



Gibraltar: Challenge, Change & Continuity

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

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British aircraftsman served with 172 and 179 Sqdns, RAF in GB and Gibraltar, 1942-1944; served with RAF Baroda and RAF Digri in India, 1945-1946

Content description

REEL 1 Background in Hull, GB, 1922-1941: family; education; employment; German Zeppelin reconnaissance over Hull; anticipation of coming war. Aspects of period as civilian in Hull, GB, 1939-1941: reaction to declaration of Second World War, 3/9/1939; bombing of family home, 1941; rationing; subsequent post-war career. Aspects of enlistment and training as aircraftsman with RAF in GB, 1941- 1942: reasons for volunteering for RAF; reasons for not admitting to employers that he had volunteered; induction at RAF Padgate including issue of uniform; medical inspection; accommodation. REEL 2 Continues: origins of recruits at RAF Padgate; basic training at Blackpool; character of squad NCO; daily routine; arms drill; physical training; state of personal fitness; adjustment to discipline; mixed squad of volunteers and conscripts; value of basic training; standard of food and accommodation in billets; relations with landladies; degree of contact with officers; entertainment and recreation; passing out parade; rigger's course at RAF Squire's Gate. REEL 3 Continues: nature of instruction and improvement in writing skills; routine for starting up aircraft; comparison between bi-planes and mono-planes; work with a variety of materials; geodetic structure of Vickers Wellington; type of fabric used and doping patches; precautions when using dope; use of ropes on chocks; use of steel cables; use of vegetable oils on US aircraft; procedure for daily inspection of aircraft including tyres, oil leaks, fluid reservoirs, Perspex and flaps; duration of inspection; levels of servicing. REEL 4 Continues: failure rate on course; classification of Aircraftsman 2; attending physical training course at Redcar, 5/1942; guard duties at Redcar. Recollections of period as aircraftsman with 172 and 179 Sqdns, RAF in GB and Gibraltar, 1942-1945: posting to squadron at RAF Chivenor; arrival and reception; accommodation; mixed RAF and Royal Navy personnel; formation of squadron; lack of training and contact with regulars; recreational activities; daily routine; rations; duties maintaining tyres; procedure for repairing tyres; the vulcanizing process. REEL 5 Continues: prior recollection of nature of German Air Force raids on Hull; conditions in shelter during air raids; question

of threat of gas; guard duties at RAF Chivenor; fire watch duties; security on airfield; attitude to church parades at Blackpool; church parades at RAF Chivenor; kit inspections; degree of contact with aircrew; role and duties of duty crew. REEL 6 Continues: self-service in cook house after 9pm; misuse of eggs; functions of Peto tube; use of gooseneck flares; hard landings on airfield and effects on tyres; method of signifying postings and activities on being posted; use of standard trade tool kit; rigger's basic tools and their uses; squadron flight to RAF Wick; impressions of RAF Wick; duties looking after aircraft dinghies; system of dinghy inflation; floatation characteristics and gear in aircraft; exits from aircraft; dinghy emergency ration box; phosphorescent trail tablet; role of squadron keeping watch on Norwegian fjords. REEL 7 Continues: duration to which Vickers Wellington could float on ditching; suitability of Vickers Wellington for night operations over sea; character of Leigh Lights and their operational use; technique for checking Leigh Light pod; squadron tactics employed during attacks on submarines; discovery by radio operator leading to electronic method of detecting submarines; use of METOX receiver and new tactics evolved to attack submarines; adjustment of depth charges used; concentrated effort for Operation Swamp; living conditions at RAF Wick, 9/1942-10/1942; concert party and card playing; move to RAF Skitten, 10/1942. REEL 8 Continues: conditions at RAF Skitten; flight from RAF Wick to RAF Hurn; flight to Gibraltar; impressions of Gibraltar; description of Gibraltar town; problems with flies and device to control fly population; trips to La Linea in Spain; presence of Gibraltarians and Spanish workforce; accommodation and rations; disposal of old rations from stores; swimming; disguise used to use Officers Only beach; reasons for aircraft crashes witnessed at Gibraltar; first sight of De Havilland Mosquito landing at Gibraltar; weather conditions; squadron patrolling; arrival of Supermarine Spitfires in boxes. REEL 9 Continues: filtering of contaminated fuel cans; reasons for fire at main fuel dump; lack of precautions when handling fuel; daily routine and reasons for shutting down in strong wind blowing from Atlantic; incident of drunken attempt by NCO to fly off Vickers Wellington; prior recollection of difficulties of taking home leave from RAF Chivenor; suicide of a desperate case who was refused home leave; division of squadron and formation of 179 Squadron at Gibraltar; overall numbers in squadron and ground crew; injury of Flight Engineer Officer caused by smoking when working with fuel; reasons for starting to smoke in India, 1945; problems with Rolls Royce Pegasus engine; contact with home. REEL 10 Continues: pen-friends; amusing story of parental censorship; demand for more water in emergency rations; sources of fresh water; use of sea water for ablutions; reasons for missing drink on 21st Birthday; sniping incident from Axis agents in Spain; shooting of commanding officer's dog; response to approach of Axis aircraft; awareness of caves in rock; incident of Consolidated Catalina being blown ashore on Spanish coast; issue of rifle to guard Italian POWs on SS Neuralia, 1943; swimming activities and role as swimming instructor; drawing. REEL 11 Continues: art materials; visits to cinema; sight of actress Vivien Leigh on Officers Only beach; football on rock; fights caused by drink; sight of German Junkers Ju 52 on rock; nature of drinking amongst service personnel; character of Tiny Smith and Ron Wilcox; duties of room

