

FLYING LOG BOOK

for

P/O FLOYD DOUGLAS DOWLING

Wireless Air Gunner, Royal Canadian Air Force

Scott, you have asked me to write a few notes about specific items in my logbook. I am now sitting at the computer with logbook in hand, and will just go through it and see what I can remember - starting at page one.

The first entry in the book is dated July 7, 1943. This was a familiarization flight in a Norseman. I believe the Norseman carried eight passengers. This was the first time any of us had been near an airplane. We flew over Niagara Falls and I do believe that not one of our crew was airsick. Of course the Norseman was as steady as a rock, so the only reason for getting sick would have been out of fear. No-one would admit, at this point in time, that they were afraid of anything.

Should I bore you with some of the events leading up to this flight? Certainly!

In early February 1943, six months before this first flight, I arrived at Manning Pool, Lachine, Quebec in a brand new blue suit and a brand new haircut. The haircut was a mistake. The first item on the agenda for new entries was a haircut. The Sarg. looked at me, decided that I didn't need a haircut, and sent me over to the powerhouse, where I shoveled coal for the rest of the day.

Manning Pool was drill, working in kitchens, doing odd jobs, needles, waiting for something to happen, and boredom. Montreal was a great place, and we all enjoyed what little we saw of it. We were there until April, but were quarantined on the station for the first six weeks of this period. I remember digging ditches in the ice to let the spring melt water flow more freely, and one of the guys philosophized that 'here we were, in the Royal Canadian Airforce, but that not one of us were ever going to get near an airplane!'

Around the first of April 1943, we were sent to Kingston, Ontario on a P.A.E.D. (Pre-Aircrew Education Division) where we took some high school math courses. The only thing I can say about this period is that I learned to dislike Kingston.

The first of May 1943, we landed at #4 Wireless School, Guelph, Ontario where we spent the next eight months. You can see from the logbook that, although we did get to fly in an airplane in July, we did not do any serious flying until late November.

Eight months in wireless school was a long, long time for most of us teenagers. We had one old guy (aged 33) on our course whom we fondly called Pop Bell. He graduated along with the rest of us but I don't know where he went from Guelph.

Our wireless flying was carried out on Menasco Moths and Norsemen at Birch, Ontario - at least, I think the name of the place was Birch. It was just an airfield.

My first flight in a Menasco was sort of a disaster. It was pitch black when I waddled over to the airplane in my seatpack (parachute). I looked into the rear seat and all I could see was radio equipment; there was just no way I was going to be able to get into that tiny space, especially while wearing the very unfamiliar parachute. But I did. When I did get in, I then had to tune up the radio and transmitter and make a contact before we took off. Even though the radio equipment (which was black in color) filled the rear cockpit, it was still so dark that I could hardly see it, let alone tune it. I finally made it, but not before the pilot became very antsy over the delay. Once we took off and got above the clouds, it was a beautiful sunny day. The pilot told me to pull the lead out and get my work done as soon as possible so he could have some fun. I told him to never mind me and go ahead and do whatever he thought he had to do. What he had to do was cloud hop and do stalls - you know, straight up, roll over and straight down. It was fun, but I got sick so we had to land. Would have liked to have tried it again but never had the opportunity. So much for the first working flight.

After graduation from wireless school we spent six weeks at B. & G. School in Jarvis, where I got a total of twelve hours of flying time in Bollingbros. Twelve hours was enough. On graduating from B. & G. everyone was posted to various places, but I was fortunate enough to get sent overseas, and there I landed, on April 1st, 1944, after a two week leave at home and another short sojourn at Lachine "Y" depot.

More training! A.F.U. (think this means Advanced Flying Unit). Lots of hours night and day on Ansons - nothing notable, although the wet dinghy drill was interesting. Went to a swimming pool in town, climbed into a wet flying suit and Mae West, jumped off the diving board into the deep end, made our way to the shallow end, righted an overturned dinghy, hauled it to the other end and climbed in. Lot of scary stuff for a non-swimmer.

Next was O.T.U. (Operational Training Unit) where we got crewed up and had further training as a crew. Lots of flying, night and day in Wellingtons, a very good aircraft. The crewing up process was interesting. All of the new aircrew gathered in one room and the pilots went around and talked to the various trades and chose their crews. Our pilot told me he picked the weirdest looking people he could find, figuring he would end up with the

smartest crew. He was right. Everyone supposedly had the right to refuse to fly with another individual if they didn't get along or had no confidence in one another.

Between O.T.U. and Heavy Conversion we had a short stay at a Commando Training Station. There we had to crawl through tunnels, climb walls and ropes and all that fun stuff. Fortunately, every time our crew was supposed to go over the course, I was someplace else - that is, until the last day, when they caught up to me. I did manage to do all that hard stuff somehow, passed the course, and from then on I was known as 'Muscles' by the rest of the crew.

