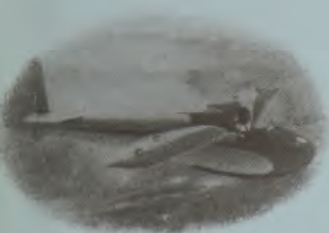


HAPPY LANDINGS

GROUP CAPTAIN EDWARD MOLE



Happy Landings

Born three years after the Wright brothers made their first historic flight, Edward Mole has lived through and taken an active part in aviation from the early pioneering days. His career as a pilot spans some 50 years, during which time he has flown 148 different types of aircraft from World War I vintage, through World War II and into the jet age.

The author was one of the pioneers of the British gliding movement, holding Certificate No. 6, and the story describes the efforts of early enthusiasts with their primitive equipment and limited knowledge who, although they made no outstanding flights, did contribute towards the present development of the sport. He was also a founder member and former chairman of the Popular Flying Association and gives an interesting history of the first few years of the P.F.A. which led up to its rapid growth and present success.

During World War II the author was closely connected with the technical development of military gliders which were used so successfully by our Airborne Forces. After D-Day he was seconded to B.O.A.C. as manager of their Development Flight, newly established to test the planned range of post-war civil airliners on their routes. He later joined the National Gas Turbine Establishment at Farnborough as R.A.F. representative responsible for liaison between technical staff and R.A.F. Squadrons then becoming equipped with jet engined aircraft. After retirement from the R.A.F., he was appointed Director of Civil Aviation in the Bahamas in charge of Nassau International Airport, and he relates various interesting and amusing incidents of life in that 'tourist paradise'. Subsequently he started his own aviation consultancy business in London.

The author vividly describes the carefree life in the pre-war R.A.F., the traumatic war years and the post-war era of great development in aviation. It is a nostalgic story enriched with many amusing anecdotes of incidents and personalities encountered. HAPPY LANDINGS is a cheerful book which should appeal to everyone interested in the sport of flying and the development of aviation since the early days.

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HAPPY LANDINGS

Happy Landings

The recollections of a light-hearted Airman

Group Captain Edward Mole,
B.Sc., F.R.Ae.S.

Airlife
England

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- and finally to my dear wife Liz for her tolerance in accepting the awful reminiscences of my wayward past.

Preface

I was born three years after the Wright Brothers in America made their first historic flights in a powered aeroplane, and two years before Colonel Cody made the first sustained aeroplane flight in Britain. Consequently, I am fortunate to have lived throughout the whole era of powered flight and to have witnessed the development of the aeroplane from its very earliest days. As an active pilot for some fifty years, I have flown 148 different types of aircraft starting with the Avro 504 and Bristol Fighter of World War I vintage, right through the Golden Age of Flying in the 1930's, to Spitfires, Hurricanes and other aircraft of the World War II period, and thence into the jet age.

My earlier reminiscences as a young man as described in this story, may be thought to be rather too light-hearted — especially some of the flying incidents. I do hope, however, that I have been able to convey some idea of the cheerful life in the pre-war RAF when flying was fun and we did not seem to have a care in the world.

With the advent of years and the weight of responsibilities, the story naturally becomes more serious. Before starting on the flying experiences, I would crave my reader's patience to allow me to start these reminiscences from the beginning, from early boyhood through the stage of a wild and rather wayward youth, until events steered me into aviation as a career.

E.M.

Chapter 1

My Early Years

My father was a manufacturing jeweller in Birmingham, of rigid Victorian upbringing and a strict Protestant. My mother's conversion to the Catholic faith caused violent disagreements between them, after one of which she walked out of the house, never to return; 'Without even her hat,' as a shocked neighbour exclaimed. With her, she took me, then a small baby, and my sister Barbara, some three years old. She stayed with friends for a while and then settled in London where, in a large house in Hampstead, she founded an institution called St. Mary's Nursery College.

The College was organised to train some thirty resident 'nice young Catholic girls' as children's nannies. They were trained to care for children who were largely the offspring of British officials based abroad in the Empire, and who were boarded at the College until old enough to join their parents. The College was highly successful and in due course was honoured by an official visit from Queen Mary herself. My mother must have been a remarkably resourceful woman to have been able to establish such an organisation while lumbered with two small children and without any previous business experience, at a time when it was not the done thing for ladies to work.

I was brought up at the College until my seventh birthday when, according to the terms of the legal separation, I was duly delivered to my father. In a state of complete bewilderment, I arrived by cab at a large and rather gloomy-looking house in Meadow Road, Edgbaston — a residential suburb of Birmingham. Here my father lived with my elder brother and other sister, both ten or more years older than myself and grown up. The house was run with rigid efficiency by an elderly lady housekeeper aided by a cook and housemaid, who must have resented the upheaval caused by the arrival of a small child. I felt completely lost for a while and badly missed my mother's affection.

Twelve months later World War I was declared, at the outset of which my brother, Kenneth, joined the army with a commission in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment. For years he underwent all the miseries and horrors of trench warfare in France, until severely wounded and repatriated. My elder sister had taken up a teaching

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appointment abroad, and my father and I were left at home together. As the war years dragged by, he was increasingly worried by the recession in his business and became more and more withdrawn, leaving me very much to my own resources.

During these war years, I was at a preparatory school where I made many friends and began to blossom out. The school proprietress was a Miss Leigh, known disrespectfully by us boys as 'Flea'. She was a severe and formidable person, looking rather like a grey-haired eagle, who ran the school with iron discipline reinforced with frequent and painful use of the cane which she carried around with her as a symbol of authority. At the age of eleven, I was co-opted with several other lads into Flea's special 'scholarship class' and was duly crammed to take the entrance exam to King Edward's — our local Grammar School. Flea had studied the exam papers over the years and knew that certain questions regularly recurred, so that we boys were coached with set answers to these questions, which seemingly useless information we had to learn by heart. She would stand us in line while she fired questions at us: 'Thomas à Becket', or 'Wat Tyler', or 'the Capes of Europe', or 'the highest mountain of the Andes', and so on. If you got the answer wrong: 'Hold out your hand,' she commanded. Then — swish! — a smart cut from the cane. It was surprising how effective that cane was as an *aide memoire*, and I got my scholarship.

King Edward's was a boys' day school founded in 1552 by King Edward VI, and was housed in a wonderful old stone building in New Street, near the main Birmingham railway station. Sadly, this historic old building has since been demolished and the school moved to new premises in a quieter and more suitable area near the University. It had a fine reputation, and I thoroughly enjoyed my life there with the rough and tumble of my fellow pupils.

When I first arrived in Birmingham my father, who was a firm Protestant, had insisted upon my going to church twice every Sunday — presumably to iron out the taint of my previous Catholic upbringing with my mother. Oh God! How I hated those boring church services. Sit down. Stand up. Kneel down. Sit down. Those meaningless hymns and that dreary sermon. On reaching the age of twelve I was told that in order to be confirmed, I had to learn by heart some rigmarole called the Catechism which I simply could not accept. At this point I rebelled, and told my father that although I believed firmly in the basic Christian faith, I could not accept the fantastic dogma that the Church had built up around it. To my surprise, he understood my feelings and allowed me to drop out from further church attendance. At a later date I learned that he had lost his faith during the Great War — he could not believe that God (although, of course, on our side) would have permitted such appalling carnage.

Shortly afterwards the war ended amid much rejoicing, and five years of severe austerity was over. My brother Kenneth came home from the army minus half his right hand, and joined my father in restoring the family business. He was my hero and I was delighted to see him again, and with his many friends coming and going, with tennis and croquet parties in the garden, life at our Meadow Road home became very cheerful.

At fourteen years old, I became extremely keen on chemistry and decided to set up a laboratory at home. My father encouraged this idea and placed a room at the top of the house at my disposal, helping me to get it fitted out and equipped for the purpose. I had an able and keen assistant, a school friend called 'Crack' — probably because of his many crack-brained schemes. We started our experiments making smells — the usual sulphur dioxide, chlorine and bromine gases. Then we managed to liquefy H_2S (sulphuretted hydrogen — the smell of bad eggs), with which we filled capsules blown from glass tubing, and so we were able to manufacture very potent stink bombs. These were in great demand by my school friends, who used to drop them in buses or over the balcony at the movies on to the unfortunates below.

Later we progressed to more serious experiments, and successfully managed to distill pure alcohol. This we tried out in the housekeeper's tea — after which she complained of a slight headache and retired to bed. She wasn't seen again for twenty-four hours! One day the housekeeper mentioned she had run out of hydrogen peroxide which she used for cleaning her teeth, so we set to work to make some for her. I had a theory that if we started with sulphuric acid (H_2SO_4) and removed sulphur dioxide (SO_2), we should be left with H_2O_2 — hydrogen peroxide. So we dissolved some zinc in sulphuric acid and boiled off the sulphur dioxide, then filtered the remaining solution which we bottled and labelled 'Hydrogen Peroxide'. Proudly we presented the bottle to the housekeeper, but the experiment proved to be a disaster. Apparently she took her teeth out at night and placed them in a tumbler of hydrogen peroxide. Our preparation must have retained sulphuric acid in it, as overnight it dissolved away the metal plates from her teeth, leaving them all loose at the bottom of the tumbler.

We progressed on to explosives, gunpowder being very easily made. We experimented with different mixes for our gunpowder, which we tested in home-made bangers, packing the gunpowder into cardboard tubes and, for fuses, using strips of blotting paper impregnated with saltpetre. These gave very satisfying explosions, except once when Crack packed the gunpowder into a piece of metal piping. The resulting explosion really scared us and did quite a lot of damage. We then managed to make fulminate of mercury, a highly sensitive explosive which would go off when subjected to any slight

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concussion, giving a loud explosion but without much impact. We filtered an emulsion of the fulminate through blotting paper, which remained quite harmless while kept damp, then took strips of this to school which we placed under the lids of desks. The resulting bangs when boys closed their desks were the cause of much merriment throughout the class.

Eventually the laboratory came to a sudden end. Crack had decided to invent a new explosive which he called fulminate of ammonia. One Saturday afternoon while I was down in the kitchen getting some cocoa and Crack was working away on his project, there was a loud explosion upstairs. I rushed up and met Crack staggering out of the laboratory with blackened face and no eyebrows. The whole place was wrecked and we had to abandon further experiments. Perhaps this was just as well, as at that time I was reading up about the preparation of nitro-glycerine, which would have been well within our capability.

Poor Crack. He died from natural causes while still a young man. Had he lived, he would probably have invented the atom bomb years before its time, and so changed the course of world history.

During one school holiday I went to London to stay with my sister, Barbara, who was now eighteen. My mother had gone to San Francisco where she set up a clinic on behalf of Coué, of auto-suggestion fame: 'Every day and in every way I get better and better!' She lived over there for the rest of her life. Barbara, left on her own in London, had a flat in Chelsea and was very much in the Bohemian Set. Her particular friends were Henry Savage, a poet and author, and John Flanagan, an artist, whose company I found most entertaining and who remained close friends of mine for many years on.

We spent amusing evenings in the Café Royal and at nearby Oddenino's, haunts of the Bohemian crowd, mixing with artists, authors, journalists and actors, some famous and some infamous. Few of them seemed to have any regard for money. It didn't worry them at all if they had none — one of their friends would probably pay, or some rich man anxious to get into the Bohemian Set would pick up the bill.

One day Henry Savage took me round to John Flanagan's studio. After we rang the bell, John looked out from an upper window and, seeing we were not rent collectors, threw down the key of the door and welcomed us in. He asked me if I would like to meet Dolores, Epstein's famous model, whom he was painting. Of course I was thrilled, and on entering the studio saw Dolores lying on a couch completely nude, her ample curves showing to perfection. I had never seen a nude lady before and was quite overcome at the spectacle! Sadly, when I returned to school and told my friends I had met the famous Dolores in the nude, no-one would believe me.

On my fifteenth birthday I had a surprise present from my father — a shining new Levis motorcycle. I already knew how to handle motorbikes, as my brother Kenneth used to let me ride his rather stately Sunbeam, chuff-chuffing around the quiet back roads of our neighbourhood, while he sat in the sidecar instructing me. There was also an occasion when his friend, Geoff Davison, a T.T. rider of some fame, left his racing Levis in our garage prior to taking it over to the Isle of Man. One afternoon, absorbed in examining this exciting machine, I was unable to resist the temptation and wheeled it out, push started it, and had fifteen minutes of the most glorious 'blind' around our neighbourhood.

Geoff Davison had selected the Levis that my father gave me, and had it fitted with a competition-tuned 250 cc engine. I was extremely proud of this little machine, with which I toured the length and breadth of the country. Despite the discomfort of its unsprung frame with board-hard tyres, and a hard saddle, I loved every minute of it. A year or so later, with this little Levis, I won the lightweight class in the Public Schools motorcycling championship, and that really started me with the motorbike craze. I still ride one to this day.

By the time we were sixteen, my group of friends all had motorbikes and we were able to go off together during our holidays, usually to Anglesey where the father of my closest friend, Ivor, had a cottage and a sailing boat. These were splendid holidays. In the summer we would pitch a large tent on a headland overlooking Eilian Bay, a beauty spot on the north of the island. We would spend our time swimming, fishing, sailing and rock climbing, cooking our own meals and leading a really healthy life.

During Easter and other holidays, Ivor's father lent us his Anglesey cottage where we lived much the same life as under canvas in the summer, but in greater comfort. Somehow I had acquired a .22 rifle which I intended to use for shooting game. I first tried it out by potting at a large bird sitting on the roof of our outside loo. I must have aimed low, as suddenly the door burst open and out came the occupant with his trousers around his ankles. Apparently, he had been sitting there minding his own business, and the bullet went clean through the loo just above his head, and gave him no end of a shock! Later on, however, I became quite a good marksman and was able to pick off rabbits and other game, which Ivor skinned and cooked for the rest of us.

On my eighteenth birthday my father, pleased with me for having gained an Entrance Exhibition to Birmingham University, gave me the motorcycle of my dreams — a 596 cc Scott Super Squirrel. The Scott had a two-cylinder water-cooled engine which made a distinctive and attractive musical hum, rising in pitch with increasing speed, to a tearing scream when flat out. It had a very low

centre of gravity which made it extremely manoeuvrable, and it could take corners unbelievably fast.

At that time there was terrific rivalry between owners of different makes of motorcycle, and nearly every ride involved a neck and neck scrap with some competitive machine. Although my Scott was not quite as fast as the Nortons and Sunbeams of that era, it had far better acceleration and cornering ability, and I could nearly always see them off on a give and take winding road. We motorcyclists were tremendous enthusiasts and on Sunday mornings used to hold unofficial speed trials on a timed half-mile stretch on a main road out of Birmingham. We usually clocked around 80 mph, but on one occasion the great George Brough arrived on his latest SS100 Brough Superior, gleaming with nickel plate all over, and he roared down the course clocking well over 100 mph to the admiration of us all.

At Birmingham University I studied mechanical engineering, which interested me and for which Birmingham was famous. We engineering students worked hard and there was little fooling about, and certainly no time for any political activities. We were a serious lot and there were no female students to distract us, unlike the Medical School with its mixed fraternity. Those medical students certainly seemed to enjoy themselves and held wild parties enlivened by innocuous looking fruit cup laced, so I was told, with alcohol taken from jars containing anatomical specimens.

One incident occurred at the Medical School which amused the whole University, and concerned a girl student called Debbie. She had the reputation of being a tease — leading the boys on, and then letting them get nowhere. During a practice dissection being carried out by Debbie with a group of other students, one of her disgruntled admirers took his scapel and chopped off an intimate portion of the cadaver's anatomy, which he put into Debbie's handbag. She didn't discover it until on the bus going home, when she opened her handbag to pay the fare. In her confusion she tipped the thing out on to the floor, much to the surprise of the conductor and consternation of the passengers!

On my first summer vacation at University I decided to visit my mother, who was then in Vancouver. So I signed on as a stoker on the S.S. *Montclare*, a Canadian Pacific ship of 16,400 tons, sailing from Liverpool to Quebec and Montreal. She was a fine ship powered by triple expansion steam turbines (new in those days), fed by ten oil-fired superheat boilers. My job as a stoker was to control the flow of fuel oil to a pair of boilers so as to keep the steam pressure up to a certain mark, but not to allow it to exceed a maximum limit above which it would blow off through a safety valve and show the 'white feather' from one of the ship's funnels.

I could hardly believe the conditions that prevailed in the engine

room. The heat was intense, the handrails being too hot to hold; the noise was indescribable and there was a continual hot oily smell. I found the rolling motion at the bottom of the ship most distressing, and during my first few watches had to keep leaving my boilers to be sick into the bilge. On one such occasion my steam pressures went over the limit and blew the white feather, whereupon the Captain rang down from the bridge to complain. The Chief Engineer came over to me and shouted in my ear: 'Do you know what you are, Mole?'

'No, Sir,' I replied weakly.

'You're a f.....g imbecile. Neither beautiful, nor any bloody good to anybody.'

I felt so ill at the time that I was unable then to appreciate the indignity of this insult.

After a day or two, I recovered from seasickness and was able to carry out my work without further complaint. I was on the middle watch, on duty from four to eight o'clock mornings and afternoons. After eight in the mornings I would clean up, have breakfast, and then secretly make my way through passages in the bowels of the ship to the first class deck, where I mingled with the passengers and took part in their shipboard life. And after eight in the evenings, I would find my way back to the first class deck and join in the evening's entertainment. Except for the Chief, the engineers were not allowed above the third class deck and they greatly resented this social stigma. Consequently, my fellow engineers encouraged me to evade the restriction, and I was able to regale them with tales as to what went on in the world above them.

Towards the end of the eight-day voyage, passing south of Labrador we sailed by numerous icebergs, impressively beautiful, shining white in bright sunlight against the blue sea. On one large iceberg I saw a marooned polar bear, the poor creature having no hope of escape. The *Montclare* called briefly at Quebec to unload cargo, then steamed up the St. Lawrence river to Montreal. Having five days' break before the return voyage to Liverpool, I rushed to the railway station to take a train to Vancouver and visit my mother, but found to my disappointment that this involved a five-day journey and that the fare was far beyond my means. So I returned to the ship and to the company of my fellow engineers, who showed me around Montreal and especially the delights of dubious French dives in the dock area. Although in later years I have been in Montreal on various occasions, I have never been able to locate those shady joints again!

Back at home, now that my group of friends had all entered the fast motorbike stage, life became exciting. We had many fast runs together and numerous spills, but traffic was light in those days and and no-one was seriously injured. I came off once at about 80 mph

when my motorbike developed a 'speed wobble' — endemic to those early machines. The handlebars suddenly started to oscillate violently from side to side and it was impossible to keep control. I finished up sliding spreadeagled along the road — a very unpleasant experience!

Often in the summer evenings we would visit the Bunny Run. Now, the Bunny Run was a short stretch at the end of the Hagley Road leading down from the King's Head pub, on which the local youths and girls used to walk up and down in the evenings, getting off with each other. Two or three of us would ride in on this scene and after several bursts of acceleration to show our muscle, we would pull alongside the girls of our choice. With little hesitation, the girls would climb on to our pillions and away we would go, racing neck and neck, with the girls crouching close behind and clinging tightly to their riders. We had our favourite spots in the Clent Hills some eight miles away and, probably as the result of the excitement of the ride, the girls seldom showed any subsequent resistance. Indeed, they usually responded enthusiastically!

One of the keenest of our Bunny Run cowboys was my friend Leather. He was a dark, handsome chap who worked at Cranmore's garage nearby, and in the evenings he used to borrow Phil Cranmore's competition-tuned BSA, which he rode with tremendous zest.

His love life was not always successful, however, as when we rode out one night with a couple of girls to a favourite spot of his by the bank of a swiftly flowing stream. We settled down about twenty yards apart, but after a short time he called me over to him. 'Eddie', he said, 'have you seen my trousers?'

'Your trousers!' I said in some surprise. 'What on earth have you taken them off for?'

'I always take them off, of course' he replied rather huffily.

We hunted around for a while, striking matches and searching for his missing trousers, when I had a sudden thought.

'Leather, I can see exactly what has happened. You took off your trousers and during your subsequent activity, you must have kicked them into the stream and now they are lost. And,' I added, 'you will have to ride home without any trousers'.

This he did, and I followed closely behind him illuminating his long, white legs in the light of my headlamp.

With the advent of long, dark winter evenings, the Bunny Run season was over and we turned our attention to the Palais de Danse. This was a wonderful place. To the music of a big American band, hundreds of couples glided smoothly around the huge dance floor. In the centre of the floor was a fountain, above which was suspended the great ball of mirrors circling slowly and reflecting spots of coloured light from arc lamps shining upon it. The Palais

was good value too, the entrance fee being only one shilling and sixpence on weekdays, and two shillings and sixpence on Saturdays.

The girls sat in small groups at tables around the edge of the floor while the boys congregated at one end of the hall, roaming around the tables between dances to choose their partners. My friends and I soon found that without our motorbikes and divested of our leather coats, and being clumsy on the dance floor, we had no success with the girls. We could not compete with the city slickers with their greased-down hair and pointed shoes, who knew all the dance steps. Consequently, I decided to take lessons from a Sixpenny.

The Sixpennies were professional dance partners, both male and female, who sat in the Sixpenny Pen waiting to be asked. You bought your sixpenny ticket at the cash desk, nodded to the partner of your choice, and off you went for one dance. I was lucky to find a partner who patiently put up with me, gripped me tight and forced me into the steps required. After a few weeks I could cope reasonably well with the intricacies of the foxtrot, quickstep, waltz and tango, and then became acceptable to the girls in the dance hall. After the dance, we often took our favourite girls back to my Meadow Road home, where we entertained them in the billiards room — the furthest away from my father's bedroom — where there were decanters of whisky, sherry and port. Sitting cosily with my girl on a couch by the fireside, I thought how much more civilised this was than out on the grass in the Clent Hills!

The following summer, my old friend Ivor and I had our last camping holiday together in Anglesey before our ways were to part. All went well until Ivor fell head over heels in love with an attractive auburn-haired girl called Mollie. She was the daughter of a visiting parson, and her brother was also of the Church — wandering around the place in a black suit and dog collar. Now, I have nothing against parsons; I've met quite a few, and some of them were almost human. One evening when we were all at a local dance, Ivor came up to me and said: 'For God's sake get that ruddy brother out of my hair. I want to be alone with Mollie for a while.' I took the brother round to the bar and stood him a pint of beer, telling the barman to slip a schooner of port wine into it. The brother smacked his lips as he drank it. 'Tawny old beer, isn't it?' I quipped. He called for another round and got the same mix, after which we went back to the ballroom. Clad in his black suit and dog collar, he seized hold of some unfortunate girl and, uttering a loud cry, went whirling around the dance floor with her — eventually crashing in a heap. The next day, I was sent for by his parson father who seemed to blame me for the incident, and accused me of 'mocking the man of God'.

Ivor's infatuation with that girl ruined his life. He had recently joined the Air Force as a pilot and, with his undoubted leadership

ability, he would have had a great career. The girl's parents, however, did not consider the Air Force a secure enough occupation and refused permission for their daughter to marry him. Consequently, Ivor resigned his commission and emigrated to Canada with the intention of setting up a ranch there — the girl agreeing to join him once he had got settled. Unfortunately, she changed her mind and broke off the engagement, leaving Ivor alone and broken hearted, far away in a strange country. Poor Ivor! He never returned, and I have neither seen nor heard from him since.

For some weeks before taking my final exams at the University, I had been working hard, sitting up late at nights studying. On completing the last exam, I felt like breaking loose and letting off steam, so that evening I set out on a wild and exciting ride on my latest motorbike, a 498 cc Scott TT Replica — probably the fastest bike in the district. Returning home by night, I failed to take a sharp bend and crashed heavily. I was delivered home unconscious with multiple cuts and abrasions and two broken teeth, and spent the next week in bed with concussion. However, after being duly patched up, I was cheered by the good news that I had passed my exams and had been awarded an honours degree in mechanical engineering.

Shortly afterwards, my father had a serious talk with me. I had now completed my training and got my degree, he said, and it was now up to me to find a job. He would keep on paying my allowance for three months, after which I was to be on my own. I did not fancy going into the engineering industry, spending my life in some ghastly factory, and I pondered over the possibility of other more attractive jobs for which my engineering training would be suited. This would not be easy, as it was now the time of the great recession and jobs were very hard to find.

A long time before, I had been taken as a child to Hendon Aerodrome to see Claude Grahame-White's flying display, and had been fascinated by the sight of those early Bleriot, Deperdussin, Maurice Farman and Antoinettes lifting gracefully off the ground and circling around over our heads. I had been interested in aeroplanes ever since, and often read the aeronautical journals. Then, one day while reading *The Aeroplane*, I noticed an advertisement for a Junior Scientific Officer at the Royal Aircraft Establishment, Farnborough, with the (then) handsome salary of £234 per annum. Without hesitation, I jumped on my motorbike and rode straight to Farnborough, calling at the RAE to apply for the job.

Despite the fact that I had no appointment, I was courteously received and interviewed by various officials, including the head of the department concerned. It was suggested that as the job would require flying as an observer, I might as well undergo the necessary

medical examination while I was there. I was sent to the Medical Centre and examined by a Doctor Saunders, known locally as 'Septic Sam', who was a cheerful character smelling strongly of whisky.

'Ever had the clap, boy?' he asked.

'No, Sir, thank goodness,' I answered truthfully.

'Well, it wouldn't have mattered much if you had,' he replied jovially. 'During the war, we simply told recruits to stand on a table and jump down. If it didn't fall off, they were accepted!'

He passed me fit for full flying duties.

A few weeks later, I received an official letter from the RAE informing me I had been accepted for the appointment, and requiring me to report for duty the following month. I was delighted. I had got a job, and I was going to work among aeroplanes!

Chapter 2

Farnborough

Farnborough! The cradle of British aviation. Here it was in 1905 that Colonel 'Buffalo Bill' Cody first experimented with his man-lifting kites on behalf of the Army, who were interested in them for reconnaissance purposes. Later, at Farnborough in 1908, he carried out the first sustained powered flight in Britain with an aeroplane of his own design and construction. The stump of the tree to which Cody used to tether his aircraft while running up the engine, is still preserved on the airfield.

During World War I, Farnborough became the Royal Aircraft Factory and here were designed and developed the famous BE2C, FE2B and RE8 'Harry Tate' reconnaissance aircraft, and the outstanding SE5A single-seat scout, all of which were used in large numbers by the Royal Flying Corps. After the war, the Factory title was changed to Royal Aircraft Establishment, with the role of carrying out aeronautical research and development of aviation equipment. For this purpose the Establishment was well equipped with wind tunnels, laboratories and workshops, staffed by highly experienced technicians and craftsmen.

The buildings were dominated by the huge Balloon Shed, now no longer there, which was capable of housing an airship. This had sliding doors opening completely at both ends, and on occasions in the past scout pilots flew right through the building for fun. Damage to certain roof girders bore mute testimony to the fate of a scout pilot who once flew into the shed and found out too late that the door was closed at the other end. The grass airfield was rather small and had a soggy patch in the middle, which became a quagmire in wet weather. I once saw a single-seat scout taking off, which on running into the quagmire, tipped on to its nose and stopped dead. The pilot was also dead, having broken his neck.

I arrived at the RAE in January 1928 and took up residence in the Technical Staff Mess, where a comfortable room was provided with four meals a day for the very reasonable charge of thirty shillings (£1.50) per week. I had been appointed to the Instrument Department, which carried out research and development on aircraft instruments, including blind-flying and automatic control devices, oxygen equipment and electrically heated clothing. My

work was largely to assist with the flight test programmes of experimental equipment, on which I often flew as observer. The aircraft used were mostly Bristol Fighters, DH9As and Vickers Vimys, with a sprinkling of Gloster Grebe and Gamecock single-seat fighters, which were flown by test pilots seconded from the RAF — mostly veterans of World War I. They patiently carried out the tests we required, often repeated over and over again, which they must have found extremely boring. For me as observer, however, the work was of great interest and, despite the discomfort of open and very draughty rear cockpits, I loved the flying!

For our early work on blind-flying instruments we used the air-driven brass gyros which had been developed by the Navy to stabilise their torpedoes, and with these we made up rather primitive turn and bank indicators and artificial horizons. Although heavy and clumsy, they were reasonably effective and the pilots reported favourably upon them. These instruments were eventually developed into the standard blind-flying instruments later to be used throughout the RAF.

Progressing from blind-flying experiments we tried to develop a blind-landing approach system but, without the benefit of directional radio beams as used today, we used an army observation balloon as a sort of sky marker. We positioned the balloon above cloud at a height and distance from the airfield, from which we calculated an aircraft should be able to glide straight down through the cloud to land. The system was not successful. The first time I tried it, flying as observer in the rear cockpit of a Bristol Fighter, I asked the pilot to fly to the balloon holding a fixed compass course, and upon reaching it, to shut his throttle and glide down at a steady 70 mph through the cloud. 'Glide my arse!' replied the pilot rather coarsely, and promptly went off and landed at another aerodrome that was not cloud covered. The balloon system failed because, as we found out by experience, different pilots flying the same aeroplane seemed to approach at completely different angles of glide.

Having got the balloon, it was decided that we should use it to investigate the fogs that plagued Farnborough from time to time during the winter. On a foggy day I would go up in the basket of the balloon taking readings of air temperature, humidity and density at different heights. This was an eerie experience: I sat there entirely surrounded by a blanket of white mist, isolated from the world except for my telephone line to the winch operator. On reaching the top of the fog level, usually around 2000 feet or so, there would be a sudden breath-taking emergence into brilliant sunshine and blue sky, with the fog belt below glittering white like a huge field of snow. The shadow of the balloon could be seen outlined against this shining white background circled entirely by a beautiful rainbow.

Above the fog in bright sunshine, the air temperature would rise some ten degrees or more, and it was most pleasant to sit there in the basket and enjoy the scene. Whenever possible, I would take a packed lunch with me and arrange with the winch operator to leave me up there during the lunch hour. One foggy day, however, a colleague of mine beat me to it and went up in the balloon to spend his lunch hour in the sunshine. Somewhat piqued by his presumption, I had him pulled down a couple of hundred feet into the cold and clammy mist below!

The technical staff with whom I worked would be known today as 'boffins'. Although friendly and pleasant, they were an extremely serious lot and not at all interested in fast motorbikes or in chasing girls. I felt rather a stranger among them and greatly missed the cheerful company of my old pals, and especially the girls of the Bunny Run!

Some of these boffins had the most odd ideas. One Senior Scientific Officer took up golf, and one day I was surprised to find him weighing his arms on a scale pan. He explained that in order to obtain the longest possible drive, he needed to work out the moment of inertia of his arms during their swing, from which he could calculate the optimum weight of the head of the club to give the maximum impact on the ball. Another scientist, an early hi-fi enthusiast, became keen to obtain distortion-free music from his gramophone. He designed and built what he called an 'exponential horn' for it, which was some eight feet long and about four feet in diameter at the outlet. This monstrous thing was suspended from the ceiling of his room, and made it almost impossible to move around in it.