orderly; daily working routine; reaction to hearing of first big RAF raid on Berlin, 1943; degree of knowledge of war situation; visit by King Peter of Yugoslavia in civilian clothing; advantages of J type dinghy; impressions of Group Captain Carey. REEL 12 Continues: reasons for aircrew visits to Morocco and Azores; refusal of his offer to search for lost crew; promotion to Leading Aircraftman; possible reasons for loss of aircrew on failure of manual lever to deploy on dinghy; process of inflation on dinghy and contrast between Mediterranean and North Sea conditions; paying of Spanish fishermen to rescue downed aircrews; incident of collision of two aircraft; use of Avro York for VIP transport; character of Rolls Royce Hercules engine compared with Rolls Royce Pegasus; problems caused by unsigned Form 100; character of Sergeant Goodman; incident of dinghy being damaged by knife. REEL 13 Continues: introduction of floating emergency aerial using rocket and kite; dealing with complaint from aircrew; how Rolls Royce Hercules engine improved survival prospects of aircraft; memories of loss of General Wladyslaw Sikorski in Consolidated Liberator at Gibraltar, 7/1943; sight of crashed aircraft floating in water and attempt to launch boat; survivor of crash; opinion of reason for crash of Consolidated Liberator carrying General Wladyslaw Sikorski; nature of rumours for reasons for crash at time, 7/1943. REEL 14 Continues: incident of being becalmed in improvised yacht; accident in which flight engineer Flight Lieutenant Wickenden was killed under wing of crashed aircraft; use of airbags to lift aircraft; reaction to death of Flight Lieutenant Wickenden; sight of aircraft and gliders in transit for invasion of Sicily, 7/1943; leave in rest camp on Gibraltar; rations; types of dinghies used; ceremonial parade; aircraft that landed with Leigh-Light lowered; arrival of American aircraft. REEL 15 Continues: loading American equipment; anti-submarine tactics employed by squadron during 1943; squadron leadership; means of righting a capsized dinghy and how he demonstrated it; questions of courting and marriage; strain on married men; 'Tiny' Smith's eye operation; missing green of English countryside; flowers on airfield in spring; replacing tins of waters in dinghies and introduction of new items; demand for new wing tips damaged in manoeuvring; replacement of aircraft wing. REEL 16 Continues: cramped conditions working inside wing of aircraft; comparison between Vickers Warwick and Vickers Wellington; vaccination against smallpox and prior recollection of effects of vaccination at RAF Wick; effects of storm on Gibraltar; rumours of return to GB; construction of suitcase from scrap material; embarkation with Italian POWs on SS Neoralia; voyage from Gibraltar to GB; sea sickness and Italian POW singing; boat drill; long term effects on uniform of kippers; impressions on arrival in River Clyde; move to RAF Predannack; encounters with drunken WAAFs and consequences. REEL 17 Continues: visits to Mullion Cove; dinner with Americans; brother and sisters' military service; difficulty journey during home leave; incident on pay parade; home leave; consequences for returning late from leave; family use of concrete shelter in garden; painting black and white stripes on aircraft prior to D- Day; fitting of cameras to aircraft; concern over effects of bad weather, 6/6/1944; orders for embarkation leave; move to RAF Chivenor. REEL 18 Continues: move to RAF St Eval, 11/1944; Christian Association at RAF Chivenor; description of RAF St Eval; fatal accident on test flight;

change from Vickers Wellington to Vickers Warwick; character of Lindholme Dinghy; comparison between American and British made tyres; snap inspection; recreational trips organised by RAF at St Eval; visit to sick NAAFI girl in snow conditions. Recollections of period as aircraftsman with RAF in India, 1945-1946: voyage from GB to India aboard Georgic; arrival in Bombay; in transit camp; travelling as individual reinforcement on train to RAF Baroda; effects of monsoon conditions on runway and perimeter track; presence of scorpions and snakes; visit to Baroda. REEL 19 Continues: teaching English to his bearer; work on Douglas DC 3 Dakotas; accident on landing and hospitalisation; work of bearer in billet; nature of accommodation; use of RAF film for photography; simplicity of maintenance of Douglas DC 3 Dakotas; lack of security on airfield; rations and system of cooking; threat from monkeys; social conditions in Baroda; reports of civil unrest and sense of personal security; a guru in action; attending Hindu celebrations in arena. REEL 20 Continues: nature of celebrations; reaction to treatment of elephants; return to Baroda followed by pack of wild dogs; overnight duties guarding crashed aircraft in elephant stables; severe mosquito bites; hearing of demobilisation group and purchase of tine trunk; tea and American beer in NAAFI; visit to service in church hut; death of squadron member from snake bite. REEL 21 Continues: homesickness induced by hearing Christmas carols sung, 12/1945; relations with new reinforcements; description of train journey to RAF Digri in Bengal; initial impressions on arrival at RAF Digri; conditions at RAF Digri; protection of aircraft from storms; damage to hut in storm; work on Handley Page Halifax aircraft; effects of humidity on letter writing. REEL 22 Continues: maintenance duties; rations; lack of recreational facilities; dangers of cleaning Perspex windows; terrain around airfield; killing of cobra; uses of cow dung; insects; leave camp and visit to Calcutta; rebuilding Handley Page Halifax and flight to RAF Baroda; awaiting demobilisation at RAF Baroda; health in Gibraltar and India; incident at well at RAF Baroda. REEL 23 Continues: inspection for sexually transmitted disease by female doctor; beggars; return voyage from India to GB aboard Queen of Bermuda; arrival in GB. Aspects of demobilisation and return to civilian life, from 1946: demobilisation; return to civilian occupation; training as radio officer for Merchant Navy; adjustment to civilian life; advantages of service with RAF.

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