Can't remember anything notable happening at Heavy Conversion Unit. We flew various Marks of old Halifaxes, most of which had seen their day.

Our crew, as a whole, were very disappointed when we were told that we were being posted to #425 Alouette Squadron. None of us were French, so it seemed strange to us that we would be going to a French Canadian Squadron. What bothered us most was that Tholthorpe was a non-permanent station and the living conditions were not the best. Nissen Huts are very cold in the winter. However, we went and it all turned out well. Worked with a lot of great people, French and English, and we all got along very well.

Guess we arrived at Tholthorpe about the middle of September 1944. The drill was that our skipper had to do two trips as second dicky with other experienced crews, then some further training, then Ops.

I can remember our first trip. This was a very short one, to the coast of France at Cape Gris Nez. It was also a daylight raid. We were all very frazzled and uptight. There was a lot of waiting around with each Op. At one point, while we were waiting for something to happen, briefing to start or bus to take us to our dispersal, the rear gunner and myself started a little sparring match to relieve the tension. I guess one of us hit the other a little too hard at one point, and we almost got into a real brawl. Fortunately for me, a couple of the guys stepped in or I would have had my clock cleaned but good. Young Carol was only about four feet tall but he was built like a brick 'you know what'. Nothing like that ever happened again. The trip itself - I don't believe that we got anywhere near Cape Gris Nez. Arnold Tighelaar was a great navigator, but the trip was so short that I don't think he had time to get organized. We dumped our bombs in the English Channel and came home, with a total flying time of four hours.

On Operations - the first one was very scary, the next four were less scary, the next twenty were routine, and the last five were totally nerve-wracking. I remember returning from leave with three trips left; it took all of my willpower to get on that train and return to Tholthorpe.

We got quite a few leaves. Every six weeks we got a week off but were on call twenty-four hours a day when not on leave.

The second trip was to Bergen, Norway. It was sort of memorable, in my mind, anyhow. We took off in rain, flew over the North Sea at eight hundred feet in rain. Fifty miles from the Norwegian coast we climbed to eighteen thousand feet in sunshine, bombed in sunshine, dropped back down to eight hundred feet and flew home in rain. Approaching Bergen, I looked out my window and wondered how we were ever going to get through all the anti-aircraft shells they were throwing up at us. The flak looked pretty solid to me, but, even though we seemed to be getting tracked by an AA gun or two, we were not even hit.

I see on Op. #3 to Dortmund we were diverted to Rattlesden, probably because of weather conditions at home base. Can't remember anything special about the trip itself, but the diversion was good. Rattlesden was an American base and we were really well looked after. Tom Mathews (another WAG) and I were talking to the C.O. and he informed us that we were the first NCO's to ever eat in the Officers' Mess. Even had ice cream. They didn't have any beds for us so we had to sleep on the floor, but in the Officers' Mess, of course.

Although all Ruhr trips were slightly 'hairy', I can't remember anything untoward until we got to Op. #9 on Dusseldorf. I see that on November 30, 1944 we had some hydraulic trouble coming back from Cologne so we landed at Swinderby. Couldn't have been too bad as we flew back to base the next day. Perhaps Hemphill (our pilot) had a girl friend in Swinderby.

We had major problems on our way to Dusseldorf. Couldn't get above thirteen thousand feet and we were supposed to bomb at eighteen thousand. We bombed at thirteen thousand, but we must have been well behind the main stream as we were on three engines. In retrospect, it was probably just as well that we were behind or we would have been on the receiving end of a bomb load. I see we landed at Manston in the south of England. Don't remember how we got home. Must have taken a train!

You will notice that we had quite a few training flights after the Dusseldorf mission and I hazily recall that some very important people on the squadron had a feeling that most of our problems on this raid were the result of 'finger trouble'. F/L Hemphill (pilot) and Sgt. McAbendroth (engineer), however, received the D.F.C. and the D.F.M., respectively, as a result of this trip.

Returning from Op. #11 to Munster, we landed at Middleton St. George. This was a mistake, as we had contacted and received permission to land at Linton on Ouse, the adjoining circuit. Imagine that - and after all those training flights too! It was fortunate that we landed between those two Lancs., instead of at

the same time as one of them. I remember us all climbing out of the plane and saying to the first person we saw, "Where the Hell are we?" I had some good friends at Middleton so it all turned out very well.

Don't know why I noted in my log that we had a bit of flak go through one of our port gas tanks over Cologne. We didn't lose much fuel as the tanks were self-sealing. If you have ever put a 22 shell through a tin can, you will know what a piece of flak going through an airplane sounds like.