Many of the junior staff were ardent Communists and held long and boring political discussions in the evenings. It has always been a surprise to me why so many otherwise intelligent young men profess to be Communists. With little experience of the hard facts of life, and filled with youthful zeal to improve the lot of the downtrodden masses, they strive to turn our world upside down. They can have no conception of the stifling tyranny they are trying to impose upon themselves, and upon the rest of us. Fortunately, however, as they grow older and acquire some material possessions, they usually learn sense and forget all about their early communist convictions.

At weekends in the summer I used to escape from the dull life of the Technical Staff Mess and ride away on my motorbike to Winchelsea Beach in Sussex. Here, my sister's friend Henry Savage, the poet and author, was now living in a rambling old cottage by the beach, in an isolated little community of fishermen, shepherds and longshoremen. I never quite knew what the longshoremen were, but they seemed somehow to eke a living from the beach and I always suspected they were connected in some way

with smuggling, for which Rye Bay was notorious. My sister had bought a gypsy caravan, which was delightfully situated nearby on a little grass hummock by the beach with a lovely view stretching over the green Romney Marshes dotted with sheep, to the little towns of Winchelsea and Rye on low hills in the distance. She let me have the use of the caravan whenever I wanted it.

Next to Henry Savage's cottage right on the edge of the beach was a picturesque old pub, the Ship Inn, sadly to be washed away by the sea during a storm the following winter. In the evenings, the local community gathered in the pub together with sundry visitors from the Bohemian Set in London, who used to descend on Henry's cottage for seaside accommodation. Henry was an obliging host and never seemed to mind who arrived, but as his primitive cottage had no running water, electricity or gas supply, his guests lived and slept rather rough! The whitewashed walls of the cottage were decorated with verses, paintings and sketches by his guests, some of whom were celebrities. Right across the wall above one bed, in large red letters, Epstein's famous model had inscribed: 'DOLORES SLEPT HERE'.

Underneath in small letters was written: 'But I didn't — the man'.

A verse inscribed by some grateful poet began: 'With a wench of wanton beauty, I came here ailing . . .'

I found these unconventional Bohemians amusing and their conversation stimulating, and my visits to Winchelsea Beach made a welcome break from the serious life at Farnborough.

Upon my arrival one Friday evening, I was approached by one of Henry's guests who asked me if I could take his lady friend to Rye on my motorbike, and put her on a train to London. He gave me ten shillings for the fare, and I agreed to do so. The girl, called Valerie, was a gypsy-like creature, with long, black hair and flashing dark eyes. I took her to the station and to while away the time before the train was due, we had a drink or two together in a pub nearby. After several drinks, it suddenly dawned upon me that I must be mad to be sending this attractive girl away, so I asked her if she would like to come back to my caravan for the weekend. She agreed, and back we went.

As we entered the Ship Inn, there was a sudden exodus by all the men in the bar, some even jumping out of the window! It turned out that earlier in the evening one of them had insulted Valerie and she had seized a knife and gone berserk. No wonder her friend had asked me to take her away. Anyway, we had a pleasant weekend together in the caravan, and she proved to be very good company — but I was careful not to leave any knives lying around!

Back at Farnborough, I was doing a lot of flying as an observer and wanted to learn to fly myself. So later that summer I joined the Hampshire Aeroplane Club at Hamble, which had a fleet of Gipsy

Moths available for hire at thirty shillings (£1.50) per hour. As a new member, I was entitled to a free twenty-minute flight for 'air experience', and one of the Club members gladly availed himself of the opportunity to get in a little free flying, and offered to take me up. He was a large, black-bearded fellow of nautical appearance, and he sat me in the back cockpit of a Gipsy Moth, omitting to warn me to strap myself in, and off we went. He had a girl friend in a house nearby which he proceeded to beat up, doing a series of dives on it followed by stalled turns, loops and half rolls. I had not experienced aerobatics before and felt extremely uncomfortable. Not being strapped in, everytime we were upside down I had to cling to my seat to avoid falling out. This experience completely put me off any further flying with the Club.

One of the test pilots at Farnborough, with whom I had become very friendly, used to land our aircraft at various RAF stations to refuel, and he always invited me to lunch with him. I enjoyed these visits and found that life in an RAF Officers Mess was cheerful and much more to my taste than in the Technical Staff Mess at Farnborough. I told him about my disillusionment with the flying club, and he suggested that I should join the Royal Air Force. 'In the RAF' he said, 'you will be taught to fly properly by better instructors, on better aircraft and, moreover, you will be paid for doing it.' He thought that with my engineering degree, I should be eligible for a permanent commission.

I was undecided, but wrote to the Air Ministry to enquire whether I could qualify for a permanent commission in the RAF. There was no answer for about six weeks, then suddenly I received a telegram: 'You have been granted a permanent commission in the Royal Air Force as a Pilot Officer on probation. You will report in uniform to No. 2 Flying Training School, Digby, at 09.00 hours on 19 January 1929'.

The die was cast. I gave notice to my Chief at the RAE and had four weeks to get kitted out for duty with the RAF.

Chapter 3

Digby

The Royal Air Force was formed on 1 April 1918, towards the end of World War I, by merging the Royal Flying Corps with the Royal Naval Air Service. Consequently, it inherited customs and practices from both the Army and the Navy, and it took many years to develop an independent RAF tradition. Officers' uniform was a curious amalgam of army and navy dress, greatcoats being naval style with epaulettes, and tunics army style with rank indicated naval style by rings on the sleeve. With 'Best Blue' we wore breeches and puttees, army style, though Squadron Leaders and above wore shiny black field boots. All officers had to carry a cane like a walking stick, but this was not used for walking — it had to be carried under the left arm so as to leave the right arm free for saluting. Without your cane, you were improperly dressed.

Breeches and puttees may have been suitable wear for trench warfare but they were most uncomfortable when flying aircraft, and canes were always a problem for stowage in open cockpits. Puttees in particular were a curse. You had to wind them round and round your legs, from the ankle to just below the knee, each turn being equidistant from the one below, and the puttee had to end up exactly half way round the outside of the leg. If not, you had to unwind the whole thing and start again!

It was fortunate for us that at the RAF Review at Mildenhall in July 1935, on the occasion of the Royal Jubilee, King George V arrived in RAF uniform but wearing conventional slacks, much to the surprise of the assembled high-ranking officers all dressed up in their breeches and field boots. What was right for the King was clearly right for the rest of us, so that breeches, puttees, field boots and canes were out soon afterwards.

On 19 January 1929, I drove to RAF Digby in Lincolnshire in a little Austin Seven 'Chummy' which I had bought after deciding with great regret to sell my beloved motorcycle, realising that a car was now necessary to carry all my RAF kit. I arrived at Digby properly dressed in 'Best Blue' and reported to the Station Commander, Group Captain 'Crasher' Smith — so called because he was reputed to have crashed over a hundred aircraft. He informed me that with two other university entrants, I was to join the

Junior Term of forty flying pupils consisting of short service officers who had been accepted for five-year commissions. For six months we were to be trained on *ab initio* aircraft, after which we would become the Senior Term and be trained for a further six months on service type aircraft. Upon successful completion of this training, we would be awarded our wings and posted for flying duties to various RAF squadrons.

At that time, the bulk of RAF pilots were short service officers, thus giving the permanent Cranwell-trained officers a good career with opportunity for promotion to senior rank. Many of these short service officers were volunteers from the Dominions and Colonies who had joined the RAF to see the 'home country', to learn to fly, and to have five years of fun and adventure before returning home. I found them to be splendid chaps, most amusing if rather wild companions, and utterly loyal to Britain.

It should never be forgotten that during two World Wars, almost a million loyal young men from Australia, New Zealand, Canada, South Africa and Rhodesia rallied to our support and came over to fight for us, many thousands of them giving their lives in our cause. It deeply shocked and saddened me when, after the last war and through doubtful economic expediency, we turned our backs on these loyal Dominions and, without regard to the damage we were to inflict on their economies, we joined Europe. By this shameful betrayal of our staunch allies, we needlessly sacrificed their enormous fund of goodwill towards us, and we can hardly expect their further support in the event of any future crisis.

Surely, with enlightened leadership, we could have formed a prosperous British Economic Community by an equal partnership of the old Commonwealth countries. Between us, we had the technical know-how, ample supplies of all necessary minerals, coal and oil, and cheap food. We had a common language, a common heritage and a common sense of British justice and fair play. This British Community would have been economically strong and able to spread British influence throughout the world. We would then have been able to negotiate an association with the European Community from a position of strength, instead of finding ourselves a poor country on the outskirts of Europe with little influence in world affairs.

But I digress!

I soon fell into the routine of my new life. Every morning at 7 a.m. we had fifteen minutes of P.T. and then breakfast, followed by colour hoisting parade, which was attended by the whole Station. The officer commanding the parade would call us to attention and give the command 'Air Salute', upon which the band would strike up and the RAF ensign was hoisted. The OC would then give the command: 'Fall out the Roman Catholics and Jews', upon which

these individuals would take two paces to the rear and turn about. The Station Chaplain would then address us with some chosen words of religious inanity, after which the parade would be dismissed and we would be marched off to our various duties.

On Sunday mornings, Church Parade was held — attended by the whole Station, except for the Roman Catholics and Jews who were given facilities to attend their own services. Non-conformists such as Methodists, Wesleyans and Baptists were collectively known as the ‘Odds and Sods’, and were for administrative convenience lumped in with the Church of England. In our Best Blue we were inspected by the Station Commander, then marched off to church with the band playing the Air Force March. Swinging our arms high and with heads up, chins in, we were a fine body of men. Or so we thought!

Our Junior Term was divided into two sections, one section proceeding to the hangars for flying training and lectures on airmanship and air navigation. The other section would attend classrooms for lectures on the theory of flight, engines, airframes, armament signals, Air Force history and Air Force Law. Wednesday and Saturday afternoons were given over to organised games — if you did not take part, you were driven five miles out in a truck and ordered to run back to camp!

Ab initio flying training for our Junior Term was carried out by a fleet of sixteen Avro 504N aircraft, relics of World War I but fitted with 180 hp Armstrong Siddeley radial engines. The Senior Term were trained on Bristol Fighters, de Havilland DH9As and the big twin-engined Vickers Vimy bombers. Each day the aircraft would be lined up for us on the grass airfield, four abreast in row after row, all smart, clean and shining. A really splendid sight.

The aircraft were started up by means of the Hucks Starter, which was a Model T Ford truck driving a long shaft mounted above it, which hooked on to the propeller boss and so turned over the engine. I will always remember, as the Avro started, the cloud of blue smoke and smell of burnt castor oil! We still get that smell at motorcycle race meetings, which makes me feel quite nostalgic.

The Avro 504 was a tandem two-seater with open, draughty cockpits. The instructor sat in the front seat with communication to the pupil by means of a speaking tube. I thoroughly enjoyed my flying lessons and my instructor, Flying Officer (now Air Commodore) D. N. Roberts, was patient and thorough, working steadily through the prescribed syllabus of instruction. I spent hours sitting behind him, but all I could see of him was the back of his head. He wore a scarf around his neck which fluttered back in the slipstream, and he had a small caterpillar brooch pinned on the back of his helmet — indicating he was a member of the Caterpillar Club, an association of those who had saved their lives by parachute.

The training syllabus laid considerable stress on spinning and

recovery from spins. In those days, inadvertent spins were the cause of most of the fatal flying accidents, though much research has since been carried out to reduce this likelihood. If the speed of an aircraft was allowed to get too slow, especially during a turn, it would stall and a wing would drop sharply. The aircraft would then flip over into a spinning nose-dive towards the ground — a very unpleasant experience. I had to spin my aircraft again and again until I had fully mastered the art of recovery from the spin. Indeed, after a time I could sense an incipient spin and take immediate corrective action to prevent it developing.

The great day came when after several circuits and landings, my instructor got out and said: 'Go ahead and carry out another landing on your own.' This was one of life's great moments — your first solo flight. A memorable experience, flying alone without an instructor, giving a feeling of confidence that you were at last master of the aircraft.

The training thereafter became more interesting. I learnt all the usual aerobatics, carried out cross-country flights and practised forced landings. Considerable emphasis was placed on forced-landing procedure due to the less reliable engines in those days. The instructor frequently cut the engine in flight and the pupil had to select a suitable field, note the wind direction, and make a simulated forced landing approach. We were taught always to keep an eye on wind direction indicators, such as smoke from chimneys, in case the engine should cut out. During one lecture, Group Captain 'Crasher' Smith advised us to look for cows in a field and to land in the opposite direction to which they were facing. 'In any case,' he said, 'you probably won't crash any harder that way than any other.'

We students dreamed of forced landings in the grounds of luxurious mansions, the dashing young airman being welcomed by a beautiful daughter and entertained lavishly by the country squire. In practice, however, I have made a number of forced landings and was only once welcomed by a beautiful daughter — a very nice one, though! Mostly, I found myself unwelcome — especially by local police who had to turn out to guard the aircraft, and by farmers whose crops may have been damaged.

Though discipline at Digby was strict, I enjoyed the community life with pleasant and amusing companions. Monday to Friday evenings were compulsory dining-in nights in full mess kit, but Saturday and Sunday evenings were informal and we were free to leave camp until midnight. All the students would then rush off to Lincoln or Nottingham to have a party and look for girls, who usually congregated to meet us at the Saracen's Head in Lincoln, and at the Black Boy in Nottingham. The sudden influx of some forty young men in the peak of physical condition must have stimulated the local girls, but even so you had to work fast if you were to be successful.

As someone remarked: 'Show a hungry dog a bone, and then see what happens!'

One evening we were in the bar of the Black Boy in Nottingham and I was approached by Granger, a nice, quiet young lad of eighteen who had only recently left school. He asked me for advice as to how to get a girl. 'I've never had a girl,' he confided, 'and I've been watching you chaps. Tell me how to go about it.'

Rather unkindly, I advised him to walk into the hotel lounge where a number of ladies were sitting. 'Pick the one you like the look of best,' I said. 'Walk up to her and offer her a £1 note. Then see what happens.' We all gathered round expecting to see some outraged female slap Granger's face, but to our surprise the lady he spoke to got up, took his arm, and out they walked together!

Towards the end of the Junior Term we took our exams which, after my University training, I found to be quite easy. There was one exception, however, and that was drill — for some reason, I was a complete duffer at drill. On one occasion early in the term, while on parade I had turned left upon the command 'Right Turn', and found myself looking along a whole sea of faces. This caused a roar of abuse from the Sergeant Major who was our drill instructor. He was a formidable character called 'Tug' Wilson, who had been seconded from the Guards to smarten up the RAF. He was a huge man with a long, waxed moustache, and he had the most powerful parade ground voice. After this incident he continually picked on me during drill practice, which caused much amusement to my fellow pupils but loss of confidence to me.

We had been told that at the end of the Course, any pupil gaining over 90 per cent marks in every subject, would be awarded a Distinguished Pass and be granted twelve months' antedate for promotion. I had set my sights on gaining a Distinguished Pass, but realised this would be impossible while I was so weak on drill. Consequently, one evening I took a bottle of whisky along to Tug Wilson's quarters and asked him for private coaching to improve my standard of drill. Mellowed by the whisky, he became quite effusive and suggested that during our forthcoming leave break, I should remain in camp and take the defaulters' parade daily under his personal direction.

This was a great opportunity. Every morning for a couple of weeks, I drilled a bunch of defaulters parading in full kits with rifles and packs. For an hour or so, I marched those unhappy individuals back and forth with success, except on one occasion when I gave the wrong command and they all marched into a hangar and out of earshot. Every day I improved and finally developed a good voice of command, and marched them, counter-marched them, wheeled them, halted them, sloped arms and presented arms with complete confidence. I was now Tug Wilson's star pupil and, moreover, he became my good friend.

At the start of the Senior Term, with a group of my friends, I was fortunate to be selected for training on Bristol Fighters. Naturally, we considered ourselves the elite among the pupils and pitied those poor sods who had to fly the stodgy DH9As, and the completely ham-fisted ones who had been relegated to the unwieldy, twin-engined Vickers Vimys. The Bristol Fighter was a wonderful aircraft, which had been highly successful and effective during World War I. It was powered by a 250 hp Rolls-Royce Falcon Vee-12 cylinder engine, and was highly manoeuvrable, fully aerobatic and delightful to fly. Long exhaust pipes ran along each side of the fuselage, and you could often recognise Bristol Fighter pilots by the scorch marks on their elbows! I well remember its long nose stretching way out ahead of my windscreen, and the curious little contrivance on the instrument panel containing a fuel pressure release valve, which squirted petrol in your face every time you turned the aircraft upside down.

We pupils converted quite quickly on to our new aircraft but found that landings were more difficult than on the previous Avro 504s, which had tough, shock-absorbing undercarriages. On the Bristol Fighters and the DH9As, the wheel axles were simply lashed to the undercarriage struts by elastic cord which had little give in it. A heavy landing broke the cord and the aircraft would go on to its nose, or even turn right over on to its back. This was at first a frequent occurrence, and pupils had to learn to land their aircraft with some delicacy.

One day there was great excitement on the airfield, the alarm bells ringing and the ambulance and crash tenders rushing out to the landing ground. It appeared that someone was on his first solo in a DH9A, and he had been unable to get it down successfully. Time after time he came in to land, hit the ground hard and bounced up again, then opened up his engine and flew off. His instructor was watching helplessly, sweating with anxiety, as he knew that the DH9A had the habit of catching fire if overturned on a crash landing. Almost a dozen times the pupil tried to land, but finally made it to everyone's relief. He eventually mastered the DH9A successfully, and in later years became a Captain with Imperial Airways — and a very good one too, so I heard.

Another landing hazard was the flock of sheep that from time to time were introduced on to the airfield to keep the grass short. While flying was in progress, their shepherd herded them together in a safe part of the field, but sometimes a few of them would stray and wander across the landing area. There were several collisions, the unfortunate sheep coming off worst while the aircraft suffered only minor damage.

The aircraft were of wooden construction with their framework braced by steel wires, and covered in fabric doped externally to give

a taut and smooth surface. After a landing crash, the riggers (airframe mechanics) got busy repairing damage to the wooden framework, adjusting the various bracing wires and patching the fabric. They usually had the aircraft flying again within forty-eight hours.

One day, flying solo in a Bristol Fighter, I decided to impress my local girl friend by doing some aerobatics over the farm where she lived. I finished up with a spin, intending to scare her by pulling out low and then diving on to her house. Instead, I scared myself. The aircraft continued to spin several more turns after I tried to stop it, and I just missed a tree when pulling out of the resulting dive. This was nearly the end of my flying career, but it taught me a valuable lesson — *Beware of over-confidence!*

The last exercise to be carried out by the Senior Term was the altitude test. We all had to climb our aircraft up to the maximum height possible so as to experience the physical effect of altitude, and the mushy handling of the controls when near the ceiling. Eight of us Bristol Fighter pilots took off and started to climb steadily. A very strong wind was blowing, so I kept flying into the wind direction as much as possible to avoid drifting away down wind. I reached 17,200 feet and, after realising that the poor old aircraft could not climb any further, I came down and landed. Only three of us returned, the other five having drifted away out of sight of the airfield, and become lost. They forced landed all over the place in north Lincolnshire and Yorkshire, much to the consternation of their flying instructors, who had hastily to arrange teams to go out to retrieve their aircraft.

At the end of the term, I was successful with all my exams and tests, and obtained the award of Distinguished Pass with a flying assessment 'Above Average'. Then came our final passing out parade in front of Air Chief-Marshal Sir Hugh 'Boom' Trenchard, the founder of the RAF. After the parade, we were lined up before him to be presented with our wings. The Station Commander marched me up with the introduction: 'This is Pilot Officer Mole, who has passed out top of the Course and obtained over 90 per cent marks in all examinations'.

The great man looked down on me from his raised dais, and boomed: 'I've never passed an examination in my life.'

Duly deflated, I saluted and withdrew to the ranks.

Our Course had been a good one without any fatal accidents and only minor injuries, despite the fact that several aircraft had caught fire after crash landings. During the following years, however, a distressing number of my fellow pupils were killed in flying accidents while on routine RAF operations — some in the Arabian desert, some in the mountains of the North West Frontier of India, and others lost in tropical storms. From official statistics at that time,

it was calculated that the 'pilot wastage rate' was eight per cent per annum, and it can easily be seen that short service officers had to be reasonably lucky to survive their five years of RAF service.

Our various postings were announced and I was glad to learn that, together with my two close friends, Bertie Musson and Glen, I was to be posted to No. 2 Army Co-operation Squadron at Manston in Kent. This was the senior squadron of the RAF, No. 1 Squadron having been formed originally with airships and balloons. It had a fine reputation and we were, all three of us, delighted.



Avro 504 after pupil's crash. The pilot suffered only a broken nose!

Avro 504's practising 'crazy flying'. Pilots Campbell and Brown.





Bristol Fighter. (Aeroplane Monthly).

Author's Parnall Pixie III.





Parnall Pixie III on tow from Whitchurch aerodrome to Old Sarum by the authors Austin 7.

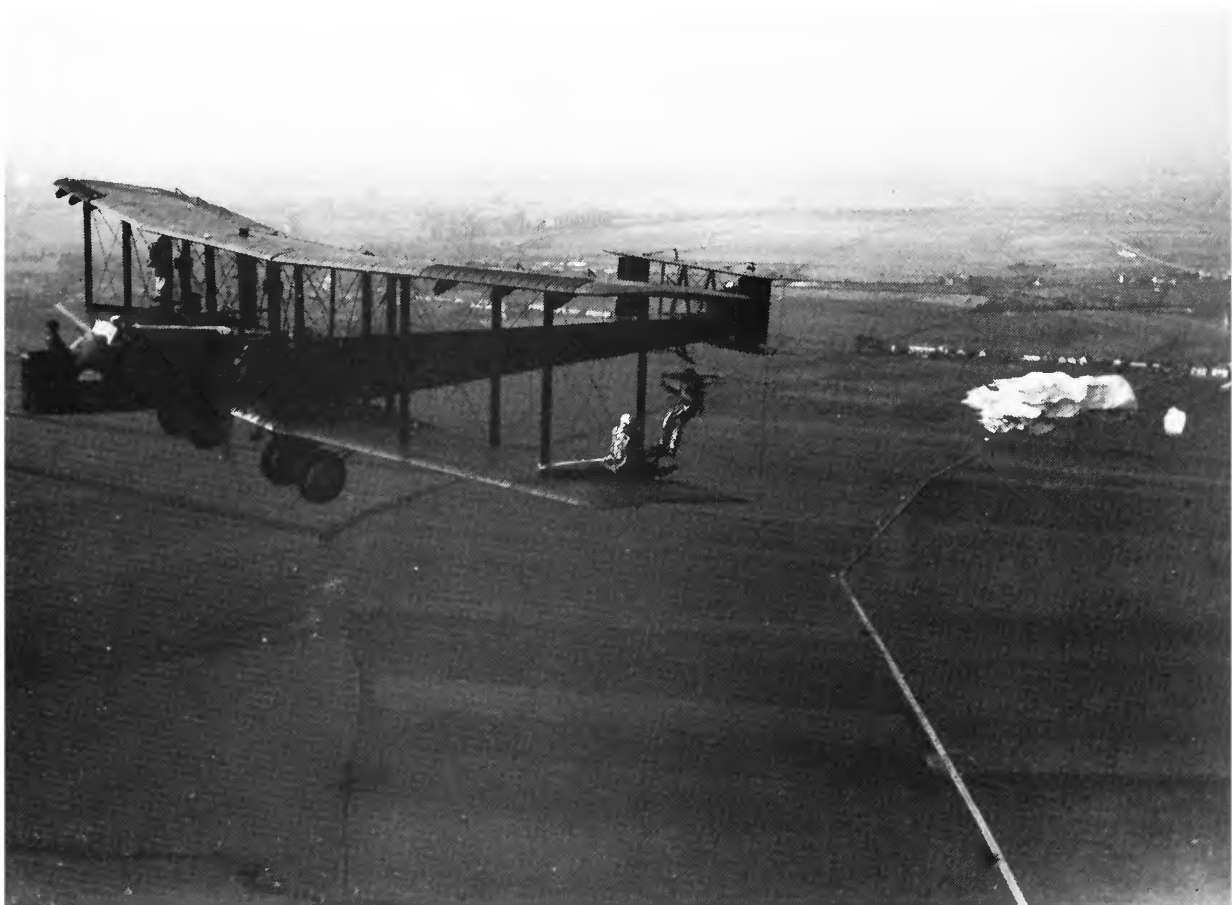
Parachuting from Virginias. (Aeroplane Monthly).





Parachute platform on wing of Vickers Virginia. (RAF Museum).

Parachutist pulling off from wing of Vickers Virginia. (RAF Museum).



Chapter 4

Manston

RAF Station Manston lay in the middle of the Isle of Thanet on the north-east corner of Kent, surrounded by a ring of seaside holiday resorts — Westgate, Birchington, Margate, Cliftonville, Broadstairs and Ramsgate; a very pleasant situation indeed! Manston was a large station housing two operational squadrons and a School of Technical Training, with buildings of the permanent type and far more comfortable than the hutted camp at Digby. Musson, Glen and I arrived there in January 1930, and found that life in the Officers Mess was much more relaxed than at Digby, with only one compulsory dining-in night per week and freedom to come and go as we pleased.

A formal Guest Night was held once a month and these, as traditional throughout the RAF, were usually very lively occasions. After dinner in the ante-room, there would be individual contests, some of which were fairly rough and often, as is the case of ‘cock fighting’ and ‘high cockalorum’, resulted in strained or even fractured limbs. A favourite game was to push all the armchairs and settees to the edge of the floor, and then in pairs we would race round the room somersaulting over them as we went.

Sometimes, before retiring we would have a game of Jerry Bowling. Selecting a long bedroom corridor, we would raid all the rooms and seize the chamber pots. The opposing sides would form up at each end of the corridor, knock the handles off the jerries, and bowl them simultaneously at each other. The object was to obtain as many clear runs as possible, but the game always ended up with a heap of broken china in the middle of the corridor. The losing side had to pay for the damage, the jerries being priced in the official RAF Stores Vocabulary as:

Pots, Chamber, Officers, for the use of	2s. 6d.
Ditto, with RAF Crest	3s. 6d.

Number 2 (Army Co-operation) Squadron operated twelve Bristol Fighters similar to those that I had been trained on at Digby, but were equipped for service use with bomb racks under the wings and a Vickers machine gun in the pilot’s cockpit firing forward through the propeller. The rear cockpit had a Lewis gun mounted

on a swivelling ring for use by the air gunner, who also worked the bomb sight. Radio communication was by wireless telegraphy, the gunner winding out 150 feet of aerial wire from a winch in his cockpit, with the pilot tapping out and receiving messages in morse code.

Our flying consisted of a continual series of operational training exercises — navigation tests, formation flying, dive bombing, high bombing, front and rear gun practice and aerial photography. Once a month night flying was ordered, our aircraft taking off and landing in darkness with the aid of a line of paraffin flares stretched out along the grass airfield. This was a rather hazardous operation, and usually resulted in one or two of our Bristol Fighters tipping up on to their noses or even right over on to their backs, much to the Commanding Officer's displeasure.

After a few months, our Bristol Fighters were replaced by the Armstrong Whitworth Atlas, a biplane of steel tubular construction, fabric-covered, and powered by a 440 hp Armstrong Siddeley Jaguar 14 cylinder radial engine. The Atlas in flight felt noticeably rigid and strong after our previous wooden constructed aircraft, but it did not handle so delightfully as the old Bristol Fighter. It suffered from loss of lateral control at low speed, which required landing approaches to be made fast, and being without wheel brakes, its landing runs were quite exciting — 'like bats out of hell'!

We had rather given up practising aerobatics on the operational Bristol Fighters, as when turned upside down an unpleasant shower of mud and dried grass would fall out from the bottom of the cockpit past the pilot's face. However, we were keen to see what could be done with our new Atlas aircraft, but they were disappointing for aerobatics, being unwieldy and heavy on control. Musson was the first to achieve a smooth slow roll in his Atlas, which he proudly exhibited to us over the airfield. I managed the roll off the top of the loop, but this required a very fast preliminary dive and a lot of brute force. Ordinary loops were quite simple, and one day Musson and I decided to try out a loop in formation. With Musson leading and me tucked closely in on his port side, we dived down together. As we pulled up into the loop I lost sight of him, but continued with my loop until on coming out into the final dive I found myself still tucked close in to Musson's aircraft, but on the other side of it!

One day I decided to try out a manoeuvre that none of us had ever done — an inverted spin. I rolled the Atlas over on to its back and pushed the stick forward; the aircraft lost speed, stalled, and flicked into a fast spin upside down. After several turns, I stopped the spin with opposite rudder and pulled the aircraft out of its dive. This was quite an exhilarating experience, but it was not appreciated by my air gunner. Apparently, he had not strapped himself into his seat as

he should have done, and he was only secured to the aircraft by means of a short steel cable connecting from the seat of his parachute harness to a clip on the floor of his cockpit. Once upside down, he found himself dangling out of the aircraft suspended only by the cable from the seat of his pants, and then he was whirled around in the spin with his legs and arms flung outwards. It cost me a bottle of whisky later on to mollify him.

The other squadron at Manston was No. 9 Bomber Squadron, equipped with Vickers Virginia twin-engined night bombers. I became very friendly with one of their pilots, Flying Officer Goad, and used to fly with him on occasions to get some experience of Bomber Command operations. Once, for the fun of it, I went up in the rear gunner's cockpit which was situated at the extreme end of the fuselage under the tailplane. Standing in that cockpit I found I could get hold of the elevator, which I pulled up and down — much to the consternation of Goad, who was more than somewhat startled. Sadly, a week or so later while flying around Manston, I saw an ominous black column of smoke rising up from the airfield; it was Goad's Virginia which had crashed and caught fire. That pall of smoke was poor Goad's funeral pyre.

As our re-equipment with Atlas aircraft progressed, Glen and I were detailed to deliver two of our old Bristol Fighters to Farnborough where they were required. It was a lovely fine day with no wind, and we flew along together with myself in the lead and navigating, and Glen in close formation. As we approached south of London we flew over a thick smoke haze, like a great grey blanket obscuring the ground. There were no radio homing aids in those days, but I knew we were precisely on track so continued the flight, keeping a close eye on my compass and airspeed. At the moment when I calculated we should be over Farnborough I cut my engine, and we glided down through the murk until at about 500 feet I saw a large white chalk circle on the ground with the letters 'FARNBOROUGH' right across it. This confirmed my confidence in the accuracy of DR (dead reckoning) navigation which I have practised many times since, but looking back on that arrival I must admit that it was a miraculous stroke of luck, as had I been only half a mile out I would never have found Farnborough in that poor visibility.

