German Air Force attack on airfield at Bergen-op-Zoom, Belgium, 1/1/1945; attempt to pick up crashed Supermarine Spitfire in field near Arnhem, Netherlands; VE Day in Enschede, Netherlands, 8/5/1945; relations between Dutch civilians and British troops, 1944- 1945; relations with French family in Lille, 1944; fraternisation with Belgian civilians at Grimbergen. Loss of HMS Eagle in Mediterranean, 8/1942. REEL 5 Continues: Reads extracts from diary he kept during voyage from GB to Gibraltar aboard MV Cape Hawke, 2/1942.

**Courtesy IWM March 2014
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