We missed a few trips in December 1944, as our skipper was away on a course for a while. When he finished the course he became a Squadron Leader (Major) and was in command of a flight. This meant that we could do only four trips a month maximum, and with fourteen trips to go, we would be stuck at Tholthorpe until April 1945. We had been doing pretty well up to this point, and were sort of looking forward to completing our tour in February. Not only that, Hemphill could choose our trips, and we all knew that he would like another medal or so.

I mentioned being stuck at Tholthorpe - well, Tholthorpe was a miserable place in the winter. The people, however, were great. Most of the ground crew and over half the aircrew were French-speaking. The C/O, Joe (the Group) Lecomte, the second in command, and most of the senior officers were also French-speaking. They were a free and easy bunch and I came to realize that our posting to 425 Squadron had been a bit of luck.

Some time during this winter, an old acquaintance of mine (Ron) arrived on the Squadron. We had peddled bread together for Canada Bread in St. Catherine's, and had become quite chummy there. He was a pilot, and was sort of a "know-it-all." He was always asking me questions concerning my job as a Wireless Air Gunner, sort of testing my knowledge. I'm sure that he'd done the same with his crew and must have been very popular!? He didn't last too long. One night an operation we were both on was delayed for an hour or two, probably on account of weather. Ron and his crew never returned from this trip. I later learned that he'd kept his engines running during the wait, instead of turning them off. They most likely ran out of gas on the way home. Could not bring myself to feel sorry for Ron, but sure felt sorry for the six guys that were with him.

The January trips to Hanau, Saarbrucken, Grevenbrioch and Magdeburg were long, but they went fairly smoothly, for us anyway. The worst part of these trips, as I recall, were the briefings and the weather. Anyway, we got through them O.K., as we did the February ones, which were of the same order.

I missed a trip in March 1945, as I was Best Man at the wedding of Art and Doris. Almost missed the wedding. They sent

me a telegram, but it came by mail and was put into my post box in the mess. Just happened to look in my box the day before the wedding, and there it was. Luckily, Heckmondwike was close by, so I just arranged a short leave and I arrived on the scene, unannounced, late that evening. They had given up on me by that time.

According to my crew, the trip I missed was a real hairy one. They were holed by flak several times, but no one was hurt and they managed to get back all in one piece. My big worry now was that I would have to do a trip with a strange crew, after the rest of my crew had completed their tour.

The March 31st, 1945 trip to Hamburg was notable in that take-off was postponed for over an hour. The Americans were over Hamburg that day, and one of their squadrons had been diverted to our station. We waited and waited, and finally what was left of the squadron, one Liberator, landed. We were a very nervous bunch by the time we took off. We later found out that most of the rest of the American Squadron had landed safely, but at aerodromes all over the north of England. Maybe they didn't like the idea of sleeping in a Nissen Hut.

April 8, 1945 - Hamburg again. On this trip our skipper earned a bar to his D.F.C. and our Engineer a bar to his D.F.M. Running up on Hamburg, our port inner engine ran away on us and caught on fire. Our Hally was shaking so hard that we thought it was going to fall apart, and there seemed to be no way of stopping the engine. Hemphill ordered us to jump and we were almost ready to go, when the prop shattered and flew off. The shaking ceased, the engine quit, and a little dive put the fire out. There we were again, approaching a target at thirteen thousand feet instead of eighteen thousand, and again on three engines. We took a vote and decided that we might as well go ahead with it, and so we did. Dropped our bombs on the target, and got out as fast as we could on three engines. At that stage of the war we could have landed at Frankfurt, but decided to go on to Paris. On the way we lost another engine, and of course, some more height. Before we arrived at Le Bourget Airport, we decided that we should try for the emergency drome at Manston, on the east coast of England. It was only about thirty miles away, but on the way we started losing power on one of the remaining engines, the one with all the pumps and generators. By the time we landed we had no hydraulics and no power. The runway was two miles long and we used it all. Took a train the rest of the way home, but somehow it took us two days to get through London. (The Skipper and Bomb Aimer had girl friends in London. The rest of us had very little money on us, but we had a good time.)

On one of our last five trips, we had a two-thousand pound bomb hang up on us. (I didn't make a note of this in my log book.) It partially released but woudn't drop. Tried diving, jiggling and

all sorts of maneuvers, but it just wouldn't go. It was just hanging on cables and the bomb bay doors would not close. We finally had to land with it; we landed at Tholthorpe. Don't know why they let us, as we could have destroyed the runway as well as ourselves. Hemphill made a very smooth landing, just like silk. We did not taxi very far - just stopped, and left it for the poor armourers to deal with.

Lost a good friend on Keil - never found out what happened.

Watched a Hally get a load of bombs dumped on him from the plane above, over Heligoland. It was their fault; they should have been watching. Found out later that it was a crew that I had a beer with the night before in York.

On the way to Heligoland we watched a Lanc just roll over on its back and fall into the North Sea. It seemed to fall slowly, twisting and turning just like a leaf. Two parachutes opened and I sent their position as soon as I could break radio silence. They were picked up, but I don't think they made it.