I circled round the airfield, which of course I knew well, and landed. Glen followed me round, came in too fast, overshot the airfield and crashed through the fence of the RAE, ending upside down but unhurt in the grounds of that Establishment. Next morning I called round at the RAE to see my old friends there, but was refused entrance as I had no official pass. Somewhat irritated, I told Glen about this and he roared with laughter: 'So they wouldn't let you in!' he chuckled. 'Well, they couldn't keep me out, could they?'

In May 1930, Musson, Glen and I were sent on a three-month course at the School of Army Co-operation at Old Sarum, near Salisbury. Here we attended lectures on military formations and tactics, and carried out exercises with the Army on Salisbury Plain. We were the eyes of the Army, who required us to carry out reconnaissance flights over 'enemy' territory to report on troop movements, and to identify targets for the gunners to shoot at. One of our main tasks was to spot for the artillery — we had to circle around at about 2000 feet over the target and watch out for their shell bursts, the position of which we would radio back to the battery by means of a clock code in morse. Once they had managed to 'bracket' their target, we gave them the OK and returned to base — of course, in actual warfare, circling around the target like that, we would have been shot down straight away by ground fire!

While still at Old Sarum, I heard about a light aircraft available for sale at Whitchurch aerodrome, near Bristol. It was a Parnall Pixie III, a low wing monoplane two-seater, powered by a 34 hp Bristol Cherub engine. This Pixie, G-EBKK, had been flown successfully in the 1924 and 1926 Light Aeroplane Competitions at Lympne, and had been stored ever since at Whitchurch. Privately owned aircraft were rare in those days and I thought how exciting it would be to own one myself. So I drove over to inspect the Pixie and found it to be a pretty little machine in remarkably good condition. After some hard bargaining I bought it for fifty two pounds and ten shillings, and as it had folding wings I hooked its tailskid on to the back of my Austin Seven car and towed it some fifty miles by road to Old Sarum.

For the next few weeks, I flew the Pixie around locally and thoroughly enjoyed handling such an attractive little aircraft. It cruised at about 65 mph with its little two-cylinder engine putt-putting away happily. After a time, I wanted to try it out with a passenger, but could not persuade any of my RAF colleagues to join me. Then, one afternoon in the Mess I met a visiting Army officer, and asked him: 'Would you like to come for a fly around with me after tea?' He said he would love to, and off we went to the hangar. He looked a bit taken aback when he saw the tiny aircraft, but bravely climbed into the rather stark front cockpit, which had no windscreen, seat belts or instruments. I started up the engine and taxied out for take-off.

After running the whole length of the airfield, I just managed to clear the perimeter fence, and seeing Old Sarum Castle straight ahead I turned to avoid it into a river valley. The aircraft would not climb and I found myself trapped in the valley, following it along, cutting through a belt of trees, until I caught my wheels on a fence and somersaulted at full speed into a field. I was knocked out for a while, and when I came to I found I was trapped upside down in the

wreckage with petrol pouring all over me. There was a hum of voices from people around, and I was scared that someone might be smoking and set the whole aircraft on fire, so I kicked hard to draw their attention to me.

Apparently, my passenger had been flung out on impact and they were looking after him, but they were not aware there was a second occupant trapped in the wreckage. Anyway, they got me out and I found I was not injured apart from multiple bruises. My passenger had torn some muscles in this neck and spent several weeks in hospital, but he was lucky to have been flung out as the engine ended up right on his seat. As a final indignity, the local farmer charged me a pound to remove the wreckage!

After investigation I found that the cause of the accident was that the Parnall Pixie had been designed to operate as a monoplane only when flown solo. It had an auxiliary wing to be mounted above the monoplane wing, making it a biplane when required to carry a passenger. I had not been told about this auxiliary wing, and with the weight of a passenger while flying as a monoplane, the Pixie had insufficient lift to enable it to climb properly.

When I returned to Manston on conclusion of the Army Cooperation Course, my Commanding Officer — Squadron Leader ‘Daddy’ Probyn — sent for me and gave me a lecture. First, he sympathised with me for the loss of my aircraft, then went on: ‘I have been watching you, Mole, and must warn you against over-confidence in your flying.’ He quoted the airman’s adage: ‘There are old pilots, and there are bold pilots. But there are no old, bold pilots.’

Finally, he added: ‘Remember always: a good pilot is one who never breaks an aircraft.’

Daddy Probyn was much respected by us all as a superb pilot, and I took his words very much to heart. It is probably thanks to his advice that I am still alive today. The last I heard of ‘Daddy’ was in 1982 when he featured in a Kenya TV programme flying his own home-built single-seater on his ninetieth birthday!

One of the most colourful characters in our squadron was the Adjutant, Flying Officer David Atcherley, who was seconded to the Air Force from the Army and desperately keen to transfer to us. He was the twin brother of Dick Atcherley who had already become famous as a pilot and who used occasionally to fly over from his base at Kenley, and entertain us with a spirited aerobatic performance in a Gloster Gamecock. The exploits of the Atcherley brothers were to become legendary throughout the RAF.*

Although serious in his professional capacity, David was a

*See *A Pride of Unicorns — the Biography of the Atcherley Brothers* by John Pudney.

confirmed practical joker and often got into trouble on this account. The first incident that I witnessed happened during a Guest Night, when our somewhat fiery tempered Station Commander, Group Captain Pink, had invited a number of local dignitaries to dinner. After the loyal toast, Group Captain Pink announced the usual: 'Gentlemen, you may smoke.' He thereupon took a cigarette from a box on the table and lit it. There was a loud explosion and the unfortunate Pink's face was streaked in soot. He rose in a fury: 'Stand up the officer who played that trick,' he commanded. A rather sheepish David Atcherley stood up. 'Leave the room, Sir,' shouted Pink. Poor David received an official reprimand for that incident.

The next occasion was during the Station Commander's summer garden party. David and I, as single officers, were detailed to hand around the sandwiches and cakes, much to our annoyance. David gave me a dish of chocolate creams to offer the ladies present. I was astonished at the awful grimaces each lady made as she ate her chocolate. It appeared that David had doctored them — he had cut the bases off the chocolates with a razor blade, removed the cream and substituted mustard.

On Guy Fawkes night, after dinner we had a rather stuffy group of Army officers to entertain. With bent pins, David hooked firework bangers on to the backs of their mess jackets, and then wandered around lighting the touch papers with his cigarette. The subsequent explosions caused a tremendous commotion, everyone ripping off their jackets to see if they too had bangers attached. This incident caused a lot of amusement, except to the unfortunate Army officers.

Once after lunch in front of a roaring fire, three stout officers were sitting on a couch fast asleep and snoring peacefully. They had spread newspapers all over themselves so that the blaze of the fire would not disturb their slumbers. This somnolent scene annoyed David, who ran his cigarette lighter along the lower edge of the newspapers, which burst into flame immediately. I have never seen three individuals wake up so suddenly!

David's brother, Dick Atcherley — or 'Batchy' as he was generally known — was certainly one of the most brilliant pilots ever to fly with the RAF. He had already become famous for his superb aerobatic exhibitions during the annual RAF Displays at Hendon in 1927, 28 and 29, in which he specialised in inverted flying sequences. In 1928, he was the first pilot in the world to carry out an inverted loop, which caused a sensation in those days. He started this manoeuvre by doing a 'bunt', the first half of the inverted loop, which is carried out by diving steeply downwards, past the vertical, and then pushing the aircraft nose right up into level flight, upside down. Later on, when his engine had been arranged to run while

upside down, he was able to continue this manoeuvre by climbing up inverted and completing the loop — or ‘double bunt’.

Batchy applied the term ‘bunt’ to describe this manoeuvre from the words of the bawdy song, ‘Eskimo Nell’, which was often sung in the Mess on Guest Nights. This concerned the activities of an agile young lady who was said to perform ‘bunts and double bunts, and stunts unknown to common’.

In 1929, Batchy had won the King’s Cup air race round Britain in a Gloster Grebe fighter, and in that year he was selected to fly with the British team in the Schneider Trophy Contest, on the last lap of which he broke the world speed record. He would have won the race but for cutting one of the turning points when his goggles became fouled with oil from his engine.

Batchy developed an aerial manoeuvre known as ‘crazy flying’, his Avro 504 sweeping around the airfield at ground level, swish tailing, with alternate wing tips almost brushing the grass. Every now and then he would lob it up into the air and drop it down on to a wheel, then go bouncing from one wheel to another like a dancing horse. This was a most spectacular sight!

So famous did his crazy flying become, that in 1930 he was invited to demonstrate it at the National Air Races in Chicago. Crazy flying had never before been seen in America, and one day while practising for his show, he was chased by a motorcycle cop who thought this must be some fool flying student and wanted to arrest him. This police chase feature was added to Batchy’s act in the show and was a great success. His demonstration was sensational, and he was invited to America again several times during the following years.

Next year the event took place at Cleveland, Ohio, and as a joke Batchy dressed up in a morning coat with top hat and umbrella, and was announced to the crowd as an English university professor who was about to try out a new theory of flight. He then went in to his crazy flying routine. On his final demonstration in 1934, he further improved the act by fixing a saddle on top of the fuselage of his aircraft just behind the cockpit, and arranging an extension to the control column. Dressed in full hunting pink, and with his stirrups working the rudder cables outside the fuselage, Batchy ‘rode’ the aircraft around the airfield while performing his crazy flying.

Though totally dedicated to the RAF and to flying, the Atcherley brothers were a light-hearted and cheerful couple. Being identical twins, it was extremely difficult to tell them apart and frequently each would pretend to be the other, so leading one into a state of complete confusion. On more than one occasion their practical jokes ‘incurred the displeasure’ of higher authority. Despite this, both attained high rank in the RAF and served with great distinction throughout World War II. In 1952, having reached the rank of Air

Vice-Marshal, David sadly lost his life while flying himself from Egypt to Cyprus in a Meteor jet fighter. Batchy carried on to become an Air Marshal and received a well-deserved knighthood, retiring from the RAF in 1958.

In September 1930, our whole squadron moved to Friday Wood, a small airfield near Colchester, where we were to co-operate with Army manoeuvres being carried out by the 4th Division. Here, we were under canvas and kept on a fully mobile basis. Occasionally, a flight of four aircraft would be detached to support some forward movement of the Army; for these detachments we would select a suitable field from which to operate our aircraft, and our stores would follow up by road. Living rough under canvas, we were always grateful for the hospitality shown to us by local residents who had no idea, until the unexpected arrival of our aircraft in their midst, that there was a war raging around them.

The manoeuvres consisted of a battle between Blue Force, the main strength of the Division and supported by us, and Red Force — a token skeleton formation representing the enemy. From dawn to dusk we carried out continual reconnaissance sorties with occasional photographic missions, and reported back by radio any enemy troop movements or activity observed. In the event of exceptionally important or urgent communications, we were supposed to make out a written report and fly back to Divisional HQ, dropping the report in a message bag bearing a long, coloured streamer. One day, one of our pilots wildly excited at having spotted a column of enemy armoured cars, flew back to headquarters with his report and then found he had forgotten his message bags. With great initiative he took off a shoe, stuffed the message in it, and threw it down. Three times he returned with more important messages, using his other shoe and both his air gunner's boots for this purpose. That evening our CO received a 'phone call from Divisional HQ complaining bitterly of the fool pilot who had kept flying over and throwing old boots and shoes at them.

After three weeks or so, Blue Force (with our help) had routed the enemy, and the war was over. We flew back to Manston, glad to return to our comfortable quarters again and to our normal routine. Soon after this David Atcherley, having got his transfer from the Army to the RAF, was posted away to a flying instructor's course and I was appointed Squadron Adjutant in his place. By this time we had a new CO, a Staff College man and a disciplinarian, who was extremely efficient but humourless, and not at all interested in flying as an art — unlike our previous CO, 'Daddy' Probyn, who was a keen flying enthusiast and encouraged us in every way to improve our skill as pilots. The new CO seemed to regard the aeroplane simply as a vehicle necessary to enable us to carry out our military duties.

As Adjutant, I was the personal assistant to the CO with regard to the administration and discipline of the squadron. This was a desk job and consequently I was no longer on regular flying duties, and had to get in my flying practice as and when opportunity offered. For this reason, I took an active part in the then new sport of gliding (described in Chapter 6) and also scrounged flights in any odd aircraft that I could get my hands upon. I had met a pilot called Henkel who was in charge of the Practice Flight at Eastchurch, the RAF Armament School on the Isle of Sheppey, where there was a strange collection of old aircraft which were used to provide flying practice for the staff of the School. Henkel invited me over there and offered to let me fly some of these.

I had never flown a single-seat fighter, and was thrilled to be able to try out an Armstrong Whitworth Siskin and a Fairey Flycatcher — a very lively fighter used by the Fleet Air Arm. Then, in the hangar I spotted a Gloster Gamecock, the prettiest little single-seat fighter of that era, on which type Dick Atcherley used to give such stirring aerobatic displays. Henkel explained that this was the last Gamecock still flying and that they were all very proud of it. However, he agreed to let me fly it, but first he would have to give it an air test as it had just come out from overhaul. I had always longed to fly a Gamecock and was overjoyed at the prospect. Henkel took off in the aircraft and did a few circuits of the airfield, and then came in to land. To my horror, he hit the perimeter fence and somersaulted. The last Gamecock crashed, and my dream was ended!

One day, while in my Adjutant's office, the Station Padre came in and was simply jittering with rage. I calmed him down a bit with a cup of tea and asked him what the trouble was. He told me that a number of the men in my squadron had recently been transferring their religion from C. of E. to Wesleyan, and what was I doing about it? I had indeed noticed this, the men concerned having reported their change of religion to me, as I had to amend their personal documents accordingly. I asked my Orderly Room Corporal to investigate the problem, and he reported back to me: 'Well, it's like this, Sir. There's a new Wesleyan minister in the village, and after the Chapel service on Sundays, the minister's wife always gives the lads tea and cakes.'

So that was the reason!

The following April, the whole Squadron flew up to North Coates Fitties, a practice gunnery range on the coast south of Grimsby, where we were to carry out live firing and bombing exercises. For this purpose I was attached to one of the flights in order to take part in the training, and found myself flying again with my old chum, Musson. The firing targets were stretched out along the shore and consisted of wooden frames, ten feet square, covered with paper.

Starting with 200 rounds of ammunition, each pilot had to make a series of dives from 2000 feet to 1000 feet, letting off short bursts of fire at his target. After every shoot, the range umpire would count the number of holes in the target and report the score.

Competition between the three flights, and between the pilots, was fierce. We soon found that the best way to get a good score was to hold your fire on the dive and then give a short burst as close to the target as possible. By this means we achieved scores of about 70 per cent, but one pilot astonished us by consistently getting over 90 per cent, until he was disqualified when his wheels knocked the target over! The dive bombing was carried out with 20 lb Cooper bombs, of which we carried four under each wing. Again, the dives were supposed to be made from 2000 feet to 1000 feet, but much greater accuracy could be gained by continuing the dives as low as possible before releasing the bombs. I well remember feeling the detonation thumps through the seat of my pants!

On the evening before the final competition, Musson and I were in the village pub and we met the Sergeant in charge of the Range Party. He was a very friendly fellow and was taking a great interest in the contest to be held next day. We told him to look out for B Flight, our flight, whose aircraft could be identified by their yellow wheels. We plied him with plenty of drink and kept mentioning yellow wheels, and when we finally left the pub, he was slumped over the table murmuring: 'Yellow wheels. Yellow wheels.' Whether this had any effect, I do not know, but our B Flight won the competition handsomely.

When we returned to Manston, I was glad to learn that our Station Commander, Group Captain Pink, had selected me as his personal pilot to fly him around whenever he needed to go on staff visits. Pink was a fiery, quick-tempered man, who hated being flown as a passenger in a draughty open cockpit. Before flight, he would stand up in the rear cockpit of the aircraft and pull a padded sleeping bag right up over him, his arms included. I had then to fasten it around his neck, sit him down, fasten his seat belt and adjust his helmet and goggles. He looked like an enormous sack of potatoes! While flying, I used to wonder what on earth I should do in the event of fire or some emergency that might necessitate baling out of the aircraft — Pink could not possibly have got out.

I got on well with Pink, once I knew that his bark was worse than his bite. After landing on our first flight together, he paid me a compliment: 'I like your flying, Mole, you keep your tail well up.' This expression was a relic of the old days of World War I, but I didn't disillusion him by telling him that the Atlas always flew in a tail-up attitude.

Some time later that summer, I had been invited to an aerial garden party being held at a private airfield near Maidstone. The

landing area was far too short for an Atlas aircraft, so with Group Captain Pink's permission I borrowed his personal Avro 504 for the occasion. The garden party was pleasant but quiet and there were no flying demonstrations, so on leaving in the Avro I decided to liven the scene up a bit by giving a vigorous aerobatic display. When I got back to Manston, I noticed that the Avro did look a little woebegone and seemed to have a distinct twist in its fuselage.

Next day, I was sent for by the furious Group Captain Pink, who shouted at me: 'I had the courtesy to lend you my Avro, and you have managed to strain it so badly that it has to be written off as beyond repair.' He was so angry, he kept hitting his desk with his stick. The tirade went on while I stood there at attention, feeling highly embarrassed. Finally he told me I was to receive an official severe reprimand for the incident.

Now this was very bad news, as the severe reprimand would be endorsed on my official documents and would do no good for my future promotion prospects. However, about three weeks later, Pink sent for me again and told me he was leaving the station to go into hospital for a major operation. He thanked me for my services to him as his personal pilot, and said he had decided to overlook the Avro incident and cancel the severe reprimand. I was really very fond of the old boy and visited him in hospital, but he died of cancer a few months later.

The following September, we all went off to Friday Wood again for the annual manoeuvres of the 4th Division. On the first evening, Musson and I were having a drink in the bar of the Red Lion Hotel in Colchester when we met a group of officers of the Black Watch Regiment who were also on the manoeuvres. In the spirit of inter-service co-operation we had a riotous party with them, and when the bar closed we all went off to Clacton Pier. After a while, Musson and I were thrown out of the Blue Lagoon dance hall and we visited the skittle alley, where Musson started to throw the balls at the prizes! The next thing I knew, he was on the ground being kicked by the bouncers, and I dived down to try to pull him away. I remembered no more until I awoke next day in the Sick Bay of the camp with a broken nose, two teeth knocked out, a split lip and a monumental hangover. I felt very sorry for myself, but had learned a valuable lesson — avoid getting into unnecessary trouble!

Soon after I had joined the squadron, a young Army lieutenant was posted to us on secondment for liaison duties. He had arrived straight from flying school and we were anxious to make him feel at home with us. After dinner in the Mess, we gathered around him rather awed by this tall and elegant being in his scarlet Mess jacket, who seemed to have come from another world. We were wondering what subjects we could discuss that might be of interest to him, when suddenly, he drew himself up and spoke: 'Gentlemen. I feel like a

roger. Let's go into town and find some girls.' We were delighted. The chap was human after all. He was one of us! So we all trooped into Margate together, on the hunt.

After this surprising turn in the conversation the new officer became known to us all as 'Roger'. He became a very close friend of mine in the years to come and we often flew together.

In the summer of 1931, Roger and I were at a dance in Cliftonville and met two extremely attractive and very wealthy ladies, probably about ten years older than us. They had rented a villa near Kingsgate Castle for the summer months, and invited us to dine with them the next evening. A chauffeur driven Rolls-Royce collected us from the Mess, much to the amusement of our fellow officers, and we were taken in style to the villa. A wonderful dinner was laid on, with caviare, champagne and the lot. After dinner, our new lady friends extended us their warmest hospitality.

We used to visit them once or twice a week after that, always with a marvellous dinner and such an affectionate welcome. We were two brash young men with two attractive, mature and experienced women whom we adored, and from whom we learnt so much! Occasionally at weekends, however, their husbands used to drive down from the Midlands to be with them, and Roger and I would suffer pangs of jealousy thinking about these men sleeping with the women we loved.

Early one morning, after a particularly strenuous night, Roger and I returned to camp just in time for me to take the squadron on to colour hoisting parade, after which I tottered to my office and sank thankfully down in my Adjutant's chair. Later that morning, Roger's air gunner came to see me. 'What's the trouble?' I asked him.

'Well, Sir,' he replied. 'It's Mr Roger. I think something should be done about him. We were up at 12,000 feet this morning and he passed out. We dived down to 5000 feet before he came to and got the aircraft under control again!'

I told him that Mr Roger had been overdoing things recently and promised to see that he would take things easy for a while, and that it would not happen again.

As the summer months drew on, Roger fell deeply in love with his lady friend, and implored her to divorce her husband and marry him. She told him that this was quite impossible as she was older than him, and used to a life of luxury. She would not be able to exist on his lieutenant's pay of eighteen shillings a day.

'Roger,' she said, 'I really love you. I can't marry you, but I would like to have a child by you.'

Roger was overjoyed. That night he took his lady friend out to a beauty spot on the clifftop by the North Foreland, and there under a romantic full moon, they consummated their love.

The following spring, the squadron moved up to North Coates Fitties again for our annual air firing and bombing practice. One evening Musson and I went into Grimsby together, and in a hotel lounge I saw two attractive girls that I had met the year before. On that occasion, I had been with another friend, Robert Smythe, and we had taken the girls to a dance on Cleethorpes pier. After the dance, as it was Smythe's car we were in, I took my girl for a walk leaving Smythe with his girl in the car. When I returned later on, I saw a large policeman taking notes by Smythe's car, having caught him in an embarrassing situation.

The two girls that Musson and I had just met seemed very pleased to see us, and we had a cheerful evening with them. Smythe's girl implored me to bring him out to see her again, but I told her this was unlikely as he had only recently been married and was now on the straight and narrow path. However, I said, write him a note and I'll see if I can persuade him to come. She wrote a little note saying she had heard he was back again, and that she would very much like to see him. Rather naughtily, in similar writing I added a few words: 'My baby needs her Daddy.'

Back at camp I gave the note to Smythe, who went pale. The other officers were all in the joke, and at lunchtime next day someone came in and said: 'There's a lady with a pram at the Guard Room, Smythe, asking for you.'

'Oh my God,' said poor Smythe. 'Don't tell her I'm here.' Then he went and locked himself in his room for the afternoon. Over the next few days the joke went on, and there were continual messages reported to Smythe, such as: 'A lady and her mother waiting at the Guard Room', 'A lady on the 'phone for you', and so on.

A week later the CO sent for me and said: 'I presume you are at the bottom of this Smythe affair, Mole, and I don't want to interfere with your practical jokes. However, the affair has now become serious as the police are investigating the matter. You had better straighten things out with Smythe.'

I got hold of Smythe and told him that the whole thing was a joke. He wouldn't believe me at first, and then in horrified tones he said: 'Oh my God! I've gone and confessed it all to my wife. Her father is a solicitor and he started action with the police to protect me.'

He hardly ever spoke to me again, and years later when I met him as a high-ranking officer, he looked down his nose at me as if I didn't exist.

In June 1932, I was detailed to fly down to Mountbatten, an airfield just behind Plymouth, to pick up an Aircraftman Shaw who was required back at Manston. I landed at Mountbatten and found Shaw, a short and rather scruffy looking AC2, waiting for me by the Watch Hut. He saluted, and I told him to hop into the back seat and we'd go straight back to Manston. On our arrival there I taxied up to

the apron, and saw to my surprise the Station Commander and his wife, and most of the top brass, waiting there. Shaw thanked me for the trip, walked over to the Station Commander, shook hands with him and kissed his wife, and they drove off together.

I was dumbfounded! At lunch, I related this extraordinary incident to my friends and one of them said: 'Well, you know who he was, don't you? That was *LAWRENCE OF ARABIA*.' It appeared that our new Station Commander, Group Captain Sydney Smith, had previously been associated with Colonel Lawrence during his Arabian adventures, and they were very close friends.

Shortly afterwards, the bad news broke. I received notification that I was to be posted the following January to join the Officers' Engineering Course at Henlow. This filled me with gloom as it was to be an eighteen-months course with no active flying. I knew that all permanent officers were expected to specialise in some subject such as navigation, armament, signals or engineering, and I would far rather have chosen navigation. However, having come into the Air Force on the strength of my engineering degree, I realised I had no choice in the matter.

At the end of the year, I sadly left Manston. I had been with No. 2 Squadron for three years and had thoroughly enjoyed my time there with such a splendid group of friends. As events were to turn out, this was to be the first and only squadron with which I was to serve while in the RAF.

Chapter 5

Henlow

Arriving at Henlow in January 1933, I found it to be a large and sprawling Station in flat and dreary looking countryside, about ten miles south-east of Bedford. Some wit remarked that when Bunyan was writing his *Pilgrims Progress* while a prisoner in Bedford gaol, he must have been looking out of the window of his cell towards the Henlow landscape when he got the idea of the Slough of Despond! Although the Officers Mess was comfortable enough, there was none of the camaraderie I had enjoyed with my squadron at Manston.

During the first term of six months, we engineering students attended lectures every morning and spent the afternoons in workshops dressed in grimy overalls, hammering, chiselling and filing away at lumps of cast iron, learning basic engineering practice. I had done all this before while at university, and the whole term was for me a complete waste of time. It was incredibly boring, especially as our flying was restricted to one hour per week in a Tiger Moth.

The following April, a Flight of three Vickers Virginia bombers arrived at Henlow to practice for a parachute demonstration to be given at the forthcoming RAF Display at Hendon. Each aircraft was to carry two parachutists, and the Flight Commander called for six volunteers from among the students. Anxious to relieve the tedium of life with the engineering course, I at once volunteered. Dropping in to the Hendon Display by parachute seemed as good a way of getting there as any other, and in any case at the previous year's Display I had arrived by glider, flying one of three gliders towed over for a demonstration.

The Flight Commander took me to the airfield and showed me the big Virginia biplane, which was fitted with a small platform on each lower wing, just behind the outer wing strut. He explained that I would stand on this little platform before take-off and hang on to the strut during flight. He would give me a hand signal from the cockpit, upon which I was to catch hold of my parachute release handle and pull it. No other instruction or drill was offered, except advice that I should wear rubber-soled shoes in case my feet should slip off the platform during flight.

Shortly afterwards, dressed in my flying overalls and wearing a

standard RAF seat-type parachute, I climbed on to the little platform and held on to the inter-plane strut. As the great plane taxied out over the grass airfield, the wing swayed up and down alarmingly with me hanging on grimly with both arms around the strut. After take-off the ride became steadier, but I felt very lonely standing out there on the wing completely exposed to the blast of the air stream. The pilot made a circuit of the airfield, and at a height of only 400 feet, gave me the hand signal. I nervously released one arm from the strut, caught hold of the parachute release handle and pulled.

Nothing seemed to happen for a while, then suddenly I received an enormous jerk as the parachute opened out behind me and pulled me sharply off the wing. I found myself swinging backwards and forwards like a pendulum, suspended from the parachute, and I had no idea how to stop this swinging. After a short while I hit the ground hard on a down swing and felt something snap in my leg. When I tried to get up I saw that my left foot was pointing backwards, and so promptly decided to lie down again.

The airfield ambulance collected me and as it was passing the hangar, I saw an anxious face peering at me through the window. This was the next volunteer waiting to go up for his parachute jump, who had witnessed my accident. The rest of the practice jumps went off successfully, although the dropping height was increased to 800 feet in order to give the parachutists time to stop their swinging. In the actual demonstration at the RAF Display, the Flight Commander misjudged his distance, and dropped all six parachutists into the car park!

I was taken to the RAF Hospital at Halton where it was discovered that I had a compound fracture of my leg, and they kept me there for two months. I greatly enjoyed my time in the hospital. The food was good, the company congenial and the nurses were pretty and very attentive. What more could one wish for! I felt sorry for my unfortunate colleagues at Henlow in those dreary workshops, chipping and filing away at their lumps of cast iron.

In my ward we had a famous character, Wing Commander Gaskell-Blackburn, who was the only RAF officer permitted to wear a beard, and who was known to all as 'The Flying Christ'. He already had this beard when he transferred to the RAF from the Navy, and he was allowed to keep it. Apparently, he had experienced some tummy trouble while serving in Iraq, and in the Baghdad hospital he was opened up for inspection of his intestines. When these were shovelled back in again, they must have been tangled up as the poor fellow was unable thereafter to go to the lavatory. He was sent home to Halton hospital where he was placed on a champagne diet, and after numerous tests and probes the doctors' efforts were suddenly crowned with success. The effect was

electric! Every patient in the ward who was mobile rushed out into the fresh air, but the unfortunates who were bed bound had to bury their noses under their blankets. He had been forty three days without relief, which must have been the Air Force record!

In the bed next to me was a pleasant young officer called Henson, who had been admitted for examination as he kept blacking out at intervals. They carried out a series of tests upon him to try and locate some tropical virus, as he had recently returned from overseas. They were unsuccessful, and eventually decided to remove his appendix. Our pretty nurse came over to him with a bright smile, bearing a shaving brush, some soap and a razor, but Henson modestly insisted on doing the shaving himself, during which process he managed to cut himself in seventeen places. Afterwards, an orderly painted some lotion all over the bald area leaving it a horrifying reddish-orange colour. Henson showed this to me and said: 'I would simply hate the nurse to see it looking like that!' As they wheeled him away to the operating theatre, the nurse followed the trolley and poor Henson groaned: 'You aren't coming along with me, are you?'

'Of course,' she replied, 'I always watch my patients being operated on.'

During a short period of convalescence, Henson kept on blacking out and was admitted to hospital once again. This time they decided to remove his tonsils, but the blacking out continued. So they pulled out a lot of his teeth. Then one day into the ward came the most beautiful girl, dark haired and sun tanned, wearing a coral necklace and bracelets, and looking like an exotic tropical flower. We all sat up smartly in our beds, stunned at this entrancing vision. She strolled across the floor, lithe and sinuous as a panther, followed by all eyes, and sat down by Henson's bed next to mine.

It appeared that she was Henson's young wife. Upon marrying her he had been granted six months' leave, which they had spent looking after an orange grove on a private Caribbean island owned by her father. They had a glorious holiday together leading the luscious life of lotus eaters, swimming, lazing in the sun, refreshing themselves with flagons of Jamaican rum punch, and making love throughout the long, hot nights. Six months of this life with such a delectable wife would have been too much for most men. No wonder poor Henson kept blacking out. All he really needed was a good long rest!

After two months, I was discharged from the hospital and rejoined the engineering course at Henlow, just before it broke up for the summer leave. I decided to spend the month's holiday in the gypsy caravan at Winchelsea Beach, which my sister had by now made over to me.

That informal holiday in the caravan made a welcome break from

the rigid routine of RAF service life. In particular, I enjoyed the company of my old friend Henry Savage, the poet and author, who as I have previously mentioned, lived in a rambling old cottage by the beach nearby. Henry was a fascinating character with a shock of black hair and a most untidy appearance, who wrote poetry for the love of it, often well into the night sitting in his armchair under a hanging oil lamp. He never worried about money, or the lack of it, although when finances became too pressing he would occasionally 'prostitute his art' by writing a book against an advance from the publishers.

Henry had many friends, mostly authors, artists and actors, who used to descend upon him with their somewhat uninhibited lady companions whenever they felt like a breath of sea air and escape from the smoke of London. In his sparsely furnished cottage, he always welcomed his visitors — all visitors, that is, except bores. He could not stand bores. What little he had, his guests could share but usually for their own comfort they brought supplies of food and drink with them, and their own bedding. He expected them to lead their own lives and to look after themselves, and never to intrude when he was writing.

One day, a rather smart young woman who had been brought to the cottage by an actor, enquired of Henry: 'Where is the bathroom?'

Of course, as there was no running water supply, there was no bathroom. Henry took her out on to the beach and pointed to the sea. 'There is my bath,' he said. 'It stretches from Dover to Land's End.' He had a sentimental streak in him, and when another girl visitor told him she was desperate about being pregnant and wanted an abortion, he took her gently by the hand out on to the Romney Marshes behind his cottage, where countless sheep were grazing. He pointed to the lambs gambolling around their mothers and said: 'Let nature have its way.' Unfortunately she didn't, and later on she shot herself.

One night after the pub had closed, Henry invited some of the old fishermen into his cottage for a drink. We sat there in his sitting room in front of a blazing log fire, sipping hot rum punch, and listening to salty tales of the sea as related by those ancient mariners. We were startled when suddenly a door opened and in walked one of Henry's lady visitors, completely naked. Whilst in bed, she had heard our voices and decided to join the party. Quite unperturbed, Henry turned to her: 'Go back to your room at once,' he demanded 'and put on your shoes. You'll catch your death of cold.'

Despite his primitive mode of life, Henry was never short of female company. He was a romantic lover in the old-fashioned sense, and composed ardent poems to woo the lady of his choice.

These romances never lasted long, however, because without exception the ladies concerned tried to change his way of life by arranging regular meal times, tidying up the cottage, hanging curtains, and so on. This he could not stand — he resented being organised.

Henry managed to be quite self-supporting, growing his own vegetables in a garden behind his cottage, using seaweed for fertiliser, and he developed an effective way to catch fish. At low tide, he laid down a row of about thirty fishhooks with their lines anchored to stones, and floated up by corks a foot or two above the sand. After the tide had come in and then receded, Henry would go off down the beach to his hooks, carrying a bucket and followed by a horde of cats — trotting after him with their tails straight up in the air. He usually seemed to collect 15 – 20 fish, varying from small dabs to large Dover soles, which he gutted on the spot — much to the cats' enjoyment.

A good catch was always followed by a delicious meal of fried sole fresh from the sea, accompanied by home-grown vegetables. The surplus fish he would take in his bucket to the village store and, slapping a couple of flounders on the counter, would obtain his groceries. A few more fish at the pub would enable the landlord to wipe clean from the slate his outstanding account for drinks.

Henry Savage was an old friend of Gracie Fields and one day her father, Fred Stansfield, descended unexpectedly on his cottage. Gracie had installed her mother and father in a nice house in a new estate at Peacehaven on the Sussex coast, but Fred — an old miner — found life there constricting and he missed his old friends of the mining fraternity, and especially the pubs. There were no pubs in Peacehaven. On arrival at Henry's cottage he announced: 'The old woman kept nagging me, so I've buggered off.' Henry, anxious to get on with his writing, asked me to look after Fred, and I took him around the country pubs where we played darts with the locals. The custom with these dart matches was to play for pints of beer, the locals always expecting to beat the visitors and so obtaining free beer. Fred, however, turned out to be an absolute champion dart player and wherever we went, we won every darts match. It was a most satisfying experience while it lasted, but after a week or so, Gracie arrived in her Rolls-Royce and took Fred back to her mother.

During this holiday, I made two friends who were to become close to me over the years to come. The first was Jimmy Justice, later to become famous as James Robertson Justice — the film star. Jimmy was a large, bearded young man with a huge, booming voice, who was out of a job and staying at Henry's cottage for the summer. He was next year to incur the displeasure of the British Government while serving with the international police during the Saar

plebiscite, when he pulled a gun in a brawl outside a nightclub and shot some inoffensive German. This caused a major diplomatic incident which resulted in the British contingent having to be withdrawn.

Jimmy at that time was a dedicated Communist and had been sacked from several jobs as he was apt to disrupt the workforce, haranguing them with raised clenched fist, with the cry: 'Workers of the world. Unite!' His brand of communism seemed to make him believe that if anyone had something he lacked, he was entitled to take it. I discovered this one evening at a party when some girl suddenly called out: 'My handbag's gone. Someone has taken it!'

All eyes turned on Jimmy who sprang to his feet, raised his hands in the air, and roared: 'I demand to be searched'.

Despite this unfortunate reputation, Jimmy was a very great character with a tremendous personality, and we all liked him immensely. With the courage of his convictions, a few years later he volunteered to fight with the Red Brigade in the Spanish Civil War, during which he was wounded. Later on, however, when he became a successful and wealthy film star, he no longer wished to be reminded of his early communist activities.

The other friend I made while on holiday at Winchelsea was young Geoffrey de Havilland, eldest son of the famous aircraft manufacturer. Geoffrey was extremely keen on flying and later became de Havilland's chief test pilot. We were to be close friends until he sadly killed himself just after the war while carrying out transonic speed trials in their experimental DH 108 tailless jet aircraft.

Geoffrey was a remarkable character, completely dedicated to flying. He was a great 'keep fit' enthusiast and during periods of his test flying he did not drink or smoke. After a while, however, he would suddenly let his hair down, throw a party and get completely plastered. Following that he would retire to Winchelsea Beach and go through a vigorous get-fit campaign, walking twenty miles a day. At Winchelsea, I went to Geoffrey's twenty-first birthday party — an uproarious occasion — after which Geoffrey insisted on everyone joining him on the beach for a moonlight bathe in the nude. I followed along in my open MG Midget car, and was puzzled by the phenomenon of two huge full moons shining high above me. While trying to focus these two moons together, I drove the car into a dyke full of water!

Returning to Henlow after my leave, I found the course much more interesting as the curriculum now covered aeronautical engineering and aerodynamics. My weekly flight in a Tiger Moth also became more interesting as I used to fly over to Hatfield aerodrome to see Geoffrey, and spend a pleasant lunch hour in the comfortable clubhouse, back in the world of flying, chatting to the instructors and the de Havilland test pilots.

At Winchelsea I had met a most attractive girl called Sheila, an enchanting fair-haired nymph, with slender, suntanned limbs that were a poem of grace. I fell head over heels in love with her and all went well, for she responded to my ardour. She lived with her parents in a charming old house in the nearby town of Rye, to which after my return to Henlow, I was frequently invited to stay at weekends. Oh God! How I loved that girl. I longed to marry her.

Then disaster struck! After an attack of 'flu, my hair started to fall out leaving bald, shiny patches all over my head. The doctors sent me to hospital for examination, and thence on to Harley Street. They called my affliction Alopecia Aereata, but they had no cure for it. All they could say was that my hair might, or might not, grow again. Although the condition was not infectious, everyone avoided me like the plague, and I lived the life of a pariah. After a couple of months or so, my hair suddenly started to grow again and all was well, but by then to my great distress, I had lost my beloved Sheila!

After such a gloomy period, I was cheered by a visit from my old friend Roger, who had by now returned to his Regiment and who had asked me to be his best man at his forthcoming wedding. This was to be a very grand affair at the Holy Trinity Church in Knightsbridge, so we both went to Moss Bros. to hire ceremonial uniforms. Roger's splendid uniform was crowned by a helmet with a spike on the top of it, while I had a helmet with a plume. We both carried swords, which we had to be careful not to trip over.

The night before the wedding we spent the evening together, and Roger suddenly got cold feet and said he couldn't go through with it. I pointed out that he could not possibly back out at this late stage as a large number of guests had been invited, including most of the officers of his Regiment. So I plied him with drinks to fortify his courage, and perhaps overdid it somewhat.

The next morning I found him in his bed almost paralytic with hangover. With great difficulty I got him up and dressed into his ceremonial uniform, and off we went to the church, stopping the taxi *en route* at the Bunch of Grapes for a couple of large brandies. At the altar, awaiting the arrival of the bride, I had to hold him up as he was swaying alarmingly. Then somehow he survived the reception at the Piccadilly Hotel, after which the happy couple went up to a bedroom to change into going-away clothes.

We all waited patiently to see them off on their honeymoon, but after a long delay the bride came down in tears and said that Roger had passed out on a bed. There he lay in full uniform, sword and all. We could not wake him up, and there he stayed for the night. The bride never spoke to me again!

On conclusion of the engineering course at Henlow in July 1934, I was awarded the engineering symbol 'E Star' after my name in the Air Force List. So ended a rather depressing eighteen months

during which I had done very little flying, although I did manage to get in a lot of gliding with the London Gliding Club at Dunstable nearby. I looked forward to my next posting, which was to be at Halton — one of the most delightful RAF stations in England.

Chapter 6

The Birth of British Gliding

During the past three years I had taken an active part in the then new sport of gliding, but before relating these experiences I would like to summarise briefly the early events that led to the development of gliding as a sport in this country.

The whole concept of heavier-than-air flight (as opposed to ballooning) was originated by Sir George Caley, generally known as the Father of Aeronautics, who was born about a hundred years before his time. He made many of the earliest studies of aeronautics and in 1853 built a successful man-carrying glider, which was first launched unpowered from the top of a hill in Yorkshire. Following a few successful flights in this way, Caley persuaded a reluctant coachman to fly in the glider. This short flight, the first manned gliding flight in history, resulted in a heavy landing and a severely frightened coachman.

Subsequently in Germany, between 1890 and 1896, Otto Lilienthal built various gliders and made many successful flights. These were really the forerunners of the modern hang glider, the pilot taking off by running down a hill into wind, and controlling the machine by swinging his body about. In 1896, however, Lilienthal unfortunately was killed when one of his gliders stalled in flight and crashed to the ground. In 1895 Percy Pilcher, a Scottish engineer, followed up Lilienthal's designs and built several gliders which flew successfully, but in 1899 he too was killed when the tail of his glider broke off in flight.

From 1900, the Wright Brothers in America experimented with gliders, and were successful in solving control and stability problems. Their biplane gliders flew well and eventually on 17 December 1903, after the installation of an engine into one of their gliders, Orville Wright made the world's first powered aeroplane flight.

In Britain, the gliding movement really started in 1922, when the *Daily Mail* organised a competition at Itford Hill, near Lewes in Sussex, to encourage interest in the sport. Various designs of gliders were flown and some were successful in soaring, as seagulls do, on the rising current of air caused by wind blowing up the slope of a hill. The best of these slope soaring flights was made by a Frenchman,

M. Maneyrol, in his Peyret monoplane during which he managed to stay in the air for 3 hours, 21 minutes.

On the conclusion of World War I, Germany was prohibited by the Treaty of Versailles from the construction of aeroplanes. This gave them the incentive to develop the sport of gliding, which did not come under the prohibition, and backed by the Government, numbers of local gliding schools and clubs were formed all over the country and thousands of young men learnt to fly with them. New and efficient glider designs were introduced which enabled great increases in height to be gained from hill slope soaring; pilots began to contact up-currents of air under cloud formations. This, together with the discovery of thermal lift, enabled spectacular flights to be made reaching great heights and covering long distances.

In 1929, while under training at my RAF flying school, I heard about these astonishing flights by motorless aircraft. They excited great interest over here and a number of letters began to appear in *The Aeroplane* from enthusiasts, including myself, who wished to get together and promote the sport of gliding in Britain. As the result of this display of interest, *The Aeroplane* arranged a lunch for us, which took place in London on 4 December 1929, during which groups of enthusiasts decided to form the British Gliding Association and the London Gliding Club. The London Gliding Club was inaugurated on 20 February 1930, under the chairmanship of Toby Ashwell-Cooke, an astute businessman who was largely responsible for its successful development. I joined as a Founder Member.

The first of the early enthusiasts to fly was Lowe Wylde, who founded the rather grand-sounding British Aircraft Company, and started to build gliders in a disused brewery at Maidstone in Kent. Within five weeks he had built his first machine, the BAC I—a copy of the German ‘Zogling’ primary trainer. This was an elementary design consisting of a high wing behind which was a simple open frame rather like a five-barred gate, with a rudder and elevator at the tail. The pilot sat out in front on a little seat, totally exposed. The glider had no wheels but took off and landed on a skid. It had no soaring performance but was extremely robust and intended to withstand rough handling by *ab initio* flying students.

On 2 March 1930, after considerable publicity, Lowe Wylde arranged a public demonstration of his BAC I glider on a flat field near Maidstone. A large crowd attended, interested to witness this first flight by a British glider. After some delay to allow press and newsreel photographers to get their stories, Lowe Wylde sat on the pilot’s seat dressed in a leather flying suit with helmet and goggles, looking for all the world like Bleriot. The glider was launched by the standard German catapult method using two lengths of ‘bungee’ (elastic shock cords) attached to a ring hooked on to its nose. Each

of these bungee cords was handled by six men who, upon Lowe Wylde's command, ran full tilt to stretch the elastic. At maximum extension, Lowe Wylde gave the command 'Release', and the helpers holding the glider back, let go.

The result was disappointing. The glider slid forward on its skid, rose to about fifteen feet, and landed. That was it. The show was over. Many of those who had paid five shillings each to witness the event felt cheated. The technical press slated the demonstration, but as Lowe Wylde explained to me later, he needed the money in order to continue building further gliders.

In April 1930, the London Gliding Club took delivery of its first glider, a German 'Zogling' primary trainer. We started operations at Ivinghoe Beacon, launching our Zogling from the top of the hill by bungee catapult, and flights of about one minute or so were possible. Everyone lent a hand, and after each flight willing enthusiasts hauled the glider back to the top of the hill on a little trolley. The catapult launch was quite a startling experience. Upon giving the word 'Release', the glider would slide forward smartly and catching the up-current of wind against the face of the hill, it would rise sharply upwards into the air. Sitting there on the little seat in front of the glider, totally exposed, one felt as if poised in space.

Our weekend operations at Ivinghoe Beacon were eventually stopped by the police because we attracted too many spectators, and their cars blocked the roads. Ashwell-Cooke managed to get the co-operation of Mr Tom Turvey, a friendly farmer near the Dunstable Downs, who housed our Zogling in a barn. This enabled us to operate from that excellent ridge of hills where the Club, now greatly expanded, is still operating successfully today.

In May 1930, the *Daily Express* organised a glider meeting at Itford Hill, near Lewes, to which they invited the Austrian, Robert Kronfeld, the world gliding champion, to give demonstrations in his superb 'Wien' high performance sailplane. He carried out some most impressive slope soaring, and ended up with a splendid flight of fifty miles across country to Portsmouth. At this meeting, I obtained my gliding certificate, being number 6 in Britain. Number 1 had already been obtained by Lowe Wylde, followed by our Club members Latimer Needham, Major Petre, McCulloch, Marcus Manton, the Master of Sempill and Mungo Buxton.

At this Itford Hill meeting, Lowe Wylde made a remarkable soaring flight in his BAC I primary glider, by which he gained his gliding 'C' certificate. He was not an experienced pilot, and after being launched off the top of the hill against a very strong wind, he was carried up immediately to about fifty feet. He was unable to make any headway against the wind, nor to get down against the up-current, and the glider remained absolutely stationary above our heads for fifteen minutes. Lowe Wylde sat rigidly there out on the

front of it, hanging grimly on to his controls, with his trouser legs flapping wildly in the breeze. Eventually, the glider drifted back with the wind, and once out of the up-current, he got it down and landed safely — much to everyone's relief.

During the early summer of 1930, the London Gliding Club bought a German 'Prufling' glider — a secondary type of sailplane capable of slope soaring, with which we were able to obtain our gliding 'C' certificates. Early the next year we acquired our first high performance sailplane — a German 'Professor'. This had a much longer wing span than the gliders we had been using, and its controls were extremely sluggish, but it enabled us to gain experience in more advanced soaring. The Professor had a very flat gliding angle of 1:25, and being without wing flaps or air brakes, it required careful judgment to land accurately. We used to joke in the Club that if you wished to land the Professor in a particular field, you would probably float right past it and across a couple more fields, before ending up in the third one. We soon learned the technique of landing the Professor uphill whenever possible, to cut out this embarrassing float.

In January 1931 I was invited to try out an interesting new glider — the 'Scud'. Its designer L. E. 'Baron' Baynes, was a great enthusiast and in the Scud he had ingeniously reduced the size and weight of a glider to the absolute minimum. It was priced at £95, and weighing only 102 lbs, it was some 50 lbs lighter than myself. Once crammed into its tiny cockpit, I felt as if I was a built-in part of the machine. After a few ground hops, I flew the Scud from the top of the Dunstable Downs and made an hour's soaring flight with it, much to Baynes' delight. Although this tiny machine was very sensitive to handle, it was extremely responsive to control and great fun to fly.

During that summer I demonstrated the Scud at various gliding meetings, where its diminutive size always aroused great interest. Once, at a meeting held on the hills behind Folkestone, the weather was extremely rough and none of the glider pilots would fly. There was a handsome silver cup to be awarded for the best flight of the day, and as there was to be no competition, it seemed to me that any short flight from the top of the hill to the bottom would be sufficient to win it. Somewhat foolishly, I got myself launched in the Scud from the top of the hill and was immediately caught up in the gale, being tossed up and down like a cork in a rough sea. My air speed indicator was flicking from 30 to 70 mph, and I had to fight hard to keep the little glider on an even keel. The bumps were so severe that I expected the wing to break off at any moment, but after about five minutes wrestling with the controls I managed to put it down safely on a wide road in a housing estate just behind Folkestone. 'Baron' Baynes, who had been jumping up and down with excitement while

watching the flight, was delighted as the strength of his Scud design was now well and truly proved.

The first Scud that Baynes sold was bought by a Dr Lander, a keen member of the London Club. He was not an experienced pilot and unfortunately decided to fly his new glider before I had the opportunity to brief him as to the sensitivity of its control. Starting on level ground with a powerful auto-towed launch, Lander shot steeply up into the air. Then, pushing the stick forward, he dived straight into the ground and killed himself. This was very bad news for Baynes who decided to drop the original Scud design and later produced the Scud II, of similar construction but larger and much more stable, which proved to be a complete success.

Early in 1931, Lowe Wylde was having success with his latest design, the BAC IV, a robust, secondary type of glider. It was selling well to the new gliding clubs that were being formed all over the country, and Lowe Wylde often asked me to demonstrate it for him. He had invented a new system of launching the glider from level ground, by towing it behind a powerful car using some 500 feet of steel cable. The glider could be pulled up steeply like a kite to a height of about 300 feet, then, releasing the cable, the pilot could make a couple of circuits around the airfield before landing. This was, of course, before the advent of the powered winch that revolutionised the whole technique of launching gliders.

The Master of Sempill (later Lord Sempill) was a keen and active airman. He had helped to found the National Flying Services, a group of flying schools whose main base was at the Hanworth Country Club on the western outskirts of London, where frequent garden parties and flying displays were organised to promote interest in the sport of flying. Sempill was a Founder Member of the London Gliding Club, later becoming President of the British Gliding Association, and he always liked to include a gliding event in the aerial programmes. Consequently, Lowe Wylde's little circus of car-towed gliders was often invited to perform at Hanworth. It was all great fun — Lowe Wylde's Bentley roaring along the airfield with Sempill galloping alongside on his white horse, and with the glider being pulled up behind in a steep climb.

In the spring of 1931, the *Daily Mail* offered a £1,000 prize for the first glider to cross the English Channel. This was intended as a stunt for the summer season, and they anticipated exciting news stories of gliders flopping into the sea with the pilots being rescued by their speedboats. In drawing up the rules for the competition, they omitted to specify the method of launching the gliders, and it occurred to me that if one could get an aeroplane tow up to 12,000 feet over England, there would be no difficulty in making a straight free glide across the Channel to France. I knew that the Germans had been towing gliders by aeroplane, but this had not yet been done in Britain.

I discussed this idea with my friend Ewen Wanliss, a fellow pilot in my Squadron, and he arranged an introduction to Barbara Cartland, a young and beautiful woman then on the threshold of her literary career. She was interested in the plan and agreed to sponsor it financially. We ordered a BAC VII from Lowe Wylde, his latest and most efficient glider — a two-seater development of his successful BAC IV. Sempill's engineers at Hanworth arranged to modify a Cirrus Moth for the towing, but they did not think of the obvious solution of towing from the tail skid and instead decided to tow from a quick release hook fitted on the wing centre section just above the pilot's head. To avoid the tow cable fouling the tail unit, they enclosed it in a long steel tube which had to be supported by a large cradle mounted above the rudder. All this weight on the tail of the aircraft altered its balance, and necessitated some 30 lbs of lead weights being fitted at the front of the engine bearers.

By mid-June 1931, just before the opening date of the Channel competition, all was ready. Lowe Wylde delivered the glider to Detling, a small private airfield near Maidstone, and the Cirrus Moth was flown in from Hanworth. The glider was beautifully finished in white with the letters 'BARBARA CARTLAND' boldly painted in bright red on both sides of the fuselage and right across the under surface of the wing. Wanliss climbed into the towplane which was hooked up to the glider by a long steel cable. I got into the glider and all was ready. Wanliss opened up the engine and we were off on the first aeroplane-towed glider flight in Britain.

The glider took off quickly, long before the towplane, and I held a position just above its slipstream. It was surprisingly easy. The towplane left the ground and, circling around the airfield, we climbed up very slowly. Wanliss tried everything he could to improve the climb but could not get above 6000 feet, which was quite inadequate to allow for a free glide across the Channel. The poor performance was, of course, due to all the extra weight the engineers had added to the towplane.

At twelve o'clock precisely on the following Saturday, when the cross-Channel competition officially opened, Robert Kronfeld took off in his glider at Boulogne towed by a Klemm aircraft, climbed to 12,000 feet and made a straight glide across the Channel, landing near Dover. He received the £1,000 prize, and the competition was over. We were greatly disappointed but Barbara Cartland took the news of our failure very sportingly, and suggested that as we had the equipment we might as well demonstrate aerial towing at air displays in England. She had faith in the future of this new development, and she was right — though she couldn't have known it at the time — when in World War II to come, thousands of military gliders were towed into various battle zones (see Appendix I).

Wanliss and I demonstrated the towing of the 'Barbara Cartland' successfully at various air displays, the lady herself sometimes flying with us. On our first flight together, to attend an air display at Reading aerodrome, Barbara Cartland carried a letter of greeting from the Mayor of Maidstone to the Mayor of Reading, thus inaugurating the first 'glider mail' as she described it. Our demonstrations aroused considerable interest and, in fact, resulted in the RAF experimenting with towed gliders the following year.

One unfortunate mishap occurred that July when we were invited to participate in the programme arranged for the official opening of the new Blackpool aerodrome. Barbara Cartland had arranged for a letter to be delivered by 'glider mail' from the Lord Mayor of London to the Mayor of Blackpool, which was carried by her agent, Ian Davison, in the glider. Arriving at Blackpool after a long towed flight from Hanworth, I released the tow, circled the airfield and landed right in front of the Mayoral stand where Ian Davison duly handed over his letter. Then the incident occurred. The towplane pilot, Geoffrey Tyson — later to become one of our most famous test pilots — came in to land trailing several hundred feet of steel tow cable which he had forgotten first to drop. The cable sliced right through the wing of a parked aircraft, like a wire through cheese, causing considerable consternation — especially to the unhappy owner of the aircraft!

A month later, I took the 'Barbara Cartland' to a gliding meeting at Ditchling Beacon, on a ridge of hills just behind Brighton. On the first day, slope soaring along a five-mile stretch of the ridge, I broke the British passenger glider record with it, and later that day broke the British duration record in the London Club's Professor sailplane — landing after dark by the light of car headlamps. The next day a gale blew, and on taking off from the top of the Beacon, the 'Barbara Cartland' was caught by a violent up-gust which turned it right over on to its back. For several agonised seconds I found myself flying upside down over the grass, then the glider crashed and was completely wrecked. I was uninjured, but desolate at the loss of the glider, which Miss Cartland generously accepted with good grace.

By next year, RAF interest in the air towing of gliders had crystallised, and they decided to introduce a glider event at the RAF Display at Hendon. Three BAC VIIs were purchased from Lowe Wylde, and I was selected to fly one of them. We were towed in Vee formation by RAF Moths and after release, we each landed correctly at our appointed spots. The event was a novelty and was considered a great success.

In July 1932, I was invited by Mr N. S. Norway (later to become famous as Nevil Shute, the author) to test the new 'Tern' sailplane that he had designed and which had just been built by his firm,

Airspeed Ltd, then in York. In order to publicise the glider, he wanted me to make a 24-hour duration flight in it, which would have been the world record at that time. I took four weeks leave and stayed with my old friend Wanliss, now based at Catterick Camp, where the local RAF officers volunteered to assist me.

The trials took place at Sutton Bank, a magnificent bowl of hills 1000 feet high and facing north-west; an ideal site which had first been flown the year before by Magersuppe, a German glider pilot in his Professor sailplane. The Tern was a beautiful sailplane but extremely heavy. To launch it off the deep heather at the top of Sutton Bank required eight men on each of the bungee ropes, but once in the air it soared easily. I carried out several flights around the Sutton Bank bowl, some of four or five hours' duration, but each time the wind dropped and I had to land.

One day the wind veered to the north with a good forecast for a 24-hour flight, so we moved the Tern to Ingleby Greenhow — another splendid hill site facing north. I had arranged for a dozen hurricane lamps to be placed around the edge of the ridge to enable me to locate it after dark. That evening, Wanliss and his group of volunteers launched me off and I cruised around the ridge happily for an hour or two. Then, as dusk came on, I looked anxiously for the lamps — but there was no sign of them. It grew dark and I could no longer see the ridge, so pulled off a blind landing on the deep heather at the top of it, fortunately without damage. Soon afterwards I saw the headlights of cars coming up the hill, and there arrived Wanliss and his merry men who had been down to the village pub for drinks, and had forgotten all about the hurricane lamps. Wanliss was deeply distressed: 'I am a Judas,' he proclaimed loudly!

A few days later we had a splendid forecast of a steady westerly wind likely to prevail for several days. We decided to fly the Tern at dawn the next morning, but on arriving at Sutton Bank had difficulty in raising enough crew to launch it. We stopped all cars on the road calling for volunteers, but after several wasted hours I decided to try a launch with only five men on each bungee. The Tern gained insufficient speed to take off properly, and sliding through the heather, it hit a concealed stump of an old fence which split the fuselage wide open. The record attempt was finally over.

I shall never forget poor Nevil Shute Norway's face as he viewed his wrecked glider. The Tern was his pride and joy, and was indeed the first and only aircraft so far built by his firm, Airspeed Ltd. In later years Airspeed prospered and moved to Christchurch in Hampshire, where they made hundreds of successful aircraft for the RAF, including the Oxford twin-engined trainer and the Horsa troop-carrying glider. Norway eventually forgave me and we remained good friends.

That September, Lowe Wylde invited me to West Malling aerodrome, near Maidstone, where he was experimenting with a BAC VII glider driven by a 600 cc Douglas motorcycle engine mounted above the wing and driving a pusher propeller. He called this the 'Planette', which he expected to market as the world's cheapest and most economical aeroplane. I flew the Planette for a short while and thought it had great possibilities, but its performance was very marginal as the experimental engine kept over-heating and it suffered from pre-ignition. Lowe Wylde went ahead with the Planette's development, but early the next year he was tragically killed in it. Poor Lowe Wylde! He was one of the great pioneers. He had lived for, and indeed died for, his devotion to gliding.

During 1933, while stationed at Henlow, I was able to put in a lot of gliding with the London Club at Dunstable, and had the privilege of testing out another new British glider, the 'Willow Wren'. This was a very pretty secondary sailplane designed and built by W. L. Manuel, an RAF engineer, who had managed to get it just right the first time. It flew beautifully and I was able to improve upon my British duration record with it. Soon afterwards, I was posted abroad and so ended my participation in the British gliding scene, though about two years later I was fortunate to obtain far more advanced gliding experience in Egypt (related in Chapter 11).

Before concluding these gliding reminiscences, I must pay tribute to my old friend, the late Mungo Buxton, who was also a founder member of the London Gliding Club (British certificate No. 5), and a colleague of mine in the RAF. Mungo was a tremendous enthusiast for gliding and he designed Britain's first high performance sailplane, the 'Hjordis'. This was built for him by Fred Slingsby, then a cabinet maker in Yorkshire, and was bought by Philip Wills who made his early record-breaking flights with it. Hjordis became the forerunner of the long line of world-beating gliders to be built in later years by Slingsby Sailplanes Ltd.

Mungo put up a remarkable flight in September 1934 during a gliding meeting at Sutton Bank. A large, black and ominous-looking thunderstorm was seen to be approaching and all competitors hastily started to picket down their gliders for security. All, that is, except Mungo, who got himself launched in his Scud II glider and headed straight for the thunderstorm. He was last seen circling beneath the cloud base before disappearing right up into it. Twenty minutes later he came out of the side of the storm at 8750 feet, which gained him the British height record at that time (officially 8,323 feet).

Mungo told me later that the base of the stormcloud was like a huge inverted saucer, and while circling underneath it, he found himself sucked right up into the very maw of the storm. He was now

flying in conditions of severe turbulence with heavy rain that seemed almost solid, and in darkness relieved only by frequent flashes of lightning with loud crashes of thunder all around him. Without any blind-flying instruments, he lost control and realised that the Scud was in a spin, but in the blind conditions he had no idea in which direction he was spinning. The up-current must have been so intense that the spinning glider was carried upwards, and after twenty minutes of this terrifying experience Mungo suddenly emerged out of the side of the storm into calm and clear air.

Although this flight gained him the British height record, he told me later on that it also gave him a lot of grey hair! It was the longest and loneliest twenty minutes of his life. Mungo Buxton was certainly one of the greats of the gliding world.

Reflecting over those early days of gliding, I feel rather sad to realise that due to the passing years, I am now probably the last of the original founder members of the London Gliding Club. We were pioneers and what we lacked in experience, we made up for in tremendous enthusiasm. During those first three years, with our primitive equipment and limited knowledge, we made no outstanding flights such as were later to be achieved by Philip Wills and other champions. Among these, I must pay special tribute to Lorne and Ann Welch, Geoffrey Stephenson, John Sproule, Kit Nicholson, Nick Goodhart, John Neilan and George Lee, whose devotion to gliding helped to put Britain ahead of the world in the sport. Gliding has now become a highly sophisticated and skilful art, and I can only hope that our early efforts may have contributed something towards its present-day development.



Henry Savage – Poet and author.

By Henry Savage's cottage on Winchelsea Beach. Henry Savage centre. Geoffrey de Havilland on right.