After Heligoland, 425 Squadron "stood down" from operations to convert to Lancaster bombers. Heligoland, therefore, was the last trip our squadron made.

I, therefore, did not have to make a trip with a strange crew, and was credited with a tour with only twenty-seven trips. Always felt a little guilty about this, but I guess those are the breaks. I was repatriated shortly after this, and returned to Canada by ship.

When the war ended, the squadron made a few sight-seeing flights over Europe and, finally, flew the Lancs back to Canada. They arrived at Moncton the same day that I went through on the train.

Scott, this turned out to be quite an epistle. I was just going to do a few notes but got carried away, possibly because I appreciate your interest.

There is no way that we could have climbed into our Hally and gone on that first trip without all of the waiting, drill and all the other stuff, good and bad, that went on for a year or so before. Guess it just goes to show that anyone can do anything they want to if they are willing to prepare themselves.

P.S. In regard to my friend Ron, I have been questioned as to how a pilot could keep his engines running, as Ron did, without attracting attention. As a matter of fact, it did attract attention and that is how I found out about it. Some time after the incident I happened to be talking to one of the members of the crew that was parked in the dispersal next to Ron, and it was he that told me about the engines not being shut down. He told me that they had shouted out to Ron advising him to shut down, but he apparently paid no attention. It has to be remembered that aircraft were dispersed over a wide area, quite a distance from the main buildings; we were always driven out to our planes, as it was a long walk.

In any event, it was only conjecture on our part that Ron had run out of gas on the return trip, but I have always believed it to be a fact. Recently, however, I re-discovered an old book called " R.C.A.F. Overseas * The Sixth Year ", which deals with operations, casualties and medals. I guess I bought it because our crew is mentioned in it twice, but I must admit that I had never read the whole book. It has this to say about F/S R.E Harvey of the Snowy Owl Squadron on a trip to Magdeburg on January 16th, 1944 on which the Snowy Owls lost four aircraft:

"The fourth Snowy Owl crew, skippered by FS R.E. Harvey, were just beginning their operational tour. The night's experience was enough to shake even battle tried veterans. Trouble with the navigational equipment caused the Hally to arrive late over the target, but the crew got their bombs away and turned homeward. Then the ordeal began. From Magdeburg to Hanover night fighters - there appeared to be four Ju. 88s - shadowed the bomber, making frequent passes at it. Seven times the Halifax evaded. Just past Hanover an eighth attack was made and the bomber was hit. One shell exploded in the rear turret, blowing out all the perspex; other shells damaged the tail and set fire to the port inner engine. With flames spreading rapidly, Harvey gave the order to jump. The Jerry apparently went down with his victim, for both the rear (FS A. J. R. Little) and mid upper (FS K. D. Reid) gunners had fired on the Junkers as it closed, and other members of the crew saw an aircraft burst into flames and explode about 1000 feet below. In addition to Little and Reid, F/O C. F. Bryce and Sgts. P.E.O. Morissette and R.J. Wilson fell into the hands of the enemy. Harvey and Sgt. J.F. McCormick were lost "

(420 Snowy Owl Squadron operated out of Tholthorpe along with 425 Alouette Squadron.)

I am sure that FS Harvey was the 'Ron' that I was told had left his engines running while sitting out a delayed take off. I thought I should set the record straight.

Floyd D. Dowling

Monday, July 27th, 1992

Vic Nielsen, WAG 109
254 Victoria Street W.
North Bay, ON P1B 6B5

Dear Vic,

Guess you have given up on me by now. Have been pretty busy trying to build a fence and clean up the yard between rainstorms. Excuses, excuses.

Didn't have a lot of luck with names but came up with a few. Not sure they are all correct. Can't understand why "Bobo" is kneeling in front of "A" Flight. Our Flight Leader was Paul Chysyk, who is pictured in "B" Flight, second man in the third row. At least, I believe this one is Chysyk. I felt Paul could have been the first man in the third row in "A" Flight; however, Paul had fair hair and that man, who I believe is Rick Tompkins, is definitely dark. Maybe someone else will know for sure and will straighten me out.

Am sending you a copy of a picture I found amongst my stuff. Luckily all of the names are on the back. This was probably taken at Birch or Jarvis. What puzzles me is that we flew in Norsemen, Moths and Yales at Birch, and Bolingbros were in use at Jarvis. The plane in the background is none of these, if memory serves me correctly.

I could not locate all of the people in this picture in the photos you sent. Possibly some of them were in "C" Flight.

Most of the faces in the photos are familiar but I just can't put a name to them. I will keep at it, however, as once in a while I take a peek at them and another name springs to mind.

We have all of this in the computer so I can add quite easily when I remember another one. Will try and keep you posted.

Regards,

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