London Gliding Club's first gliders – the Zogling – at Ivinghoe Beacon. The author centre holding fuselage frame.

Gloster Gamecock. (Aeroplane Monthly).





The author being launched in Scud I glider.

Zogling glider being catapult launched at Dunstable. (Aeroplane Monthly).





The author being launched in 'Willow Wren' off Dunstable Downs.

Kronfeld being launched in his 'Wien' sailplane at Firle Beacon during 'Daily Express' glider meeting, May 1930. (R.Ae.S.).



Chapter 7

Halton

I arrived at Halton in July 1934 on conclusion of the engineering course at Henlow, and found the Officers Mess to be at Halton House, a palatial mansion formerly owned by Baron Rothschild, which he had given to the Government during World War I. At this mansion Baron Rothschild had entertained many famous guests, including King Edward VII and Lily Langtry. Inside was a large hall with a gallery around it, and an enormous chandelier suspended from the ceiling. The various reception rooms were lavishly decorated, some even with gold foil on their walls and ceilings. The mansion was surrounded by spacious grounds, splendidly landscaped, and containing stables in which our polo ponies were housed. This was indeed a stately home, and a most sumptuous place in which to live.

Halton was a very large station established for the training of aircraft apprentices, some four thousand of whom were accommodated in smart, modern barrack blocks. These lads were recruited at fifteen to seventeen years of age for a three-year course of training in various trades, and were given a first class technical and general education. Every form of sport was available for them at Halton, for which they received the maximum encouragement. Discipline was strict, and they were as smart and keen a bunch of lads that it would be possible to imagine.

It was rather unfortunate that on posting to various RAF stations after passing out from Halton, the enthusiasm of these bright young lads was frequently deflated by old sweats of Sergeants who resented the arrival of highly educated young aircraftmen. As one Sergeant Major said to me, 'Those Halton brats seem to think that the sun shines out of their arses'. He would then hand them out brooms and tell them to sweep out the hangar. Nevertheless, during World War II the ex-Halton apprentices became the backbone of the Air Force and their technical skill enabled our aircraft to be kept in the air.

My job at Halton was largely administrative, supervising the basic engineering training. When I reported to the Air Officer Commanding he told me, 'I don't expect my officers to work every afternoon. I want them to take an active part in organising sport for

the apprentices.' As my favourite sport was flying, this gave me a valuable excuse to spend most afternoons on the aerodrome where I arranged to give batches of apprentices short trips in the air. It was my aim to ensure that no apprentice would pass out from Halton without having had some opportunity to fly.

The Practice Flight on the aerodrome was equipped with a variety of aircraft to keep the pilots on the staff in flying trim. There were a number of Tiger Moths and Avro Tutors which I used for flying the apprentices, an old Atlas or two, and a Siskin single-seat fighter which became my special pet and with which I spent hours polishing up my aerobatics. With such unrestricted flying so readily available, I was never happier in my life.

One incident alone disturbed the harmony of my life at Halton. In order to keep fit, I often took a run around the aerodrome in the evenings before changing for dinner, and once while jogging gently along in the dark dressed in grey flannels and sweater, I noticed a car driving around the airfield with headlights on. The lights flashed past me, and then — Bang! Bang! — from a double-barrelled gun. I heard the shot swish past me on the grass, and threw myself down flat on my face. It appeared that our new Group Captain, recently returned from Iraq, had been in the habit of driving around the desert at night, setting up gazelle with his lights and shooting at them. He was trying the same sport at Halton and must have mistaken me for a hare — a rather large one though! I complained bitterly about this incident in the Mess, and next day some wit placed a notice on the board in the hall:

WARNING! THE CLOSE SEASON FOR FLIGHT LIEUTENANTS HAS NOW BEGUN.

Soon after my arrival at Halton, I met a new officer who had just returned to England after a two-year period of service in Iraq. His name was Mick and he proved to be the most cheerful companion, who became a close friend of mine and is indeed still so to this day. After two years in the desert without any female company, Mick was raring to go after the girls without wasting any further time. We spent many evenings together, hunting around the local towns of Wendover, Aylesbury and Luton, with considerable success. Mick was a tall, broad-shouldered, good-looking chap with twinkling eyes, and he seemed to attract girls like bees around a honey pot.

One Sunday afternoon, I paid my formal social call on the Air Officer Commanding's residence where one was expected to sign the visitor's book and leave two cards on a silver tray in the hall. On the tray I noticed a wallet left behind by a previous caller and opening it, I saw on one side Mick's visiting cards and on the other — unwrapped and 'ready for action' — an unmentionable rubber article. It so happened that Mick had been selected as the escort for the AOC's daughter at the forthcoming Officers Mess Ball, and I

can't imagine what her mother would have thought had the butler handed that wallet to her on the silver tray!

While swimming in the local reservoir at Tring one sunny afternoon, I had the luck to meet a gorgeous blonde who lived in a delightful thatched cottage nearby, and she invited me home for tea. Her name was Jennie, and it turned out that her husband worked in the City every day and poor Jennie was very lonely. She seemed pleased with my company and invited me to come to tea any day I could manage it. This was very pleasant until rather stupidly I introduced her to Mick and to one or two other single officers from Halton. She welcomed them all, and often at tea time two or three of us would be sitting there glaring at each other, until we all had to leave smartly at 6.30 p.m. when Jennie went off to the railway station to meet her husband.

One afternoon I flew the Siskin down to Winchelsea to have a look at my caravan there, and seeing some of my friends on the beach I gave a vigorous aerobatic display to entertain them. On the way back to Halton I was passing over Gerrards Cross when — Bang! Bang! Bang! — and the engine stopped. I had run out of fuel and must have used up far more than I expected while aerobating around Winchelsea Beach. I was over a heavily wooded area but spotted a long narrow field and got safely down on it, ending my landing run a few feet from a tree.

I called at an adjoining house where a rather surly caretaker reluctantly allowed me to use the 'phone. I got through to Mick who was then in charge of the Practice Flight, and explained the situation, asking him to bring out the fuel tanker so that I could fill up the Siskin and get it back to Halton. Mick replied: 'Sorry, old man, but I'm just going out to tea.' And I could guess where, too! I then told him that I was in a lovely country house with three beautiful daughters looking after me. 'Oh, alright then,' said Mick, 'I'll be with you in thirty minutes.' I got the Siskin filled up and back to Halton without the incident being discovered. Had it been stuck out there for the night, there would have been a Court of Enquiry and I would probably have received a severe reprimand, as running out of fuel in flight was a major crime in the RAF.

We were delighted when the Practice Flight was equipped with a Bristol Bulldog fighter which, with its more powerful 490 hp Bristol Jupiter engine, was a great improvement over the Siskin as regards aerobatics. This aircraft was the dual version of the single-seater Bulldog in which a rear cockpit had been introduced rather as an after-thought, with the seat so high that the pilot's head stuck out well above the fuselage. I made my first flight in it from the rear cockpit and, immediately after take-off, facing the full blast of the slipstream, my goggles blew straight off. It was quite a problem groping my way around the airfield in order to land.

Another embarrassing incident occurred when I put the Bulldog into a spin. I had heard that the dual version was a bit tricky in a spin, so went up to 12,000 feet before trying it. After two or three turns of a normal diving spin, the nose suddenly came up until the aircraft was almost horizontal and began to spin much faster. It was like a sycamore leaf. The elevator and rudder controls were completely ineffective and I was down to 5000 feet before I finally checked the spin by giving bursts of engine power so as to rock the aircraft over into a normal diving attitude. Now I knew what the old World War I pilots used to describe as 'being in a flat spin'.

One day the AOC 'phoned Mick at the Practice Flight and complained of a low-flying aircraft that had been buzzing around while the AOC and a party of the County gentry were holding a shoot nearby. The aircraft had scared away all the birds, the shoot was a failure and the AOC was furious. Unauthorised low flying was another major crime in the RAF and the AOC gave Mick the number of the offending aircraft and ordered him to investigate and report the pilot concerned.

Mick checked up on the Flight logs and found to his horror that he himself was the miscreant. He had been in the habit when carrying out air tests of his aircraft in the mornings, of circling low around Jennie's garden where she was apt to sunbathe in the nude. On that morning, he had been unaware that the AOC and all the County bigwigs were having a shoot nearby. Poor Mick! He was reprimanded and given one month's CC (Confined to Camp).

That was a dreadful month for Mick. He used to stalk up and down the ante-room like a caged tiger while we all went out on our evening jaunts. When we returned, we would regale him with tales (usually imaginary) of the girls we had met and of the fun we had had with them. At long last, the month's confinement was over and Mick was free once more. He had made a date that evening with his favourite girl to meet him in a pub at Luton, and was just about to slope off alone when we pointed out that the occasion called for a celebration. So we all joined him with his girl in the pub. Mick's girl was drinking a curious cocktail called a Green Goddess, and the party carried on cheerfully — round after round of drinks being consumed. Eventually Mick set off with his girl for his favourite spot on the Luton golf course, and we returned to camp. Very shortly afterwards, an extremely disgruntled Mick appeared. 'You bastards,' he growled. 'Filling my girl up with all that Green Goddess. No sooner had I got her into the car than she passed out cold!'

Mick got his own back on me later on. I had met a pretty, violet-eyed brunette called Valerie, who lived with her granny in Chelsea. On Saturday nights I would drive up to London and take Valerie out to supper and a dance, after which we would return to her home,

tiptoe past granny's room and into the warm cosiness of Valerie's bedroom. One Saturday night at Halton I had 'flu coming on and felt awful, but Valerie was not on the telephone and I couldn't let her know. I saw Mick setting out in his car for London and asked if he would mind calling on Valerie and explain the situation to her. Knowing that she would be all dressed up ready to go out, and not wishing to disappoint her, I suggested that he might like to take her out in my place.

To my surprise, he was back at Halton quite early that evening, and I asked him how he had got on. 'She was very nice,' he replied, 'and I took her out as you said.'

'What did you do?' I asked.

'Oh, I took her to a field I know near the Heston gasworks.'

'Good Lord!' I said, 'And what then?'

'It was lovely! She responded to me delightfully, but the ground was so muddy and she got into such a mess that I couldn't take her anywhere else. So I took her back home, and here I am.'

That ended my romance with Valerie. She never wanted to see me again!

Among our group at Halton was a very pleasant young officer called Woodley. He was a great sportsman and excelled at most games, but he was incredibly naive and gullible and we used to pull his leg unmercifully. One Saturday night while some of us were out on a party we sent him a telegram: 'You are posted forthwith to RAF Station Leuchars. Proceed there immediately. (Signed) Air Ministry'. For the reader's information, Leuchars was the most northerly RAF Station in Scotland, and a posting there was dreaded by everyone. On Monday morning after breakfast I saw an RAF tender being loaded up outside the Mess, and discovered it was for Woodley who had packed all his gear and was just about to depart for Leuchars. Thank God I was able to stop him in time!

On another occasion we placed some permanganate crystals in his chamber pot, so that when he used it that night the contents would be a dark crimson colour. Next morning at breakfast we asked him how he felt. He replied that he thought he had a touch of kidney trouble and was going to see the Station doctor about it. We briefed the doctor in advance, and he entered into the joke and said he would give Woodley some methylene blue tablets. 'That will make him pee royal blue,' said the doctor. Poor Woodley! He would not know if he was going to do it red, white or blue.

One day I received a 'phone call from Paddy Naismith, a famous girl pilot and parachutist, whom I had often met at various air displays. She was secretary to Sir Derwent Hall-Caine, a prominent Member of Parliament, and she wanted me to arrange permission for Sir Derwent to land his private plane at Halton and take some friends up in it. I fixed this up for him and in due course he arrived in

his Leopard Moth. Paddy Naismith came over by car bringing the friends, who were three ladies from a health farm at Champneys, near Tring, where they were taking the cure. To my surprise, they were in their night attire and dressing gowns, as their clothes had been removed to prevent them slipping out into the town and cheating on the frugal diet.

One of them was Lady Edmée Owen, who had just been released from a French prison where she had been sentenced to four years' solitary confinement for murder. Edmée had been a French actress and had married the aged Sir Harry Owen, who died shortly afterwards leaving her a large fortune. She took a lover, and on learning one day that he was upstairs in bed with another woman, she flew into a rage.

'I took a peestol', she told me, 'and I walked into ze room and I shot 'eem. But I missed 'eem and 'it 'er, and I killed 'er.' Had she killed her lover, it would probably have been treated as *crime passionnel*, but she could not be excused for killing the innocent girl. Since she was by marriage a British subject, Sir Derwent in his role as an M.P. had intervened, and obtained her release after two years.

Edmée was short and fat, and extremely volatile. We flew together in the back seat of Sir Derwent's aircraft, and every time the plane banked Edmée nervously clutched me at the top of my thighs, her long finger nails digging painfully into a tender part of my anatomy. When the flying was over, we all had tea in the mess and the three health cure patients simply dived for the cream cakes! After tea, some of the other officers joined us and Edmée was delighted. 'I veesh to be loving 'ostess to the Air Force,' she exclaimed.

Shortly afterwards, Edmée decided to hold a grand party to which all the RAF boys were invited. She asked me to arrange at her expense a liberal supply of food and drink, including several cases of her special champagne. The party was held in a cottage by the grounds of Champneys and was a tremendous success, most of the health farm inmates attending — all in their night attire. As most of them had not eaten much for days or even weeks, they passed out like flies and we RAF boys were kept busy carrying them out into the open air to revive them. Two well-known actresses had a fight and started pulling each other's hair. All in all, it was a memorable occasion.

When Edmée finished at the health farm, she rented a luxury furnished suite in Mayfair, which was open house every night for a party, and we were always welcome to drop in on her. Once, while passing through Shepherd Market on the way there, I was accosted by a flower seller who forced a bunch of violets on me. On arrival at Edmée's suite, feeling rather ridiculous holding a bunch of violets, I dumped them on the mantelpiece in the hall, and went on in.

Shortly afterwards, Edmée came over to me beaming with joy and said I had paid her the most beautiful compliment she had ever received. Apparently I had placed the violets beneath her mother's portrait!

Despite her wealth, Edmée was a lonely woman and she desperately needed a lover. Though we were extremely fond of her, her emotional intensity scared us all and none of us could face getting intimately involved with her. Eventually she found a lover while being shown around the Bethlem Mental Hospital, where she became interested in one of the patients — a parson who had been confined there on account of certain devious sexual tendencies. Somehow she got him released, and the last I heard of her was that they were living happily together in the country. So out of our lives went this colourful, dynamic and generous woman.

After the death of Lowe Wylde in 1933, Lord Sempill acquired his British Aircraft Company and set it up at Hanworth aerodrome. Kronfeld had come to England as a refugee from Hitler, and took over the management of the company. He continued with the development of the 'Planette' motor-glider, refining the structure and installing a more powerful engine — a 750 cc Douglas Sprite. The resulting aircraft was called the BAC Drone, and was completely successful.

I was invited to Hanworth to try out the Drone prototype, and found it great fun to fly. Upon opening the throttle, the little aircraft trundled gently over the grass and after a couple of hops or so, it left the ground at about 30 mph. In the air it cruised at 60 mph, using only one gallon of petrol per hour. Sitting in the glider cockpit with the engine and propeller above the wing and behind, one had a perfect view all around and could fly peacefully along with enjoyment. Moreover, there was the comforting feeling that in the event of engine failure, the Drone was simply a glider and could be landed safely in any small field.

On my first trip I flew the Drone to a gliding meeting at Ditchling Beacon near Brighton, flying low against the wind and following the main road. Cars were passing me but as they got stuck in traffic jams, I just sailed happily past them. On arrival at Ditchling, I switched off the engine and joined the gliders soaring over the hill slope. It was clear to me that the Drone provided an entirely new concept in fun flying.

Kronfeld asked me if I would like to demonstrate the Drone for him at various air displays that summer, and for convenience he allowed me to keep the aircraft at Halton. I flew it around a great deal in the months to follow and it always aroused great interest at air displays — a motor-glider then being a complete novelty. In June 1934, just before the T.T. motorcycle races were to take place in the Isle of Man, I thought it would be a good idea to take the Drone over

there. The Douglas Company had a motorbike team racing in the T.T., and they liked the idea of a Douglas-engined aircraft arriving during the races. Kronfeld agreed, as the flight would provide good publicity for the Drone.

I set off from Halton, and after refuelling at Blackpool airport, I climbed at full throttle for twenty minutes to a height of 3000 feet before setting off on the sixty-mile sea-crossing to the Isle of Man. Five minutes later, while over the sea, the engine started to vibrate badly and lost power, one of its two cylinders having cut out. I turned back immediately and headed for the shore, which looked an awful long way away. Losing height steadily, I just managed to scrape over the sand dunes and landed on a fairway of the Blackpool North Shore golf course.

A friendly garage mechanic came along and we discovered that the cause of the trouble was a 'cooked' sparking plug, which must have been overheated during my long climb at full power. A new sparking plug put the engine right again, but by then I had lost confidence and, thinking of that long, sixty miles of cold wet sea, I decided to return to Halton.

On the way back, passing Northampton, the engine failed again — the other cylinder cutting out. All the fields below were extremely small, and I chose one with long grass through which the Drone swished and came smoothly to a halt with practically no landing run. I got out, and standing there knee deep in the long grass realised there was no hope of taking off again from that field. Just then, I saw an extremely pretty girl approaching me. She had watched my unexpected arrival and came over to see if she could help. Her name was Diana, and she took me back to her home nearby so that I could use the 'phone and make arrangements. Her father, the local vicar, invited me to stay the night and this was the one and only occasion during numerous forced landings, that I received a friendly welcome by the beautiful daughter at a country house!

Next day, borrowing some tools from a local garage, I repaired the engine. Diana and I then dismantled the wings from the Drone and together we carried them to a long straight drive leading to Castle Ashby nearby, after which we wheeled the fuselage there and put the whole thing together again. I took off successfully down the drive, waving to Diana as I left. On the flight back to Halton I kept musing on what a wonderful wife she would make. Such a charming, attractive and kind-hearted girl, and so extremely capable! Unfortunately, I never saw her again.

After Kronfeld had carried out modifications to improve the engine cooling, I regained confidence in the Drone and suggested another long flight to publicise it — this time from London to Berlin non-stop, a flight of some 600 miles over flat country, which would have broken the world distance record at that time for the ultra light

aircraft class. Kronfeld was keen on the idea and we decided that an overload fuel tank of 15 gallons would be ample for the trip, and could easily be carried by the Drone. He started at once to prepare the aircraft for the flight, while I got on with the administrative arrangements. Then came a major disappointment — I received notification from the Air Ministry that I was required for immediate posting overseas, and was to report within seven days to the embarkation base.

Lord Sempill, Chairman of the British Aircraft Company, decided to carry on himself with the record-breaking project, and on 2 April 1936 he successfully flew the Drone on the 600 mile trip to Berlin in 11 hours non-stop. On arrival there, he was received officially by General Udet and Baron von Neurath, the German Foreign Minister. The record made news and gave the Drone much valuable publicity.

By that time, I was sweating it out in the baking hot Sudanese desert.

Chapter 8

The Sudan

My tour at Halton had been most enjoyable but suddenly ended in September 1935, when I was ordered at seven days' notice to proceed overseas on posting to an unknown destination. I reported to a base near Liverpool, where I was duly inoculated and issued with tropical kit, and then embarked on the S.S. *Cameronia* — an old passenger liner that had been taken from the scrap yard and hastily converted as a troopship. Aboard the *Cameronia* were the personnel of nine RAF squadrons with HQ staff and two maintenance units. The whole operation had been conducted in great secrecy and none of us knew where we were going, or for how long.

At that time Italy had invaded Abyssinia (now Ethiopia) from their bases in Eritrea — then an Italian colony. Anthony Eden, our Foreign Secretary, called for sanctions against Italy to stop this aggression, but Mussolini replied with the threat of war. To us ordinary chaps this threat seemed ludicrous — Britain had the most powerful navy in the world and we controlled the Mediterranean with bases at Gibraltar in the west, Alexandria in the east and Malta in the middle. We had military control of the Suez Canal, and the Italian army, heavily engaged in Abyssinia, would have been cut off from reinforcements and supplies by our closure of the Canal. Yet the politicians took Mussolini's threat seriously and the sanctions proposal was dropped. So began the series of political appeasements that eventually led to World War II.

In view of the threat of war with Italy, it was decided hurriedly to strengthen our rather meagre forces in the British-controlled countries around the area. Bomber and fighter squadrons were to be sent to the Sudan and to Aden, and also to the western desert of Egypt against possible invasion from the Italian colony of Libya. Hence our presence on the *Cameronia*. As our aircraft in those days had insufficient range to be flown out, they also had to be shipped out and were delivered in separate ships, crated for assembly on arrival.

The *Cameronia*, grossly overcrowded with some two thousand RAF personnel, left Liverpool for the Mediterranean where for security it sailed a zigzag course until reaching Alexandria two

weeks later. Here, the personnel of three squadrons were disembarked for the Western Desert, and the ship went on through the Suez Canal to Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

By this time I had learnt that I had been allocated to an Aircraft Park established to undertake repairs and maintenance in support of our operational squadrons in the Sudan, and to hold a pool of aircraft and aero engines in reserve for them. The personnel of two Fairey Gordon bomber squadrons and one Bulldog fighter squadron, together with my little unit, were off-loaded at Port Sudan into stifling heat with over 90 per cent humidity. After a twenty-four hour railway journey in considerable discomfort we arrived at a tented camp with no facilities of any sort, situated in flat, sandy desert that stretched so far as the eye could see, the horizon all around shimmering with heat. This seemed to be hell on earth, and here we remained for several days with nothing to do, and wondering — what next?

Suddenly, to our great relief, the unit was ordered to move to Atbara, a pleasant little town on the banks of the Nile, which was the headquarters and main base of the British-run Sudan Railways. We set up our maintenance unit in their engineering workshops, which provided all the facilities that we needed. The British community welcomed us and we were housed in comfort. Though the climate was extremely hot, it was a dry heat and quite tolerable — there was not a cloud to be seen in the sky for months to come.

Our little unit consisted of seven officers and about sixty other ranks, with a Squadron Leader in command. My fellow engineering officer, Robert Todd, was an old friend of mine from Henlow days and we were able to work closely and harmoniously together. There were two equipment officers responsible for the stores and supplies, a young administrative officer and the doctor.

After a couple of weeks or so, the aircraft crates began to arrive by rail, having been shipped to Port Sudan. Ample supplies of spare parts and general stores were delivered, but none of the special tools and handling equipment that we needed for assembling the aircraft. However, we improvised these with the help of the Sudan Railways workshops, and we were able to assemble three or four aircraft a week. Todd and I carried out air tests on the newly assembled Gordons, but the Bulldogs were delayed as we could not fit their propellers without a special tool which could not be improvised.

The whole region around Atbara was a natural landing ground, consisting of flat, hard sand desert. We set up our aerodrome by simply fencing off a suitable area outside the town, on which we parked the aircraft. Refuelling was carried out by means of four-gallon cans of petrol which we stored in huge dumps, and carefully guarded against almost constant pilfering. Empty petrol cans were discarded, and they started a new local industry by being converted into household goods much desired by the Sudanese.

Life at Atbara in the winter was very pleasant. The British staff of the Sudan Railways lived with their families in comfortable houses, many of which were on the banks of the Nile and had wonderful gardens — thanks to the fertility of the riverside soil. They were very hospitable and frequently invited us to their homes for drinks or dinner parties. There were two British clubs, the senior one for executives above a certain salary level, and a junior one for the rest. We officers, despite our low salary levels, were made honorary members of the senior club but much preferred the junior one as there was more life there, and the ladies were younger. It amused us to note that when a member of the Sudan Railways staff was promoted to the salary level of the senior club, he had to leave all his friends behind in the junior club and join the senior one, where no-one would want to know him for the first year or two.

Once we had got all our aircraft assembled and stores organised, there was little for us to do. We started work at dawn each day, finishing off at 11 a.m. when it got too hot for comfort, and we would then go along to the swimming pool where the wives of the Sudan Railways staff congregated. Probably because we were strange faces in their midst, we were made extremely welcome, and often one or other of the wives would invite us home for a coffee after the swim. Their husbands worked until 2 p.m. which was very convenient. We had a theory that in the heat of the Sudan, the husbands were permanently over-tired, and the wives appreciated the arrival of fresh young single men to brighten up their lives. One incident amused us — ‘Woodie’, a large young army officer who had been on some ceremonial parade that morning, had to make a hurried exit out of a bedroom window dressed in full uniform complete with sword, when the husband came home unexpectedly early!

One of the favourite sports at Atbara was riding. Todd and I bought an Arab pony for £8, which was looked after and fed by its ‘syce’ (stable boy) for thirty shillings a week. I was not an experienced rider and the pony had not been properly schooled, so that I suffered more than a dozen falls before I managed to control the brute. It had only two speeds — dead slow while walking out of the camp, then full gallop immediately we entered the open desert. After a few minutes of the gallop, its ears would go flat back, then it would lower its head and swing suddenly to one side. Off I would come, clutching on to the reins otherwise I would have had to walk back to camp. After throwing me, the brute would turn round, look at me lying on the ground and then laugh in my face, showing its horrible yellow teeth.

One of the Sudan Railways staff, who was a keep-fit enthusiast, used to ride out into the desert, dismount and remove all his clothes. He would then go galloping around in the nude, a splendid, sun-

tanned figure with his blond hair flowing in the breeze. Unfortunately, on one occasion some Arab stole his clothes, and the poor chap had to ride back to town without them.

After a couple of months we received the special spanners necessary to fit the propellers on to the Bulldogs, and I tested out the first one. I was overjoyed to be flying a fighter again, and gave a vigorous display of aerobatics over Atbara. Shortly afterwards I was sent for by the District Commissioner and thought I was to be reprimanded. Instead, he congratulated me and said that aerobatics had never before been seen by the Sudanese, and that my flight had raised their moral. They were now convinced that Britain had sent out their latest modern equipment, and seriously intended to support them against the feared Italian invasion!

The District Commissioner was a remarkable man. About forty years old, he controlled an area as large as England. His fair-minded judgement was widely respected by the local Chiefs, who used to bring their disputes to him for settlement. I know that it is the custom today to decry British colonialism of the past, but the Sudan was a fine example of British rule at its best.

Previously the Sudan was a primitive country torn by constant tribal wars, and slavery of the black inhabitants was rife. Under British rule, schools and hospitals were built, railways and roads constructed, and a Civil Service established which was run by Sudanese staff under British supervision. Order was maintained by the Sudan Defence Force, a mobile police force manned by Sudanese trained by the British. Only a minimal British military presence was necessary for a country the size of Europe — this consisting of one Army battalion and one squadron of the RAF. During some sixty years of British occupation, the Sudan experienced a period of peace and prosperity such as it had never before enjoyed.

Todd and I got in very little flying, although we managed an occasional delivery flight of new aircraft to the squadrons that were based nearer to the Abyssinian frontier. Their role, other than routine training, was to patrol the border and look out for raiding parties that used to come over to capture the Sudanese as slaves. In the event of war developing with Italy, the operational plan was to bomb Massawa, the main port of entry for Italian reinforcements and supplies. Unfortunately, it was found that our Gordon bombers did not have enough range to reach Massawa and return again, so that large dumps of fuel and bombs were buried at Aquiq, a landing strip close to the Eritrean frontier, and on Bahdur Island just offshore in the Red Sea, at which our bombers *en route* to Massawa were to land, refuel and bomb-up. When the crisis was over, a party was sent out to recover these stores but found that the petrol cans had corroded and all the fuel evaporated. The ground in which the

bombs had been buried, had set like concrete and they could not be dug up. So far as I know, those bombs are still there to this day.

In February 1936, I was sent for three months' temporary duty to Aboukir, the main RAF maintenance base in Egypt, where they were experiencing excessive pressure of work. The 1400 mile journey was made first by train to Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian frontier, then a glorious two and half days by Nile river boat past the temples of Abu Simbel to Aswan, and finally by train to Cairo. Aboukir was situated on the Mediterranean coast about twelve miles east of Alexandria and was certainly the most delightful of all RAF stations, having wonderful beaches with superb swimming and sailing facilities, and with the flesh-pots of Alexandria not far away.

I was attached to the Engine Repair Section to help out with the overhaul of large numbers of Rolls-Royce Kestrel engines that were being returned as unserviceable from our squadrons in the Western Desert. To study the cause, I flew over to Mersa Matruh where our aircraft (Hawker Harts and Furies) were based, and found the whole area to be a sea of fine, white sand which blew up in clouds as the aircraft taxied. The sand got sucked into the engines, which had no air filters fitted, and the resulting rapid wear of pistons and cylinders caused so much loss of compression that it was impossible to start up the engines after only forty hours or so of operation.

At Aboukir, we fitted new pistons and cylinders to the engines, and rigged up air filters for use on the aircraft. This episode provided a valuable lesson which paid dividends subsequently during World War II when far greater numbers of our aircraft were to operate from the Western Desert.

The following May, I reluctantly journeyed back to Atbara, where I found conditions to be completely changed. It was now extremely hot with daily temperatures always reaching 111°F, and once as high as 123° in the shade. All the wives and families had returned home to Britain to escape the long hot summer, and half the male staff of the Sudan Railways had gone home for their annual three months' leave. The remaining half were utterly depressed, and mostly were drunk every evening. There was now no social life at all — just heat, dust and boredom.

To overcome the restlessness of our men in the absence of any women, a brothel which had been run by a Greek was taken over for their benefit. There were about half a dozen girls, all Abyssinians, who had come over to Atbara to earn money needed for their dowries so that they could go home and get married. Our doctor checked up on the girls regularly, and they were warned that if they were caught offering their favours elsewhere, they would be instantly dismissed.

The brothel was, of course, out of bounds to officers but was available to other ranks at the very reasonable charge of ten piastres

a time (10p in our money). The establishment was subsidised by our Station Sports Fund, there being few other sports on which to spend the money. All went very well with this enterprise, which was popular and served a useful purpose, until the Governor's wife in Khartoum heard about it and had it closed down.

Our Gordon aircraft had also suffered from the ingress of sand into their engines, but the Panthers stood up to it better than the Kestrels and the aircraft remained operational. However, their consumption of oil became so heavy that the aircraft had to be restricted to two hours duration of flight through limitation of oil tank capacity. Consequently, all flying by the squadrons had to be cut to the minimum and morale was low.

Soon after my return to Atbara, one of the squadron's Gordons crashed in the desert about ninety miles away. Todd flew off in one of our newly delivered Vickers Vincents, to view the scene of the accident, taking with him our Commanding Officer and two aircraftmen. Very sadly, while circling around the wrecked Gordon, he must have stalled the Vincent which spun into the ground, killing all four of them. This was a major disaster for our little unit and shocked us all, especially as the CO, Squadron Leader Catchpole, was well liked and greatly respected by every one of us.

As the senior officer remaining, I had to take command and sent transport out into the desert to collect the bodies, and made arrangements for the funeral at Atbara. When the bodies arrived back after four days out in the heat, they were unrecognisable and our doctor insisted upon their burial at dawn the next morning. An RAF padre had been flown up from Khartoum for the service, but at the last moment someone pointed out that one of the aircraftmen was a Roman Catholic. Luckily we found a black priest in the native village nearby, and he asked me which of the dead men was the Catholic. In my distress, I just pointed out one of the coffins at random, and that one was given a separate Catholic burial service. However, I don't suppose it made much difference one way or the other.

We had a brave funeral, a Company of the Royal Sussex Regiment providing full military honours, and all the Sudan Railways staff attended. It was an extremely sad occasion for me, as Robert Todd had been such a close friend and I was going to miss his cheerful company very greatly indeed.

By now the Italians had completed their conquest of Abyssinia, where they remained until we threw them out a few years later in World War II. The crisis was now over, but none of us knew why we were being kept out there, or when we would get home again. With flying being severely restricted, there was very little work for us to do and boredom set in. With the continual heat and dust, the moral of all ranks became low, the monotony causing some of the men to

behave very oddly. One aircraftman started to wander around the camp reading the Bible aloud all day long — we sent him off to Khartoum for examination, and he was invalided home. Another aircraftman deserted camp and started to walk along the railway line towards Cairo, about 1400 miles away. He was lucky that we picked him up after some twenty miles, otherwise he would have been dead.

One day after lunch I went out of the Mess into an oven-like temperature of about 120°F. There I saw our doctor sitting naked on a wall in the full glare of the sun. 'What on earth are you doing, Doc?' I enquired. 'Trying to keep warm,' he groaned. I sent a signal to Air HQ at Khartoum asking them to send us a doctor to examine ours. As the result of this, our doctor was invalided home.

One day the monotony was relieved for me. It was my turn to drive the van to the railway junction to collect the mail from the Khartoum train. We always looked forward to this task, as it gave us the opportunity of having a cold drink in the dining car and of chatting with the passengers. To my astonishment, stepping out of the train I saw an attractive girl, the first I'd seen for months, and I asked her what on earth she was doing in a place like Atbara. It turned out she was a nurse from the General Hospital at Khartoum, and had been sent to help out in the nearby native village where they had a plague of some sort. I gave her a lift to the village, and made a date with her for that evening.

I kept the news of this girl's arrival very much to myself, and that evening took her to supper at a mango plantation down on the banks of the Nile. She was lonely and we had a wonderful time together, lying on the grass beneath the stars and under the big African moon. Oh God! I needed affection so badly and so, it seemed, did she. For several evenings I had her to myself, but then the news of her arrival leaked out and I got lost in the rush!

In September, the wet season started and torrential rain turned the whole area into a sea of grey mud. Tropical storms, known as Habboubs, brought great clouds of black dust up from the cotton-growing soil of the south, which got into our eyes, noses and throats, and into our clothes and the food. The sudden humidity combined with the heat caused us to sweat profusely and we all developed prickly heat — a most uncomfortable skin rash which made sleep almost impossible. The morale of our whole unit had reached an all-time low, when suddenly we received a week's notice to pack up and proceed to Port Sudan for shipment home. The men went wild with delight.

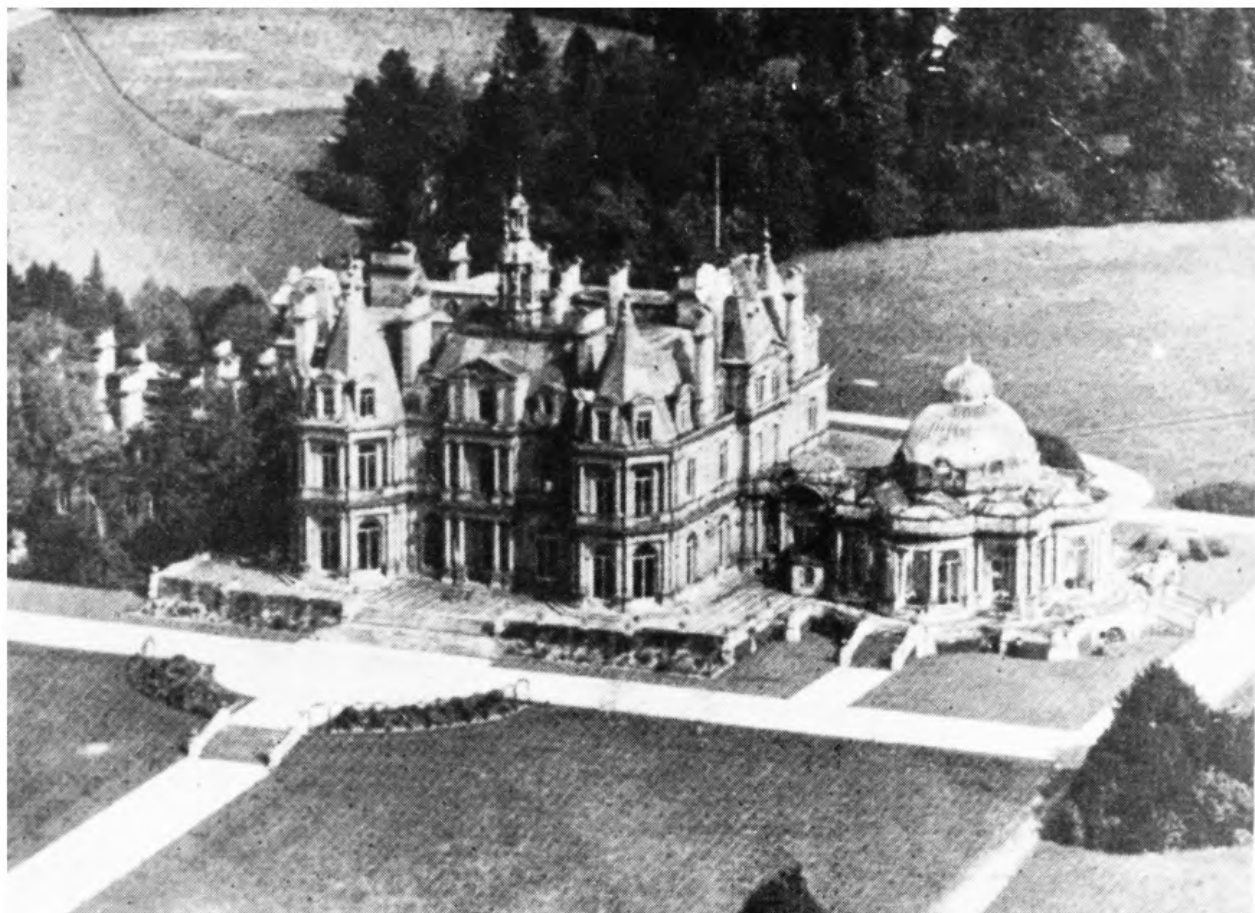
I had about £200 left in the unit funds and did not see the point of returning this money to the Air Ministry. So I sent for my Warrant Officer and told him to blow the whole lot on a big farewell party for the men. The party took place on the train to Port Sudan, and certainly enlivened that long journey!



Author being given mascot by Barbara Cartland.

Author being briefed by Kronfeld prior to first flight in the 'Drone'.





Halton House.

Siskin fighter. (Flight International)





*Sqn. Ldr. Catchpole, Officer Commanding
(killed in crash with Todd).*

Bristol Bulldogs Mark II A. (RAF Museum).





Flt. Lieut. Robert Todd by Vincent aircraft prior to his fatal crash in May 1936 near Atbara, Sudan, with Sqn. Ldr. Catchpole (our C.O.) and two aircraftmen.

The wing-tip season at Abu Sueir. Hawker Audax.



On the ship, we joined the personnel of our squadrons and the homeward-bound reinforcements from Aden. Everyone was excited at the thought of going home after twelve months' absence, to rejoin our families and friends. The ship stopped for a while at Suez, where a signal was received from the RAF HQ in Cairo: 'Flight Lieutenant Edward Mole to disembark and proceed forthwith to RAF Depot, Aboukir, on posting.'

Out of all those happy home-goers abroad, it had to be me!

Chapter 9

Aboukir

Bitterly disappointed at not being able to return home to England, I reported to RAF Depot, Aboukir, where the Commanding Officer welcomed me and indicated that it was he who had requested my posting there. It was some consolation to realise that I must have done a good job during my three months' temporary duty there earlier in the year, and that they wanted me back again. In the cooler Mediterranean climate, my prickly heat quickly disappeared and the sea-bathing and good food soon put me into good physical shape again. Aboukir was really a delightful station and I settled down happily there. The Officers Mess was comfortable, and my room looked out over a palm tree plantation to a white, sandy beach fringing the blue Mediterranean about half a mile away.

Now that the Abyssinian crisis was over, the pressure of work at the Depot had eased and life was very pleasant. Working hours were from six in the mornings until one o'clock, followed by lunch and a siesta. The afternoons were spent swimming from the superb beaches, and sailing, followed by tea and drinks with the officers' families in their beach huts. Most of the officers were married, and there was plenty of social life with frequent parties.

Our work now consisted of salvaging the aircraft and stores left behind by the reinforcement squadrons, but sadly most of the aircraft, including all the Bulldogs, had to be scrapped as being beyond economical repair. We set up an overhaul production line for those aircraft that we were able to retrieve, and that kept me busy for months. I had plenty of opportunity to fly, and often flew up to the RAF station at Heliopolis for weekends in Cairo.

At Aboukir I was glad to meet an old friend of mine from Halton days, named Walter, and for a while we were the only two single officers on the station. Walter seemed to have got himself very well established in the night life of Alexandria, some twelve miles away, and knew the proprietors of the night-clubs personally. He occasionally invited them out (with selected hostesses) to Aboukir for sailing parties and picnics, with the result that when we visited a night club, the proprietor would welcome us and instruct the waiter: 'Prix spécial pour ces messieurs'. So we had cheap drinks, and also first-hand advice from the proprietor as to the situation with regard to any of the girls.

The dance hostesses were most attractive, usually Hungarian or Greek, and were expected for a fee to sit at tables and entertain the customers. They would order 'Champagne Coupe', the most expensive drink, but would be served with ginger ale so that they would get a bigger cut from the order. Most of them would go home with a favoured customer after the floor show, but they were very expensive. However, the girls that Walter and I had entertained at Aboukir, accepted us as friends and made no suggestion as to charging us for their company.

Poor Walter met his fate when he fell in love with a night-club hostess called Eva. She was an attractive Hungarian dancer who worked in a club that was not only out of bounds to officers, but also to all other ranks. Walter applied for permission to marry her, but this was refused by the Air Officer Commanding after an investigation had been made into the girl's background. To overcome this setback, Walter went on leave to Budapest taking Eva with him, and there he married her.

On his return to Aboukir with his little wife proudly on his arm, the AOC was furious. Walter was posted immediately to an RAF station in Iraq where no women were permitted, and there he sweated it out — sending Eva his monthly pay cheques. He asked me to keep in touch with her in case she was lonely without him, but from what I saw of her she seemed to have plenty of gentlemen friends, and was far from lonely!

From time to time that summer, a Vickers Valentia troop carrier used to fly over from Iraq with a load of RAF personnel intending to spend their local leave in Egypt, away from the heat and boredom of the desert. The officers usually stayed in our Mess, and not having seen a woman for many months, they would be raring to go into Alexandria. I often took a group of them with me for an escorted tour of the night clubs, but warned them not to rush at the girls too early as they were on contract and could not leave the clubs until 4 a.m. I would take them first for drinks and dinner at the Cecil Hotel, then at about 11 p.m. in order to fill in time, I would suggest that we all went to a movie. 'What!' they would cry, 'Waste time in a movie? Let's get after the girls!' So they would rush to the night-clubs, start drinking and buying the girls expensive champagne coupes, and by about 2 a.m. they would probably have passed out. Within a week these boys had usually spent all their money and achieved nothing. If only they had listened to my advice!

One incident involving a Valentia flight from Iraq, amused us all. There was to be a big RAF display at Heliopolis aerodrome, at which the Egyptian King and all top Government officials would be present. As an item on the programme, it was planned that two Valentias should be flown in bringing a company of Iraqi Levies who, on arrival, would disembark, form up smartly and present

arms in salute to the King. This was intended to impress the King and Egyptian officials that Britain could now reinforce Egypt at short notice from our forces elsewhere.

The *Valentia* carried twenty-two armed troops, and cruised at only 90 mph. Not being pressurised, it had to be flown relatively low, and the turbulent air over the baking hot desert caused it to heave and roll about most uncomfortably. After an eight-hour trip, the two *Valentias* landed on time at Heliopolis and taxied to a halt in front of the Royal Stand.

There was a long delay, and nothing seemed to happen. Then, one of the passenger doors slowly opened and a very dishevelled Iraqi soldier, green in the face, climbed out and lay flat on his back on the ground. The demonstration was not a success!

Once we had a flight of Fleet Air Arm Blackburn Sharks temporarily stationed with us, and one of their pilots — Lieutenant de Courcy Ireland, a Royal Marines officer — invited me to accompany him for a trip out to the aircraft carrier *Glorious*. I sat in the open rear cockpit, dressed only in shorts and an open-neck shirt, and we went straight up to 12,000 feet where I nearly froze. After about an hour we sighted *Glorious* somewhere out at sea, looking minute in the vast expanse of ocean. De Courcy Ireland promptly carried out a dive-bombing attack from out of the sun, followed by several mock torpedo attacks. Then, after a rather boisterous approach over the stern, he made a nice wheel landing on the deck. Carriers in those days did not have arrestor wires, and after we touched down, half a dozen stalwart characters grabbed the wings to stop us swinging over the side.

In the wardroom later on, over a gin before lunch, de Courcy Ireland said: 'Congratulate me, old boy.' 'For why?' I asked.

'Because that's the first landing I have ever made with a Shark on a carrier!'

One day an old friend, Pat Kirwan, whom I had first met at Henry Savage's cottage at Winchelsea, arrived at Alexandria. Pat was a film script writer and had come over with a troopship to gain material for a film he was writing which was to be produced by Alexander Korda. He stayed with me for a few days and when I saw him off on his return flight to England, I recognised the Captain of his aircraft as my old flying instructor at Digby. I introduced Pat, and to make polite conversation Pat said to him: 'I hear you taught Edward to fly. I understand he is a very good pilot.'

'Well, he ought to be,' replied the Captain rather gloomily. 'He must be the only one of my pupils still left alive!'

During my frequent trips to Cairo, I used to stay in the Officers Mess at Heliopolis where I made many friends. Based at Heliopolis was No. 216 Squadron equipped with Vickers *Valentia* transports (twin 650 hp Bristol Pegasus engines), which were used for long

range communications and troop movements. In those days, Britain controlled all the countries on the African route to South Africa, and on the route to India and the Far East over Arabia, Iraq and the Persian Gulf. Number 216 Squadron had the interesting job of flying these routes.

I had by now done over four years on engineering duties, and was due to return to flying again. Hearing that there was to be a vacancy for a Flight Commander in No. 216 Squadron, I went to see the CO and applied for the appointment. To my delight, he accepted me and my posting was arranged for the following October. I was duly checked out as pilot-in-command on Valentias, and then granted two months' home leave.

I flew home by Imperial Airways in one of their superb Empire Flying Boats. This was luxury air travel at its very best — not quick but extremely comfortable, with stops at interesting places *en route*. The cabin was very roomy and there was a promenade deck on which the passengers were able to wander about, not being confined like cattle as today. We went from Alexandria to Athens, Brindisi and Rome where we were put up for the night, thence to Marseilles, Macon (landing on the river) and Southampton. At Southampton, we were disembarked straight into a special train to London, on which immigration and customs formalities were carried out.

Imperial Airways (later to become BOAC and then British Airways) operated these flying boats on regular services along the Empire routes to South Africa and India, and onwards to Singapore and Australia, landing on lakes and rivers, and even in harbours as at Alexandria. Their take-offs and landings thrilled the passengers, the great boat streaking across the water with a flurry of foam and spray. Imperial Airways' operations were a magnificent achievement and put Britain ahead of the world in air transport, but sadly after World War II these wonderful flying boats had to be dropped as they proved quite uneconomic against post-war landplanes.

Back in England that summer, I spent most of the leave in my caravan at Winchelsea Beach. After nearly two years in hot, sandy countries, it was such a joy once again to see the green stretches of the Romney Marshes dotted with white sheep, to visit the pretty Sussex villages and to drink with the locals in their friendly country pubs. My old friend, Henry Savage the poet, was as usual host to an amusing collection of authors, journalists and artists, who descended upon his rambling old cottage nearby to escape the dusty, summer heat of London, and I found their company most entertaining. There was plenty of attractive young female company around, and the free and easy life in my caravan by the beach made a welcome change to the routine existence at an RAF station.

Alas! the time came only too soon for me to return to Egypt.

Being by then nearly broke, I went back the cheapest possible way — third class ‘hard arse’ by train to Venice for £3, and then a deck passage on an Italian cargo ship to Alexandria. This ship, the SS *Foscari*, called *en route* at Bari, Brindisi, Corfu, Athens and Rhodes, and the trip was marvellous value for just £8.

Chapter 10

Abu Sueir

Upon my arrival back in Egypt, I was bitterly disappointed to learn that my posting to 216 Squadron had been cancelled as the Chief Engineer Officer at RAF Abu Sueir had been invalided home and I had to fill the vacancy. This meant promotion to the rank of Squadron Leader, but I would much rather have been a Flight Commander with 216 Squadron.

I reported to Abu Sueir in October 1937, and took over the Chief Engineer's post. The Station was a Flying Training School, similar in many ways to Digby where I had learnt to fly, but established to train pilots under desert flying conditions for future service in the Middle East, Iraq and India. Abu Sueir was located in flat, open desert about twelve miles from Ismailia on the Suez Canal, and was equipped with Avro Tutors for primary instruction, and Hawker Audax day bombers for service training. There were about fifty young pupils, who regularly tipped their aircraft over and kept my engineering workshops very busy!

The station was reasonably comfortable, and despite its isolation in the desert it had good recreational facilities. The main sport was sand yachting; the hard, flat desert was ideal for this purpose. The yachts were constructed by the men themselves, largely from disused aircraft parts, and I gave them all possible assistance in the workshops. They ran on aircraft wheels, the front pair having a very wide track for stability, and with a steerable wheel at the stern functioning as a rudder. There was no drift as with boats on water, and these yachts could sail astonishingly close to the wind, reaching speeds of 40 mph or more.

Our water supply was provided by the 'Sweet Water Canal', dug for some seventy miles from the Nile near Cairo. Once this canal was in operation a sort of ribbon development occurred, Egyptians setting up home all along its banks, using the canal to water their oxen and cattle, and for their own toilet purposes. When the water reached us, it was a dark brown colour and smelt atrociously — but somehow the filtration experts purified it and assured us that it was fit to drink.

The nearest civilisation was Ismailia, a delightful town on the Suez Canal and the headquarters of the French-run Suez Canal

Company. Here, the French families lived in lovely homes, situated in flower-bordered boulevards, and in considerable luxury. The town was out of bounds to the pupil pilots, but we staff were frequently invited to soirées (sort of cocktail parties) by the French families who were extremely hospitable.

I met a number of attractive young French girls, and as President of our Officers Mess, I thought it would be a good idea to return hospitality by holding a mess dance and inviting the girls along. This was duly arranged and about twenty of the girls accepted our invitation. To my horror, they all arrived with their mothers or aunts as chaperones, and we staff found ourselves lumbered with these while the pupils had the whale of a good time with the girls.

This chaperone business was an infernal nuisance but was rigidly enforced. It was impossible for a single man to take a girl out alone unless he was engaged to her. We eventually solved the problem by joining the Yacht Club, and inviting the girls to come for a sail with us. They would arrive at the Club with their mums and aunts, who would look doubtfully at the little boat we provided, and then sit and wait on the jetty. We could then sail happily away with the girls free from any further interference.

Whilst Abu Sueir was a happy Station with an excellent community spirit, I was glad to be able to break the monotony of desert life occasionally by flying to Cairo on weekend leave, staying in the R.A.F. Mess at Heliopolis. Saturday nights in Cairo were great fun. With a bunch of young officers, we would wander around our favourite bars, have dinner together and then go on to a night club. After the floor show was over, we would often resort to Madame Karoff's to meet the girls.

Madame Crackoff (as we called her) ran an exclusive house employing about a dozen attractive girls of various sizes, shapes and colour. She was a plump, friendly woman who looked after her girls rather like a mother hen with her chicks, and they all adored her. She was proud of her girls, and she particularly liked and welcomed the R.A.F. boys. Upon arrival at Madame Crackoff's we would assemble in the reception lounge, and the girls would be called in. Champagne would flow. Soft music would be playing and you could either dance with the girl of your choice, or just sit with her on your lap. They were surprisingly demure and the atmosphere was almost decorous.

One day, Madame Crackoff moved her establishment to new premises close to the Officers Mess at Heliopolis. Being fond of the R.A.F., she managed to get hold of a copy of the officers' address book and sent them all a formal invitation to a party on her opening night. Unfortunately, this book contained only the names of married officers who lived with their families out of Mess. As can be imagined, there were some very red faces amongst them and the wives were not amused.

Our Station Commander, Group Captain G. S. M. Insall, VC, MC, was a keen archaeologist, and made frequent trips into the Sinai desert in a Tutor aircraft, looking for signs of early habitation. From above, the pattern of an old settlement could clearly be seen on the desert sand, and on sighting one, Insall would land nearby and dig for objects. This used to worry the Chief Flying Instructor because if anything happened to Insall and he did not arrive back, a search and rescue party would have to be staged to find him. Consequently, the CFI always asked me, as a spare pilot not involved in his flying programme, to go along with the 'old man' in another Tutor, and ensure that he was alright and would return to camp on time.

Insall and I used to go off in two Tutors laden with spades and pick axes, and with emergency rations and ample water supply. When he saw an interesting site, he would waggle his wings and down he would go, landing nearby. I would follow him down, and then full of excitement he would start to dig violently. I had also to dig — back-breaking work under the hot, desert sun — but never found anything of interest except once, when I turned up what looked like an old blue china teapot. 'Good Lord!' I said. 'Someone's been picnicking here.' I was just about to throw the thing away, when Insall grabbed it with a cry of joy — it appeared that it was an old lamp of enormous interest to him, and it became the pride of his collection.

Insall got used to having me as his escort, and took me on other expeditions. Once we flew down to Ras Muhammed, a completely isolated spot on the tip of the Akaba peninsula in the Red Sea. He had arranged for a native felucca to be sailed over from Suez to meet us there, and we had several days of the most exciting fishing. We camped out at night on the beach, cooking our fish on a portable stove and sharing our meals with the boatmen. I shall never forget the most gloriously coloured coral reef with myriads of fantastic tropical fish swimming around within it.

On another occasion, Insall decided to visit his friends at the RAF HQ in Baghdad. We set off together in two Audax aircraft to make the long trip across the featureless Arabian desert. There were no radio navigation aids in those days, but all we had to do was to find and follow the oil pipe line which ran straight as a die for hundreds of miles. We took with us all necessary desert flying equipment — emergency rations, water bottles, first aid kits — and Ghoolie Chits.

Now, the Ghoolie Chit was a most important item for us pilots. The RAF presence in Iraq was to keep the peace, and prevent continual fighting between rival tribes. When fighting started somewhere, the aggressor tribe was told to stop it; if they did not, they were given due warning that their villages would be bombed. A few villages destroyed always brought about the desired result with the minimum loss of life. The tribesmen concerned, however,

resented this interference in their affairs by the RAF, and any unfortunate pilot who happened to come down in the desert was liable, if caught, to be tortured and mutilated. Castration, at the very least, was almost certain, and this would be done with a rusty knife or a piece of broken glass, or worse still by beating between two stones. The Ghoolie Chit was a document written in Arabic and local languages, promising a substantial reward if the bearer was returned intact.

I remember one pilot who had been lost for several days, and was then brought back by some tribesmen. He came into the Mess, proudly opened his trousers and displayed his ghoolies — both intact — to an admiring audience. There was a story about another pilot with very red hair, who was absent for nearly a month. When he returned intact, it appeared that the tribesmen had been greatly impressed by his red hair, which they thought to be god-like. Instead of castrating him, they put him to stud.

En route to Baghdad, we stayed the night at Fort Rutbah just over the Iraq frontier, where we were entertained by the Sheikh who invited us to a feast. This was held in a large tent, and leaving our shoes outside, we went in to find all the local Arabs of note sitting around on cushions on the carpeted ground. The main item of the feast was a sheep roasted whole, slices of which were cut off to be eaten with fingers. The Sheikh dug out one of the sheep's eyes, and graciously handed this delicacy to Insall, his distinguished guest. Insall, somewhat taken aback, made a short speech declaring that he felt unworthy of such an honour, and requested the Sheikh give the eye to the oldest man present. It was then passed to a venerable, bearded old Arab, who swallowed it with relish.

While in Baghdad, Insall, who was a keen photographer, applied for permission to visit the holy city of Khadsimain, as he wanted to film the famous golden-domed mosque. Permission being granted, we were taken to Khadsimain by an Iraqi Government car and deposited outside the mosque. Before entering, it was necessary to see the Imam — the holy man in charge of the mosque — who happened to be in the turkish bath outside. We were led into the turkish bath to meet the Imam, who was lying naked on a stone slab in the hot room with a towel over his middle. We could hardly see him for the steam, but he welcomed us cordially, clapped his hands and ordered coffee for us.

Being the winter months, we were dressed in full RAF blue uniform, and standing there in the hot steam-room, drinking our coffee and trying to make polite small talk, we dripped with sweat. Our uniforms were saturated! With the Imam's final blessing, Insall was escorted into the mosque which he managed to film, much to his satisfaction.

Before returning to Abu Sueir, Insall asked me to fly him over to

Samarra, a city thirty miles north of Baghdad up the River Tigris, where he wanted to film a famous 9th century tower known as the Spiral Minaret. We were warned to take our Ghoolie Chits with us, as the RAF had been busy in that locality recently and the tribesmen might be expected to be most unfriendly. I located Samarra and was circling low around that tower with Insall in the rear cockpit filming away, when suddenly my engine started to back-fire violently. My heart stopped beating! Recognising that this was an ignition fault, I quickly checked the magneto switches and cut out the defective one. The engine ran sweetly again and, greatly relieved, I turned tail and headed straight back to base.

After my arrival back at Abu Sueir, I was fortunate enough to be loaned a high-performance sailplane which I kept there for several months, and for which I was able to arrange aero-towed launches whenever I wished. With this sailplane I carried out many exploratory thermal soaring flights over the hot desert, as related in the next chapter.

Chapter 11

Gliding and Soaring Flight in Egypt

While stationed at Aboukir from late 1936, I frequently flew up to Cairo for weekends, and there I discovered a gliding school newly formed as an off-shoot of the Royal Aero Club of Egypt. I made contact with their chief instructor, Count L. E. d'Almásy, a most charming Hungarian, who welcomed me as an enthusiastic glider pilot and invited me to take an active part with the School. D'Almásy was a very keen pilot who had flown with the German Air Force in World War I, during which he was reputed to have shot down the British 'ace', Alan Gerrard, VC.

The school operated in the flat desert just outside Almaza Airport, and was equipped with several primary gliders used for training the Egyptian students who were intensely keen and quick to learn. These gliders were launched by the usual shock cord method, or by winch and cable, and flights up to some two minutes were carried out. The school also had a German secondary sailplane — the Goppingen 'Wolf' — but as no hill slopes were available, this was unable to maintain soaring flight and the chances of finding thermal currents during short flights at low altitude were remote.

I obtained permission from my CO at Aboukir to use an Avro Tutor for aero-towing the Wolf, and fitted a bomb release hook on to its tail skid, operated by a toggle in the cockpit. We used a standard RAF target-towing cable, and carried out many aero-tows from outside Almaza Airport. Now, at last, d'Almásy and I were able to search for, and locate, thermal currents and achieve soaring flight. The Wolf was not a high-performance sailplane and we made no outstanding flights with it, although on one occasion d'Almásy flew seven miles across Cairo landing by the Pyramids, and I flew it back again.

As might be expected, thermal currents abounded over the hot desert. Probably the site of the gliding school was of assistance in this respect, being situated in the desert about a mile away from the green cultivation of the Nile Delta. The air, heated by contact with the hot desert, would rise in thermals and be replaced by a flow of cooler air from the cultivation area. This cooler air would in turn

heat up, and thus a whole string of thermals would develop. These thermals were difficult to locate as in the dry air they did not lead to cloud formation and they were relatively narrow. The start of a thermal could often be spotted by the formation of a 'dust devil' — a miniature whirlwind raising the sand in a small vortex — but I was greatly helped by spotting groups of kite hawks circling around. When I joined them, we circled effortlessly together in the up-current and they showed no resentment, probably accepting the sailplane as a big, friendly bird. Indeed, they were so close at times that I could see their black, boot-button eyes staring at me.

In April 1937, there was to be a big RAF Display at Heliopolis aerodrome, and the gliding school arranged for me to demonstrate the Wolf as an item in the programme. I was allotted six minutes' flying time and realising that thermal soaring, which consisted of continuous circling in invisible air currents, would not hold the interest of the onlookers, I decided to do something more spectacular. I worked out an aerobatic sequence starting with release from the towplane at 3000 feet over the aerodrome, followed by a series of loops and stalled turns, then a short spin down to 1000 feet pulling out into a fast dive with a final swoosh around the enclosure just above the heads of the spectators, before landing. This event was well received by the Press, and was said to have demonstrated effectively the silence and grace of a sailplane in flight.

Some time before, Kronfeld had told me about a glider flight he had made at Nuremburg, during which he carried out 65 successive loops. The Wolf sailplane had proved so manoeuvrable that I decided to have a go at beating this, and one day got a tow up to 8000 feet and managed 67 successive loops on the way down. This flight was officially observed by H. E. Mohammed Taher Pasha, President of the Royal Aero Club of Egypt, who without informing me, put in a claim for it as an official world record for Egypt. Unfortunately, it was then found that an American pilot had previously achieved 85 loops in a glider, and my flight was not accepted as a record. Somewhat piqued by this fiasco, I had another go later on.

One day I was sent for by the British security police, who questioned me closely about Count d'Almásy. They told me he was the leading Nazi agent in Egypt and they were suspicious about his frequent flights alone into the Western Desert. They wanted me to report any discussions we might have that would throw some light on these activities.

Of course, before the war there was no crime in being a Nazi. I knew that d'Almásy had a virulent hatred of communists and of Jews, and this was understandable as his estates in Hungary had been seized after World War I by Bela Kun, the Communist

dictator. Often, striding up and down in his apartment, he would lecture me on the way Britain was being manipulated by international Jewry. 'Your banks, your newspapers, your cinema and your major industries are all controlled by the Jews for their own ends,' he would declaim. 'Unless you get rid of them, your country will be ruined.'

I tried without success to point out that it was largely thanks to Jewish business acumen that many British industries were so successful and competitive in world markets. I had no sympathy for his extreme political views, but we were fellow pilots and both keen gliding enthusiasts, and I liked him immensely. He never gave me any indication of Nazi activities, but I believe later on in World War II he did serve on Rommel's staff in the Western Desert campaign.

Late in 1937, the gliding school bought a new high-performance sailplane — the M22, which had been designed and built by the students of Budapest Technical College. The gliding school named it 'Turul' — Arabic for that mythical bird, the Roc. It was a really superb machine, gull winged and beautifully streamlined, rather similar to the German Minimoa. It was stressed for full aerobatics, and handled delightfully in flight.

By now, I was stationed with the RAF Flying Training School at Abu Sueir, about seventy miles out in the desert from Cairo, where in February 1938, a flying display was planned to celebrate the end of term. The gliding school kindly offered to lend me Turul to demonstrate at the display, and I arranged for an aero-tow over to Abu Sueir. On arrival, I was somewhat disturbed to learn that some of our flying instructors were complaining about a glider being included in their display programme. Consequently, I wanted to bring off a manoeuvre in Turul that they could not emulate. I decided on an outside (or inverted) loop, which none of the instructors had ever done and which their aircraft could not have achieved.

I did not know if an outside loop could be done with a sailplane, but was confident that Turul was strong enough to withstand the inverted stresses involved. First of all I practised 'bunts' (the first half of an outside loop) in an Avro Tutor, which I found to be quite easy. Then I tried them in Turul, diving downwards past the vertical — then upwards into horizontal flight, upside down. These again were quite easy. All I needed now was to find out how much speed would be necessary at the bottom of the dive, to be able to continue with an inverted climb upwards and so complete the loop.

After several unsuccessful attempts when Turul lost speed on the inverted climb and slid over sideways, I managed by increasing my speed to 160 km per hour at the bottom of the dive, just to be able to carry on upwards and complete the loop. That upward climb inverted was most uncomfortable, my weight being thrown

outwards heavily against the shoulder straps, and my feet upwards from the rudder pedals. Red spots floated before my eyes — but I had done it.

The flying display was attended by Count d'Almásy and H.E. Mohammed Taher Pasha, through whose generosity Turul had been loaned for the demonstration. Among various aerobatics, I achieved another outside loop which greatly impressed our flying instructors, one of whom filmed it for the record. I later realised, however, that this manoeuvre was entirely wasted on the spectators, the majority of whom could not differentiate between an outside loop on a glider and an ordinary one, and were quite unimpressed by the feat.

After the display, Mohammed Taher Pasha asked me if I would like to keep Turul at Abu Sueir on temporary loan as they had insufficient hangar space for it at the gliding school, and none of their pupils were yet qualified to fly it. He gave me permission to use the glider at my discretion to explore thermal currents over the Egyptian desert. My Station Commander kindly agreed provided that I undertook always to remain within gliding distance of the aerodrome — he had no wish to stage a search and rescue operation out into the desert on my account! He also agreed to allow me the use of an Avro Tutor aircraft for an aero-towed launch whenever I needed one.

I carried out one more outside loop in Turul on the occasion of a garden party at Abu Sueir, and then heard of the death of Eric Collins, an old friend of mine with the London Gliding Club. Eric was a brilliant pilot and had been giving gliding demonstrations with the Cobham Air Circus in England. In trying to bring off an outside loop, he was killed when the main spar broke and the wings came off. After the shock of this news I made no more outside loops, but it was some consolation to realise that I was the only British pilot to have achieved these successfully in a glider.

During the next few months I carried out a number of flights in Turul to explore the thermal currents over the desert, and had quite an orgy of delightful soaring. The desert thermals, however, proved disappointing — there was plenty of disturbance in the air, but it seemed to consist of an irregular series of sudden up and down currents rather than properly developed thermals. Probably this was because Abu Sueir was entirely surrounded by desert of roughly the same colour and consistency, and consequently there was no uneven heating of the ground. The air was probably in a state of turbulence due to heat convection, resulting in an indiscriminate mixture of up and down currents.

The up-currents were narrow, not often exceeding ten feet per second and usually dying out at about 4000 feet. Unless exercising great care, I was apt to fly out of an up-current into an even stronger

down-current, and all the height gained by a long period of arduous circling would be lost in a few minutes. By concentrating hard on the variometer and turning away at the first sign of a down-current, it was usually possible to stay up at will. It was hard work, but excellent sport and thoroughly enjoyable. The best soaring climb that I achieved (as recorded by barograph) was from 400 feet to 5000 feet in twelve minutes, which was the Egyptian glider height record at that time.

The weather in Egypt is remarkably consistent with a steadily prevailing northerly wind and cloudless skies, but an occasional change occurs. The wind swings round to the south and an influx of hot, dusty tropical air causes the temperature to jump up suddenly. These conditions are known as 'Khamsin'. It was during such a period with the shade temperature well over 100°F and the desert shimmering with heat, that conditions seemed ideal for a soaring experiment which promised to be interesting.

Some twelve miles away was Lake Timsah on the Suez Canal. Sailing on this lake was characterised by sudden violent squalls, and I formed a theory that these squalls were caused by thermal currents rising in the desert surrounding the lake — which was to be expected owing to the uneven heating between the water and the surrounding land. On this particularly hot day, I decided to carry out a thermal exploration around the lake and was towed to 6000 feet above it. When released, I found to my surprise that Turul was sinking fast — over lake or desert there was nothing but sinking air. I made my way back to base and was almost down on the desert when, luckily, a weak patch of lift just enabled me to reach the aerodrome.

The probable reason for the failure of Khamsin weather to provide soaring conditions is that the air blown up from the south, being much hotter than normal for the latitude, is rapidly cooling. This makes it denser, and thus causes a general sinking of air over the whole region. The incident was particularly annoying as I never had another opportunity to explore those lakeside thermals.

My last flight in Turul was of some interest. The previous year, I had carried out 67 successive loops in the Wolf sailplane to beat Kronfeld's 65 loops and we found that an American pilot had done 85 loops in a glider. Since then Wolf Hirth, a German gliding champion, had carried out 125 loops during an air show at Stuttgart. I decided to have a go for 150 loops, and estimated that Turul could do it from a height of 16,000 feet. The Avro Tutor could not reach that height when towing a glider, so I fitted a tow hook on to one of our Hawker Audax light bombers. I arranged that this aircraft should carry an official observer to count the loops, and the Station Commander, Group Captain Insall, also volunteered to observe the flight from another aircraft on behalf of the Royal Aero Club of Egypt.

On 12 April 1938, with a sealed barograph installed in Turul, I was towed up by the Audax flown by one of our flying instructors, Flight Lieutenant Judge, and after forty-five minutes he had reached 15,400 feet and could not climb any further. I released the tow cable and began to loop at once — loop after loop taking some ten seconds each, seeing now the desert, now the sky, and now again the desert. I appeared to remain stationary while the earth and sky rotated around me.

After twenty-five minutes of continuous looping, I was down to 500 feet and straightened out for my landing, but a curious giddiness made the world still seem to be looping around me. I could not locate the aerodrome and more by luck than judgment, I landed safely on a nice smooth patch of desert. Stepping out of the glider, I fell straight over backwards! Shortly afterwards, the official observers landed alongside me and reported that 147 loops had been recorded, which was later confirmed by the barograph chart. The flight had therefore been successful, and was a world record. This record will probably remain unbroken, as I doubt if anyone would be stupid enough to wish to break it.

A few days later an accident occurred at the gliding school in which a student was unfortunately killed. The school's operations just outside Almaza Airport were already unpopular with the airport authorities, and pending an official enquiry into the accident by the Civil Air Department, all gliding in Egypt was stopped and Turul was grounded. Poor Turul! During the next few months I hated to see her lying dusty and neglected at the back of a hangar. With the heat of the Egyptian summer, wrinkles appeared on her smooth skin, and her graceful curves began to lose their symmetry and shape. We had shared so many happy hours soaring in silence under the blue Egyptian sky. We had faced some stirring moments together, but she had never failed me. I had real affection for her, and wondered — would she ever fly again?

The long, hot summer passed without much incident until September, when I was informed I had been selected for the next course at the RAF Staff College at Andover and was to be posted home to England. So it was goodbye to Turul and goodbye to Egypt after two very happy years there.

Chapter 12

Andover

On arrival back in England in October 1938, I was posted for temporary duty to HQ Training Command at Market Drayton in Shropshire, to fill in time before the start of the Staff College Course the following January. The recent Munich fiasco, when Neville Chamberlain signed his famous treaty of appeasement with Hitler, brought home sharply the realisation that Britain's forces, which had been run down severely over previous years by Government economic policy, were in no shape to challenge Germany's armed might. A huge rearmament programme was now introduced and there was tremendous activity within Training Command.

To my delight I found I was to be assistant to Wing Commander Dick Atcherley, who was responsible for the flying training organisation. 'Batchy' was famous throughout the Air Force for his flying exploits, and was certainly the most brilliant pilot of the day. He fully sympathised with my keenness on flying and understood how I felt at having been stuck on engineering duties for the past six years, and he gave me every encouragement to fly whenever possible. Most of the aircraft types in use by the RAF were based at Tern Hill, our local airfield, for evaluation by our flying training staff and I had the opportunity to fly them all. The most delightful was the Hawker Fury, one of the last of the long line of RAF single-seat biplane fighters, with which aerobatics could be carried out so effortlessly.

One day to our excitement, the first Spitfire arrived for handling trials by our staff, and I managed to get forty-five glorious minutes in it. The Spitfire was a tremendous advance over our previous biplane fighters, being far more powerful and at least 100 mph faster. This early Spitfire had a wooden propeller of very coarse pitch, so that on opening up the engine to take off, the aircraft trundled quite gently over the grass airfield. At about 50 mph, the coarse pitch propeller would suddenly start to 'bite' the airstream and then — whoosh — off she went! That short flight was one of the most memorable experiences of my life.

At Tern Hill I was able to take the blind-flying course and to do a lot of night flying. 'Batchy' Atcherley was very keen on night flying, and I used to go with him as navigator on long trips by night in an

Airspeed Oxford twin-engined trainer. 'Batchy' was developing a simple scheme for landing at night on grass airfields, indicating the landing strip by means of a line of Franco Sign reflectors — the forerunner of the modern cats-eyes used on our roads today. He used car headlights at the perimeter of the airfield to mark the direction of approach to the strip, and the Franco reflectors shone up well in the beam of our landing light. I have always been surprised that this simple and cheap method of night landing was never taken up by the RAF for use at improvised airfields.

In January 1939, I arrived at Andover to join the twelve months' Staff College Course. There were about twenty-five students, mostly of Squadron Leader rank. The Staff College was regarded as the gateway to future promotion, and competition to be selected for it had been keen. The DS (Directing Staff) were all high-ranking officers, and we students were to be judged by them both on the score of our ability, and also as to our social behaviour. Consequently, we were a serious bunch and there was no fooling about, although we were able to let our hair down at weekends when we were away from the College.

The course consisted of lectures in the mornings on military history, defence strategy, staff administration etc., with occasional visits to aircraft and armament factories. The afternoons were free for flying practice, sport or study, and every evening we worked in syndicates on military exercises and war games, or in preparing reports as might be required by the DS. A typical exercise was a visit to the London docks, around which we were given a comprehensive tour. That evening, each syndicate had to prepare a plan for the bombing of the docks to give the maximum disruption to the country's economy as a whole. The course was extremely interesting, but I was glad to escape at weekends to the more cheerful atmosphere of London or, later on in the summer, to my caravan at Winchelsea.

On our course were Victor and Charles Beamish, two of the four Irish brothers who all served with great distinction with the RAF. The eldest Beamish was George, an enormous man and our heavyweight boxing champion. Charles was also large and Victor, although slighter, had a really tough look about him. One night Charles, Victor and I were drinking in a crowded bar in Southampton, when I noticed a large placard on the wall announcing an all-in wrestling match to be held locally for the world title. I mentioned to the barman that Charles and Victor were contestants for the match, and shortly afterwards they were puzzled to find themselves the centre of an admiring and respectful throng of well-wishers, who insisted on buying them drinks. They never learnt the reason for their sudden popularity!

Victor Beamish became a very close friend of mine. He was a

brilliant pilot, and later during the war he served in Fighter Command where he proved to be a great leader and was highly decorated. Sadly, in 1942 he was shot down in his Spitfire over the Channel and drowned. Victor was typical of so many Irishmen who voluntarily joined our Services and fought with us during the war, often reaching high rank. It always seems extraordinary to me that with such a wealth of goodwill to us from Irishmen, both in the north and the south, politicians have managed to make such a mess of events in Ulster instead of developing some sort of harmonious relationship there.

One week during the course, a team from the Royal Navy Staff College joined us for a combined war game. The two sides set up HQs in separate rooms out of sight of the War Room, in which operations were conducted on a giant map under the supervision of a panel of judges. In our HQs we received radio reports as to the disposition and movements of the enemy fleet, and planned our offensive accordingly. Victor and I were in command of a torpedo bomber squadron, and we managed somehow to elude the defences and surprised a naval task force. We claimed to have sunk the battleship, but our claim was disallowed by a senior Navy Captain on the panel of judges, who ruled that an aircraft could not sink a battleship and he penalised us with the loss of half our squadron. He was to be sadly disillusioned a few years later when two of our finest battleships, *Repulse* and *Prince of Wales*, were sunk off Malaya by Japanese torpedo bombers.

At the end of the week, we entertained our naval friends to a farewell dinner in the mess. The occasion went off well and after the usual speeches, we trooped into the ante-room for coffee and drinks. Then, the most amazing thing happened. The naval officers all took off their mess jackets and, without warning, began to attack us. Although completely surprised, we fought back and soon the ante-room was full of struggling officers. Furniture got broken, ornaments were smashed, and cushions were slashed so that feathers were flying everywhere. Then some naval lunatic let off a fire extinguisher and filled the whole place up with foam. Eventually the struggle ceased and the Navy gave up. It had been their intention, it seemed, to throw us out of our own mess — some odd naval tradition, I suppose.

We felt very surprised at this extraordinary behaviour by our naval guests, especially after the hospitality and co-operation we had shown to them during the past week. We were even more surprised and very annoyed when we learnt that we were to be charged £20 each on our mess bills to pay for the damage our naval visitors had caused. However, soon afterwards they did return our hospitality by inviting us all to Portsmouth for a few days to demonstrate the Navy in operation. We were taken on exercises in

the aircraft carrier *Ark Royal*, on a destroyer and in a submarine, and I must admit we were greatly impressed by their efficiency and discipline.

Just before Easter we were invited to witness Army exercises on Salisbury Plain, where they demonstrated their latest military equipment to us. It was an impressive show except for the final item of the display — their newest and top secret tank of which they were extremely proud. This was the 'I' tank, heavily armoured in front (some three inches thick) and with a maximum speed of only 8 mph. They explained to us that 'I' tanks in war were intended to cross no man's land between the trenches at walking speed, leading columns of infantry advancing securely behind them. The Army was still thinking in terms of the static trench warfare of World War I and had not yet woken up to the German blitzkrieg technique, which they were to encounter a year or so later.

The 'I' tank came towards us impressively, trundling slowly along at walking speed. As it climbed the slope on which we were standing, it moved slower and slower. A Colonel standing next to me remarked that it seemed to be going unusually slowly. I replied: 'I don't think it's moving at all!' Indeed, it had stopped completely. They later explained that the 'I' tank, being still under development, was powered only by a 60 hp Ford V-8 car engine, which had proved unable to drive the 11 ton tank up the slope. They later developed the Mark II 'I' tank — the Matilda — powered by two 95 hp Leyland engines, which was said to be more successful.

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The 1930s are regarded as the Golden Age of Flying, when private flying boomed and the sport prospered. During the past three years, while I had been abroad, great development had taken place with light aircraft and many new designs had been introduced. Now while at Staff College with afternoons and weekends free, I had the time and opportunity available to take an active part in the sport of flying.

To begin with, my old gliding colleague C. H. Latimer Needham, who had been a lecturer on aerodynamics at the Halton Technical School, asked me to carry out flight trials on his newly designed and built aircraft, the Luton Major. He had already introduced a successful ultra light aircraft, the Luton Minor, some examples of which are still flying today. The Luton Major was a tandem two-seater of wooden construction, rather similar in lay-out to the American Piper Cub, and powered by a 62 hp Walter Mikron engine.

I went over to Denham airfield to try out the Major, and after a few fast taxi runs with it, I opened up the engine and took off. While climbing away, my seat broke loose from its anchorage and slipped

back leaving me out of reach of the controls. Somehow, I managed to pull myself forward and regain control before the aircraft stalled, and I was then able to land it safely. This defect having been rectified, all further flight tests were satisfactory except for the aileron control becoming increasingly heavy, which I later found was due to the control cable having come off a pulley, jammed and frayed — only three strands were still holding! Otherwise, the Major proved to be quite a pleasant little aircraft.

While at Denham, Needham asked me to try out a motor-glider he was developing. This was the 'Buzzard', powered by an Anzani Vee-twin motorcycle engine which he had installed upside down. Needham warned me not to exceed 3000 rpm with the engine or pre-ignition would set in with resulting loss of power. Upon opening up the engine to take off, the vibration was so intense that it was quite impossible to read the instruments. Somehow I managed to lob over the airfield fence, and then losing height I turned downhill and found myself circling low over the Denham film studios, well below the level of the airfield. For about twenty minutes I circled around, juggling with the throttle to try and coax enough power out of that engine to enable me to climb back up to the airfield. Eventually I managed it, and after landing was informed of a serious complaint from the Denham studios: I had completely disrupted a whole film session. I never flew that Buzzard again!

Shortly afterwards I was invited to try out the Chilton, a little single-seat ultra-light monoplane powered by a 40 hp Train engine. This was a sporty little aircraft designed and built by two bright young aeronautical students, Dalrymple and Ward, and stressed for full aerobatics. It handled beautifully, just like a miniature Spitfire, and was so extremely manoeuvrable that I rather startled Ward by making a couple of flick rolls with it while on my approach to land. Four Chiltons were made before the advent of war stopped further production, and two of these are still flying today. Since the war, I have done my best, but without success, to get a modernised version of the Chilton into production.

While on a visit to Hanworth aerodrome I met Brian Allen who had the sales agency for the Belgian 'Topsy B', designed by E. O. Tips, a keen light aeroplane enthusiast. It was a very pretty side-by-side two-seater monoplane, powered by a 62 hp Walter Mikron engine, and delightful to fly. The Topsy was ideal both for touring and as a trainer, and was remarkably economical to operate — cruising at 90 mph with a fuel consumption of only 2½ gallons per hour. Brian Allen asked me to demonstrate the aircraft for him that summer, which of course I was delighted to do — taking it around to air displays all over the country.

The following May, I entered the Topsy in the Isle of Man Air Race, which was my first experience of air racing. This was a

handicap race with a staggered start — the aim of the handicappers being to have all the aircraft pass the finishing line together, while the aim of the competitors was to beat the handicappers and by their skill get ahead of the field. The course was three laps around the island, which we all flew at tree-top height.

It was tremendous fun. I started off fifteen seconds behind a Blackburn Bluebird which the owner had modified by removing his windscreen and fairing over the open cockpit to gain extra speed. His head stuck out through a hole in the fairing! I followed him around the course, slowly gaining on him, when on the final lap after rounding a turning point, he seemed to have disappeared altogether. It transpired that he had been flying so low that his wheels hit the sea, causing his aircraft to dive straight to the bottom. Fortunately, he was rescued without serious injury. I carried on and finished the race in third place.

My old friend Geoffrey de Havilland had won the preliminary race from London to the I.o.M., and also had made the fastest time in the Island Race in his TK2 — a racing monoplane built by the students of the de Havilland Aeronautical Technical School. During the celebrations in our hotel after the race, Geoffrey rather over-indulged himself and passed out. We put him to bed, but an hour or so later we were surprised when his tall figure suddenly appeared, completely naked. He strode through the hotel lounge, out across the street and down the beach to the sea for a swim.

My last race that summer was a disaster. This was the Folkestone Trophy held in August, and consisted of three laps around a course from Folkestone to Dover over land, and thence back along the coast. Starting from Lympne airfield, I took off in the Topsy and, flying very low, cut between two woods *en route*. Suddenly, and too late, I saw what looked like hawsers stretched right across my path — these were the wires of the main electric grid which I had not noticed as the pylons bearing them were obscured behind the trees. The Topsy hit the wires and bucked, throwing me out. While falling through the air, my mind worked very quickly and I thought: ‘Oh my God! After so many narrow escapes, this is it!’ The next thing I knew, I was rolling down an embankment finishing up on a road, where a passing car picked me up and took me to hospital.

I was not too badly hurt, just bruised and with multiple abrasions, and after being cleaned up and stitched up, I was able to return to Lympne in time for the celebrations after the race. The poor little Topsy was complete wrecked, but strangely enough Brian Allen seemed quite pleased about it. Sales had not been good, and the aircraft was insured for its full new value.

★ ★ ★

Early in August 1939, war clouds were growing and mobilisation was declared. The Staff College closed down and all students were

considered to have passed the course and were posted to various HQs. I reported for duty with the Intelligence Section of the Advanced Air Striking Force, which was being formed at RAF Abingdon. The AASF consisted of twelve squadrons — eight of them Fairey Battle light bombers, two were Bristol Blenheim twin-engined bombers, and the remaining two were Hurricane fighters. These squadrons, together with our HQ and an Air Stores Park, were due to move to France immediately if war was declared.

We worked hard getting our HQ organisation complete, and packing supplies and equipment ready for the move to France. At 11 a.m. on that fateful day of 3 September 1939, I listened on the radio to hear Neville Chamberlain's sombre announcement that war was declared on Germany. We were due to fly out to France next morning not knowing what the future held for any of us, so that evening we held a farewell party at the delightful Trout Inn near Oxford. After the party, driving back without headlights (owing to the blackout regulations) I failed to take a sharp 'S' bend in the road, mounted the bank and knocked down a telegraph pole. My three unfortunate passengers and I, all badly bruised and shaken, somehow got back to camp and managed to join the airlift to France the next morning. It would hardly have done to have reported sick just as we were due to go to war!

Chapter 13

France

Our airlift arrived at Rheims aerodrome according to plan, where we were given a big welcome by the French Air Force, with high-ranking officers abounding. As we disembarked from our aircraft, we were greeted by the French top brass and everyone seemed to be saluting everyone else. Unfortunately, during my car crash the previous evening, the steering wheel had made an enormous bruise across my stomach and I could hardly stand up properly, let alone lift my arm in salute. Moreover, I was still suffering to some extent from my air crash only a month earlier.

Our arrival arrangements had been well planned by an advance party, with the squadrons based at various grass airfields around the district. Our HQ was housed in the Chateau Polignac on the outskirts of Rheims, home of the Comte and Comtesse de Polignac, who moved into one wing of the building and left the rest of the magnificent chateau for our use. Our personnel were all billeted locally, and within a few days the AASF was fully operational and in readiness. Day by day we waited for a German strike, but except for a few false alarms nothing happened. Days ran into weeks, and weeks into months, and still no enemy action. We had entered the eight-month period of the 'phoney war'.

The French took their war effort extremely seriously, and every day there were endless streams of coaches filled with troops going east to the Maginot Line. It would seem that nearly every Frenchman of military age had been conscripted and was being sent to the Maginot Line, which stretched along the German frontier all the way from Belgium to the Swiss border, and consisted of a series of underground fortresses in which hundreds of thousands of men existed.

I was a member of the Intelligence Section at our HQ. 'Intelligence' in military terms does not indicate a particularly high IQ, but covers broadly two functions: Information — to find out as much as possible about the enemy's organisation, strength and disposition; and Security — to prevent the enemy obtaining such information about us.

My job was to obtain and collate all possible information on the enemy's air defence system and organisation. Frequent

reconnaissance flights were made by our aircraft over Germany, both by day and night, and I received regular reports as to the strength and location of the anti-aircraft defences as encountered by our pilots. No bombs were dropped on these flights as it was not intended to start a shooting war, but our night bombers dropped tons of propaganda leaflets warning the unsuspecting German population of the hopelessness of their position and advising them to give in before it was too late. It seemed most unlikely to me that the German population would be so simple as to believe this propaganda, but I suppose it must have had some effect as the Germans started to drop similar leaflets over us in France.

I also received valuable information obtained from agents sent to us by the British Embassy in Paris. These were mostly Dutch or Belgian businessmen who (as neutrals) would be going to Germany in the normal course of their business, and who loyally risked their lives to obtain any particular information we might require. These agents were never introduced to us by name but merely by number, and their reports were of enormous help to us.

In my office I maintained a huge map showing the air defence system in Germany. From the various reports received, I marked in anti-aircraft gun and searchlight positions, fighter squadron bases, and so on. I was then able to brief pilots prior to their reconnaissance flights as to the safest routes to follow, and on the whole my routeings were successful and appreciated by them. Regrettably, however, early in the war I had a failure when Wing Commander 'Wings' Day, an old friend of mine from Aboukir days, turned up in my office. He was in command of a Blenheim squadron which had been detailed to carry out daylight photographic reconnaissance flights deep into Germany on behalf of the Army Command, who required early information as to any enemy military activity or troop concentrations. Day felt that he, as CO of the squadron, should carry out the first of these hazardous flights himself.

Day came to me for briefing as to enemy anti-aircraft defences *en route*. At that time I had received conflicting reports as to whether a certain airfield in Germany was operational, and asked him if he could get me some photos of it. He agreed to do so, and I routed him to the airfield to the best of my ability in view of the limited information then available, after which he would carry on over the Ruhr as required by the Army.

Day took off on Friday, 13 October, but disaster befell him. He was intercepted by enemy fighters and shot down in flames; his crew were killed but he escaped by parachute. Badly burned, he was well treated by the Germans until recovered, when he was sent to a prisoner of war camp. Poor Day spent the next five and a half years in various P.o.W. camps, and his exploits in organising and leading

escapes from these are part of RAF history. In all, he escaped seven times but was recaptured each time and finally handed over to the Gestapo who committed him to the death cell block in a concentration camp. Here he existed under appalling conditions with the constant threat of being taken out and shot, but he was one of the fortunate few who survived. An enthralling book, *Wings Day* by Sidney Smith, describes these adventures and is well worth reading.

Many years later I met 'Wings' Day in the bar at the RAF Club in Piccadilly. We had a few drinks together and he remembered me well from the old pre-war Aboukir days about which we chatted. Fortunately, he did not seem to recollect that it was I who had briefed him for that ill-fated mission!

Life in general was very pleasant in Rheims. Although maintaining readiness for immediate action, as the phoney war progressed we could relax and enjoy the hospitality of our many French friends. Rheims was the centre of the champagne district, and indeed underneath the Chateau Polignac there were miles of caves originally dug by the Romans, in which were stored some twelve and a half million bottles of Pommery champagne. We were frequently entertained by Prince Heidsieck and other champagne magnates, as well as by the Pol Roger family with their three enchanting daughters in nearby Epernay.

Soon after our arrival in Rheims, my colleague Mumford and I had dinner at the Hotel Foch, which was noted for the finest food in the town. Mumford was a very amusing fellow with tremendous charm, which he used on the old proprietress of the Hotel Foch to such an extent that she accepted the two of us as *billetaires*, by which she agreed to accommodate and feed us at the hotel for the very nominal billeting grant paid by the French Government. Mumford and I were the only two officers at the HQ so fortunate. The rest were either billeted out in French homes where they were not particularly welcome, or accommodated in small and overcrowded hotels requisitioned for the purpose, and where they were fed on NAAFI rations hashed up by RAF cooks. Mumford and I were certainly lucky, and we lived it up in comfort at the Hotel Foch for the duration of our stay in Rheims.

Security was all important. Naturally the Germans were anxious to get information as to the strength and disposition of our forces, and numerous agents were infiltrated into the Rheims area. Many of these were girls from Alsace, which was strongly pro-German, and the French Deuxième Bureau kept a close watch on them. One of them was the attractive hat-check girl at the Hotel Lion d'Or, where pilots on leave from our outlying squadrons liked to congregate in the evenings. They used to chat up this charming girl who must have got a lot of information as to where they came from

and what they were doing. We were rather shocked when we learnt that she had been arrested by the Deuxième Bureau, and later shot as a spy.

Two brothels in Rheims were taken over for our forces, the Palais Oriental for officers and the Sphinx for other ranks. The Deuxième Bureau warned us that some of the girls there were from Alsace and might be enemy agents, with the consequent risk that some of the clients, probably full of drink, might prove too talkative and disclose information. Not wishing to put these amenities out of bounds to our men, it was arranged that a Security Corporal should be on duty every night in each brothel, with instructions to listen at the bedroom doors. If he heard any undue conversation, he was to bang loudly on the door!

I, myself, once got involved unwittingly with an enemy agent. While in the bar one evening at the Lion d'Or, I was approached by an Australian civil pilot who flew the mail between London, Rheims and Paris. He had two attractive French girls with him, and he asked me to make up a four for dinner as he could not speak a word of French. I was glad to do so, and found that one of the girls was Marise Bastié, the famous French airwoman — the Amy Johnson of France. I found her most interesting and we talked all evening about sporting flying, and she described her long-distance exploits in light aircraft. About midnight, a French Colonel came over to our table and bowed to the other girl, who got up and left with him — apparently she was his mistress. As the Australian pilot was the host, I felt rather *de trop* so I bade him goodnight and left him with Marise Bastié.

At about 6 a.m. next morning, my bedroom door burst open and three policemen rushed in. 'Where is Madame Bertrand?' they demanded.

'She's not here,' I said. 'And anyway who on earth is Madame Bertrand?'

'She's a suspected enemy agent we have followed down from Paris,' they replied, 'and you were seen having dinner with her last night.'

'Good Lord,' I said. 'She told me she was Marise Bastié. I left her with the Australian pilot at the Lion d'Or.'

We all rushed round to the Lion d'Or, and found that the Australian pilot had left early with the lady and was *en route* in his mail aircraft to Paris, taking her with him. As soon as they landed, the Deuxième Bureau arrested her, questioned her for forty-eight hours, and then shot her as a spy.

The sequel to this incident was that the Air Officer Commanding the AASF sent for me. 'Mole,' he said, 'you are on my Intelligence Staff and you have access to all top secret information. Yet I am informed by the Deuxième Bureau that you have been seen dining in company with an enemy agent. What is your explanation?'

My mind flashed like lightning. 'Sir,' I replied, 'part of my duties on your Intelligence Staff is to preserve strict security. On the evening in question I saw the Australian mail pilot talking to a lady unknown locally. I made it my business to join them for dinner to ensure that no leakage of information would take place during their conversation. I was also anxious to check up on the lady and, in fact, was able to help the Deuxième Bureau to locate her the next morning.'

The AOC gave me a hard look and replied: 'I accept your explanation, Mole, but please be more discreet with your security activities in the future.'

The Wing Commander in charge of security was a strict disciplinarian with no sense of humour and little charm. Among his many regulations, we had at all times to carry our gas masks together with webbing harness and side arms, which was embarrassing when dining in restaurants. One day Harry Freeston, an old friend of mine who was in command of the Air Stores Park, came to lunch with me at the Hotel Foch, and he left his gas mask and webbing harness in the cloakroom. Wing Commander Security spotted this, came over to our table and put poor Harry on a charge for breach of regulations.

During lunch, I noticed that Wing Commander Security was not wearing the side arm he should have been carrying. I went out to the cloakroom, found his greatcoat, and there in one of his pockets, as I suspected, was his Colt 45 automatic pistol. I knew this weapon well, and dismantled it completely into a mass of small components — springs, pawls, latches, screws etc. — and shovelled the lot back into his pocket. When Wing Commander Security left the hotel, he gave me a very hard look — but he was in no position to voice his suspicions!

One day I was detailed to escort two visiting American Generals to Verdun where they were to inspect the Maginot Line. We were courteously received by the French officer in command, and shown over one of the fantastic underground forts where thousands of soldiers lived, worked and slept. The French officer assured us that the Maginot Line was impregnable, and upon leaving we were presented with medallions inscribed: *On ne passe pas*. Unfortunately, the Germans did not have to pass. A few months later they invaded France through neutral Holland and Belgium and simply went around the end of the Maginot Line leaving the huge French army in their underground forts with their guns all pointing in the wrong direction.

We were also shown over the battlefield where the French fought so heroically for eighteen months during World War I to withstand the massive German offensive against Verdun. They suffered 426,000 casualties during that historic siege, and a large section of

the battlefield had been preserved as a memorial to them. We saw a line of bayonets sticking out of a trench in which soldiers had been waiting to go over the top for attack, when a shell-burst buried them alive. The whole scene brought home to us only too vividly the grim horror of trench warfare in World War I.

That night, while we were dining at a hotel in Verdun, we received a message that General Windsor would like to see us in his suite upstairs. We went up and found that General Windsor was our ex-King Edward VIII who, after his abdication, was living in France and was now serving in a liaison capacity between the British and French armies. He was most charming and sat me down on the sofa beside him and kept topping up my glass with brandy while he and the American Generals discussed World War I in which they had all served.

In March 1940, I received a letter from the Air Ministry informing me that I was to be transferred to the newly formed Technical Branch of the RAF, and was to be posted to the Air Ministry in London. Apparently, all officers like myself who had been commissioned into the RAF on the basis of their university technical degrees, received similar letters. I was sad to realise that there was now no hope of ever returning to full flying duties, but there was nothing I could do about it. The order had been issued and I had to comply.

Before leaving France, I was granted two weeks' leave which I spent at the Negresco Hotel in Nice, where we had been offered special terms. I was surprised to find no evidence of the war at all in Nice. Restaurants and casinos were doing business as usual, and the town was brightly lit up at night — unlike Rheims, with its strict black-out regulations. I was given a splendid suite on the first floor overlooking the sea, and when the time came to leave I went to pay my bill. The cashier said to me: 'You are the first British officer to stay with us since the war started. My Director wishes you to be our guest and there is nothing to pay.'

I must stay at the Negresco again one day — if I can afford it!

On my return to Rheims, I had a farewell dinner with my friends of the Advanced Air Striking Force and then departed for London. None of us had any idea of the disaster that was to befall the AASF in a couple of months' time. On 10 May 1940, the Germans invaded through Belgium and Holland, bypassing the impregnable Maginot Line and so cutting off the bulk of the French army. The speed of their blitzkrieg attack took our forces by surprise and it was necessary for all units to retreat or be cut off. The confusion caused by the general retreat greatly handicapped the AASF squadrons, but they fought magnificently against impossible odds. The Hurricane fighter pilots were outnumbered by hordes of German Messerschmitts, and most of their aircraft were shot down. The two

Blenheim squadrons were wiped out within the first three days. The Battle pilots bravely kept bombing the advancing German columns, but the Battle was a slow and lumbering aircraft with no defensive armament beneath it, and it was a sitting duck for German fighters attacking from behind and below. Consequently, the Battle aircraft had to be flown low, and many were shot down by ground fire.

After seven days of the German offensive, the AASF ceased to exist as a fighting force. Over fifty per cent of their aircrew were killed, and a total of 299 aircraft destroyed.

Chapter 14

Wartime London

In March 1940, I travelled back to London, crossing the Channel by ship from Cherbourg to Southampton. On the deck sprawled a crowd of ragged and tattered individuals who were, I later discovered, Polish Air Force pilots who had escaped after the German occupation of their country. Under conditions of extreme hardship, they had made their way on foot across the Balkans to Turkey, thence by deck passage to Marseilles and by train to Cherbourg. They were on the way to Britain to join our Forces, determined to carry on the fight. They were later absorbed into the RAF, and filled with a fanatical hatred of the Germans, they fought magnificently.

Upon my arrival in London, I took a furnished flat in a large modern block called Kensington Close. Though small, it was comfortable and wonderful value by today's standards at only £2.50 per week, including breakfast brought daily to one's room. For the first time I had a place of my own where I could lead my own life, and I intended to enjoy it. Except for the black-out at night, which was strictly enforced, life in London seemed just the same as in peacetime. Theatres, restaurants and night-clubs were carrying on as usual, dances and parties were held, and there were no noticeable shortages of anything. No one, it seemed, was conscious that there was a war on — but they were soon to find out.

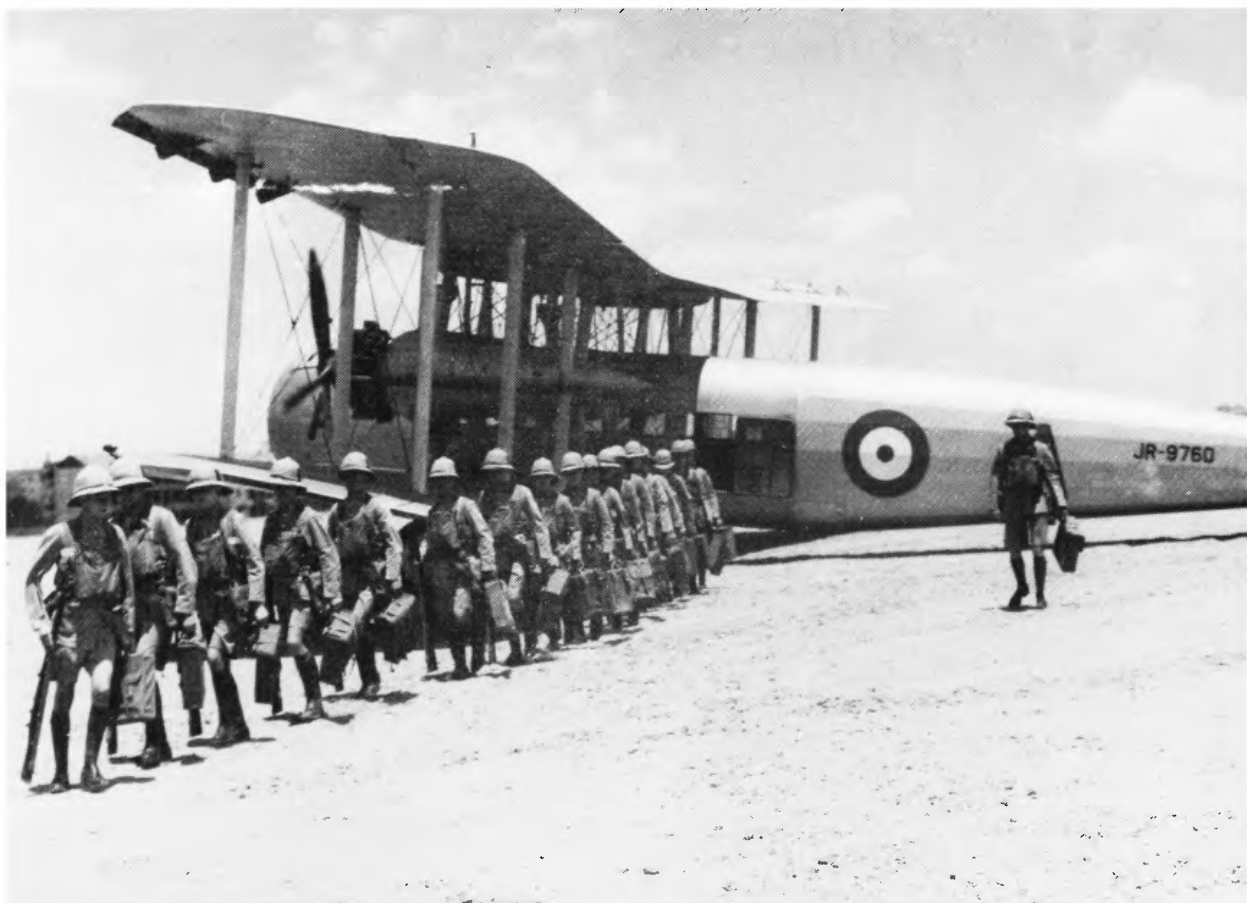
At the Air Ministry, I was on the staff of the newly formed Directorate of Repair and Servicing. Previously, aircraft servicing had been carried out largely on the initiative of the engineer staff at RAF stations, but with the rapid expansion of the RAF and consequent dilution of technical skill and experience, the DRS had been formed to control the servicing and give guidance for the sake of uniformity. Our work in setting up this new organisation involved frequent visits to RAF stations to obtain data on the servicing requirements of the various aircraft types in operation, which we could collate and issue as maintenance instructions throughout the RAF.

During these visits, I noticed that nearly ever squadron had one, or possibly two, aircraft permanently unserviceable, which were being robbed of parts needed to keep the other aircraft flyable. This



Empire Flying Boat. (R.Ae.S.).

Troops disembarking from Vickers Valentia at Heliopolis. Egypt, 1936. (RAF Museum).





G/Capt. Insall, VC, MC, at Rutbah Fort, en-route to Baghdad with Hawker Audax.

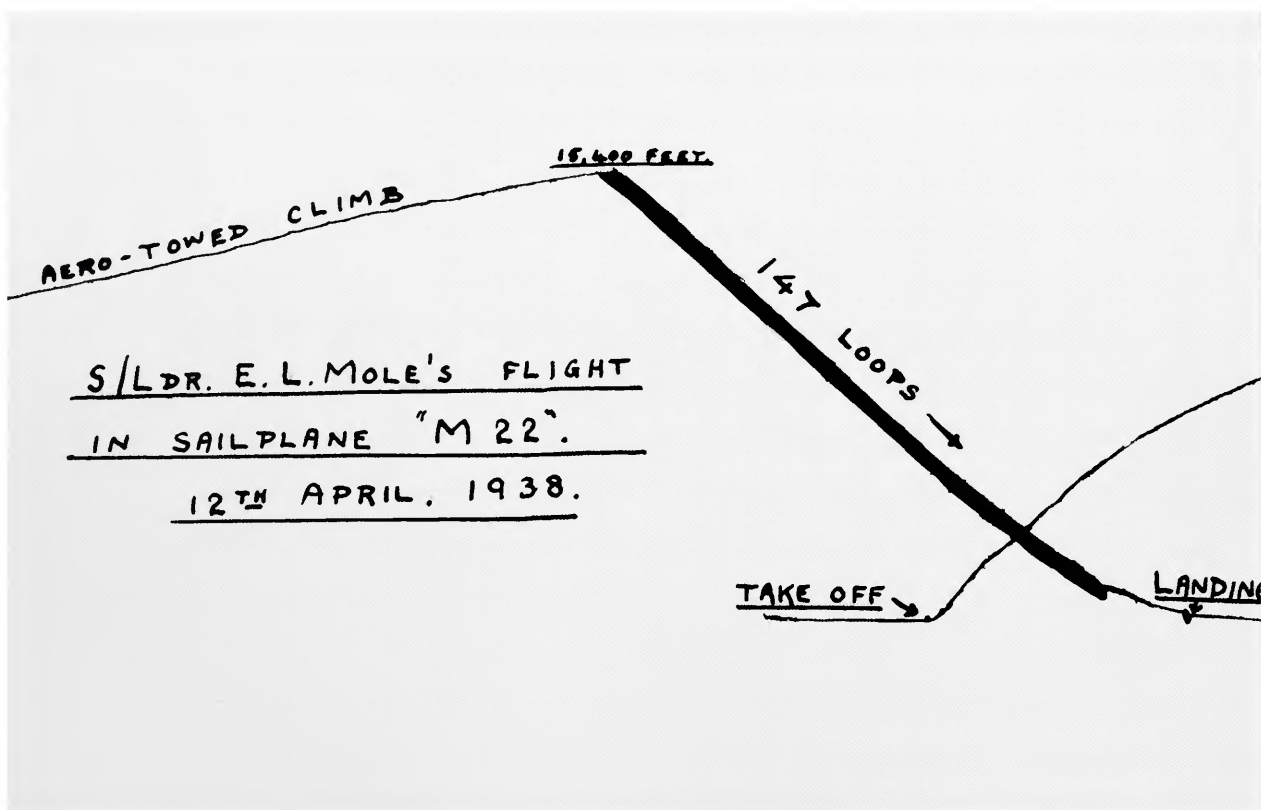
The golden domes of Khadsimain Mosque near Baghdad.

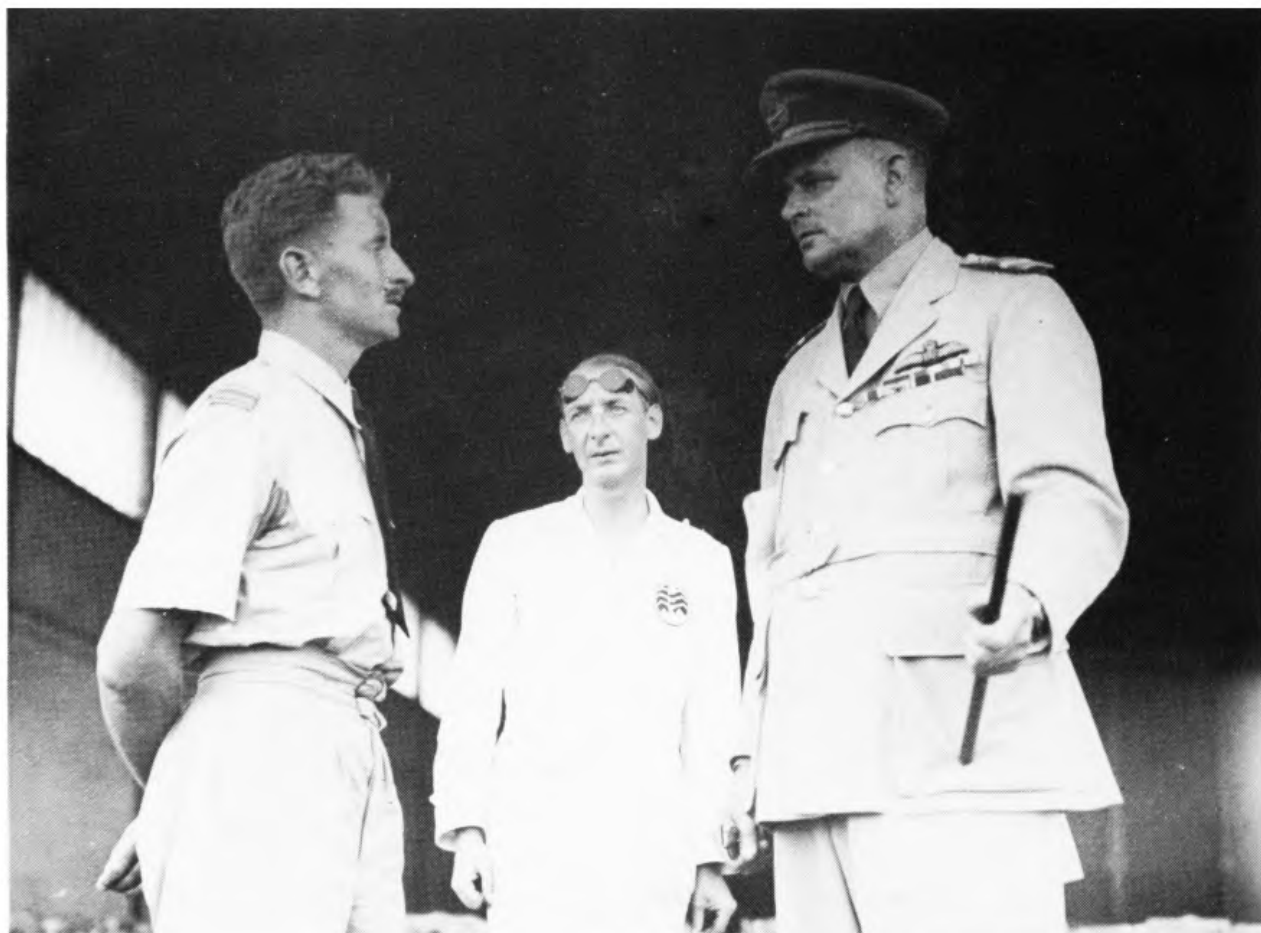




Sand Yachting at Abu Sueir.

April 1938. Barograph chart of 147 loops at Abu Sueir.

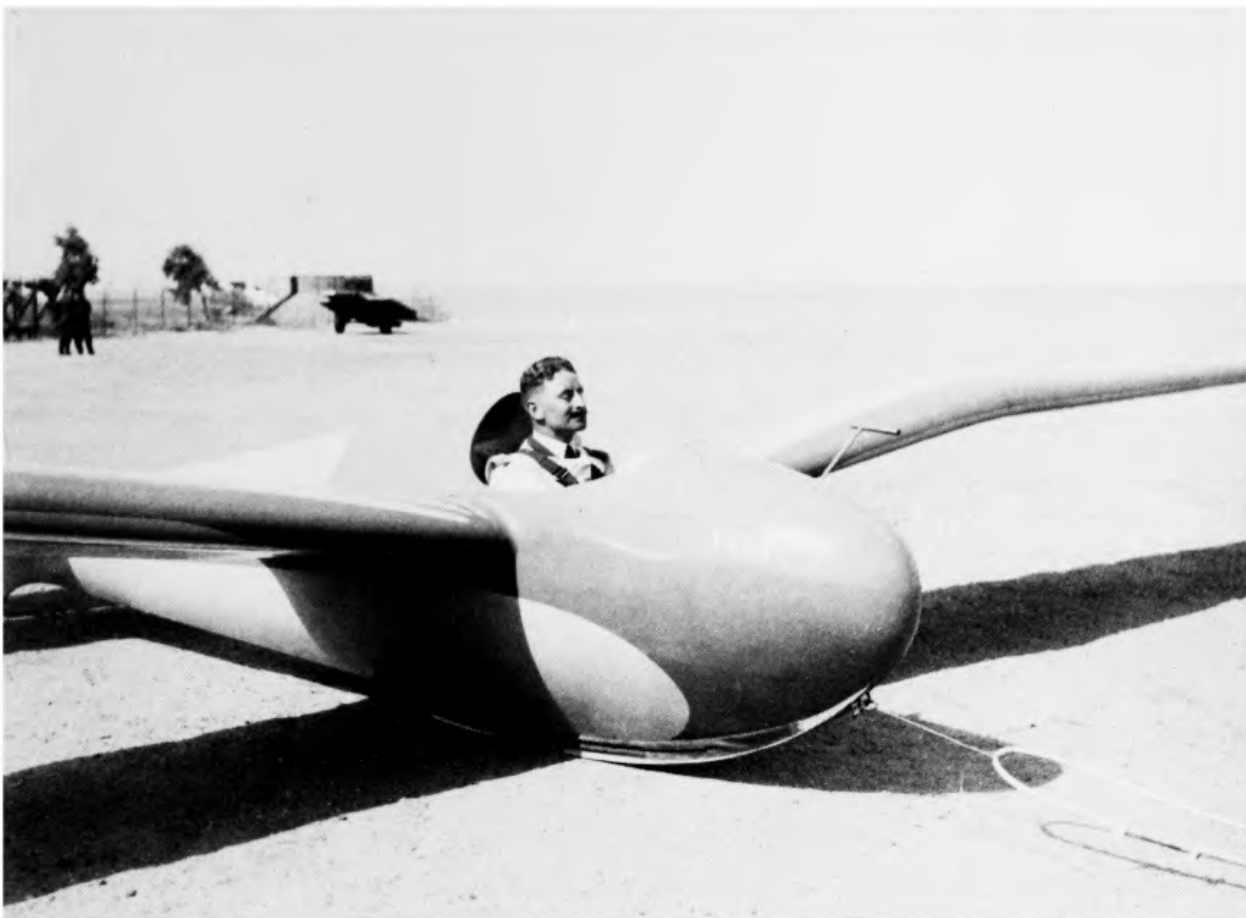




Author being presented to Air Vice-Marshal C. T. M. Maclean CB, DSO, MC, AOC, RAF Middle East after gliding demonstration at RAF Display, Heliopolis. Centre: Count de Almásy.

Gliding with Wolf sailplane in Egypt, Almaza Aerodrome.





Author in 'Turul' sailplane at Abu Sueir.

Gliding in Egypt (Abu Sueir).





With Brian Allen and his Topsy B at Hanworth aerodrome prior to Folkestone Trophy air race.

Ranald Porteous Flying Chilton SV near Derby – Summer 1947.





Fairey Battle as used by the AASF in France. Note the lack of defensive armament against attack from below. (RAF Museum).

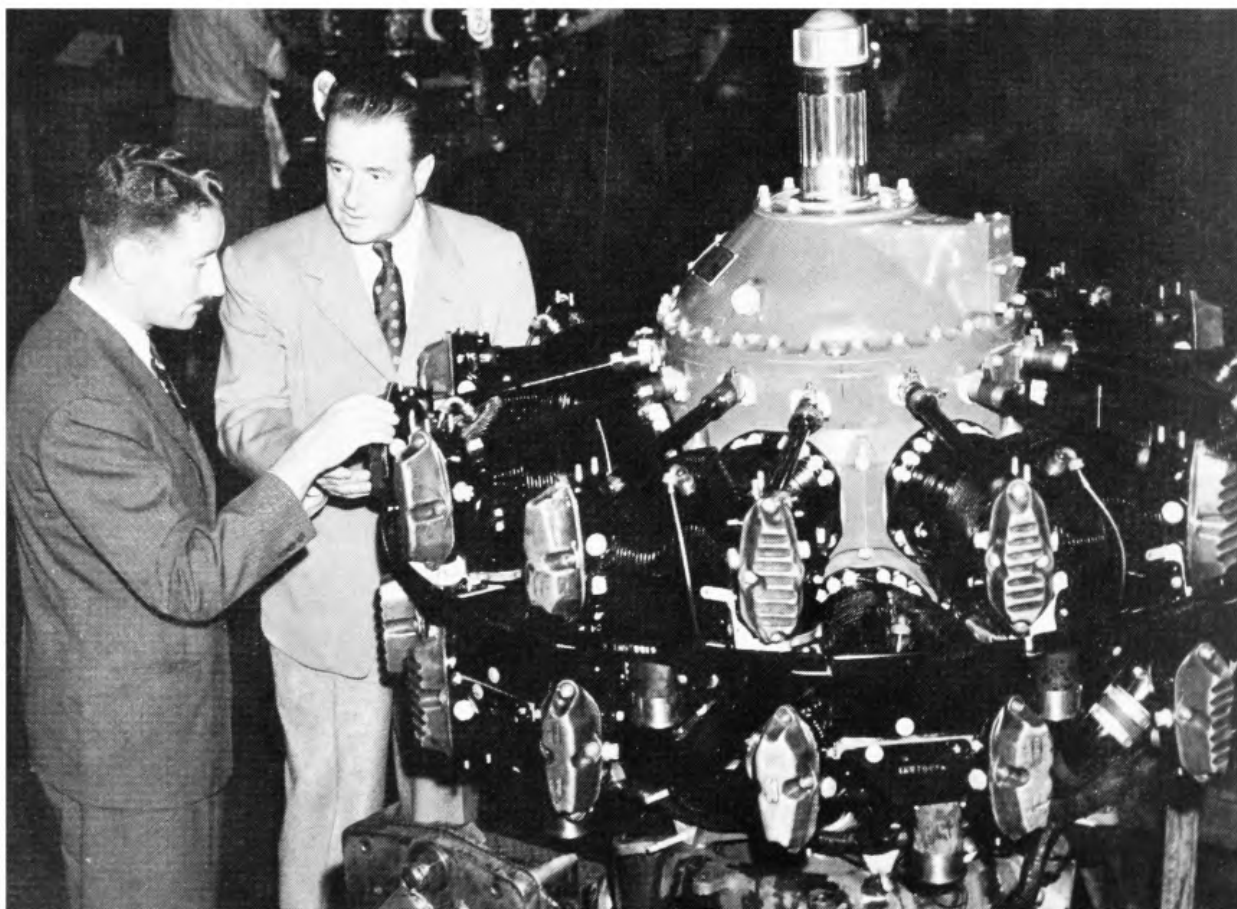
Author with 'Cygnet' at Deauville Air Rally 1939.





Left to right – Homer Berry, the Author, Katherine Hepburn at Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer Studios.

Author (left) with Homer Berry at Pratt & Whitney factory examining Twin Wasp R1830 engine.



practice was known as 'cannibalisation', and was obviously most wasteful. We made it our business to obtain data on the spares consumption of each type of aircraft, from which proper provisioning could be made at Air Ministry level, and so avoid spares shortages in the squadrons. Our efforts to obtain all this information were usually not appreciated by the local engineering staff who resented the intrusion into their affairs by 'that bunch of Whitehall Warriors'.

I was able to make most of these visits by air, flying myself from Hendon aerodrome using aircraft of the Communication Flight. At the outset of the war, the RAF had sequestered all privately owned aircraft and many of these were based with the Communication Flight for use by staff officers. There was an extraordinary collection of light aircraft, some of them well-known types, including Tiger and Hornet Moths, Miles Magisters, Messengers and Whitney Straights, Vega Gulls etc., but others such as Wickos and the Messerschmitt 108 'Taifun', I had never even heard of. It was most interesting to try them all out.

On 10 May 1940, when the Germans began their invasion of France through Belgium and Holland, the British public suddenly woke up to the fact that the phoney war was over, and the real war had begun. The news every day was dreadful. The speed of the German blitzkrieg had taken the Allied Forces by surprise, and the French Army had been outflanked. The British Army went into full retreat until driven on to the beach at Dunkirk, and were under heavy attack from the German Air Force while the historic evacuation by a fleet of small boats was in progress.

During this period, desk-bound in my office at the Air Ministry, I felt completely frustrated. On the Friday evening I asked my Director what our plans were to be during this national emergency. He told me there was nothing we could do, and that there was no point in my coming to the office the next day as the staff would not be there. 'Take the weekend off,' he advised, 'and relax'. That Saturday, I drove down to the coast and stood on a cliff looking across the Channel towards Dunkirk. It was a brilliant day with blue sky, but a black smudge of smoke was clearly visible on the horizon. I sat down and pondered. What on earth was going on over there, and how were my old friends in the AASF faring? I little knew then of the disaster that had befallen them.

On the Monday following, my colleague Geoffrey Emms, who shared the office with me, suddenly jumped up and said, 'I can't stand this any longer.' He had been plucked out of a Hurricane fighter squadron to serve in the Air Ministry, having been, like me, a university entrant to the RAF. He dumped a stack of files on my desk and said: 'You get on with these, Eddie. I'm off back to my squadron.' A few days later, he was killed in action.

During the weeks to follow, the Germans continued their onslaught. France, believing we had deserted them, capitulated. The Germans had occupied Belgium and Holland, and then Denmark. They invaded Norway, where we made an abortive attempt to repel them, suffering a grievous loss of ships, aircraft and men. We then stood alone, under the threat of imminent invasion.

Hastily, anti-invasion plans were drawn up. Our beaches were wired and mined, and tank traps and concrete pill-boxes were constructed along the shores. The Army concentrated on the defence of coastal areas, and the Home Guard was formed in which most of the older able-bodied men in Britain volunteered to serve. After Dunkirk, the Army was still in considerable disarray, having left their weapons and heavy equipment behind them. There was a general shortage of rifles, many of the Home Guard units having to be armed with shotguns and even pikes. The Germans had gained a brilliant, if ruthless, victory and were now in control of the whole of western Europe from the Pyrenees to Norway. If they had invaded us then by an airborne operation, they would probably have won the war. But first they had to neutralise our Air Force, and so on 1 July, the Battle of Britain began.

The Germans started by bombing our airfields to put the RAF out of action, but despite heavy losses, our fighter defence was more than a match for them. While the Battle of Britain raged, it was commonplace to see vapour trails woven high in the sky, made by our Spitfires and Hurricanes dog-fighting with Messerschmitts. Occasionally we were cheered by the sight of a German bomber coming down in flames, with a stick of parachutes floating down behind it. The Germans then began daylight raids on London and other cities, but eventually their losses became so heavy that the daylight offensive was called off and the Battle of Britain had been won. Strangely enough, during this period morale in Britain remained very high. We were proud of our fighter boys, and it never occurred to us that we might lose the war. Although we could see no prospect of victory, we thought things would probably drag along to some sort of stalemate.

One day during the Battle of Britain, I drove down to Winchelsea Beach to see how my old friend, Henry Savage, and the little community of fishermen and longshoremen were getting along in view of the imminent threat of invasion on that coast. I had heard that they had all joined the local Home Guard, and were consequently permitted to remain in their cottages by the beach. Being in uniform, I was allowed into the Defence Zone and on arrival at Henry's cottage found him with an old fisherman shooting out of a window at an aircraft flying past low along the beach.

'What on earth are you doing?' I asked him.

'Trying to shoot down that Messerschmitt,' he replied.

‘Henry,’ I said reprovingly, ‘that Messerschmitt happens to be a Spitfire.’

Henry looked extraordinary in the worst fitting uniform I had ever seen, and wore his forage cap perched high on top of his wild shock of hair. He was, however, the most loyal of British subjects having served in the Boer War and in World War I. He was proud now to be serving right in the front line of the Battle of Britain, though possibly somewhat over-enthusiastic. Rather sadly, soon afterwards the Army evacuated Henry and his friends from the beach and demolished their cottages, which formed an obstruction to the field of fire of the anti-tank guns. So ended the little community by the beach of which I had become so fond.

With the air war in progress, normal flying on staff visits naturally became more restricted. We had to carry a Verey pistol with a two-colour cartridge, the colours being changed each day, which we would fire as a recognition signal in the event of being attacked by our own fighters. One day I was to go to Aldergrove in Northern Ireland, taking a large, fat Wing Commander with me on a staff visit. Hendon had allocated me a rather decrepit looking old Audax single-engined bomber for the trip. As a precaution before crossing the Irish Sea, I decided to land and top up with fuel, and knowing we were to fly through a fighter zone around Liverpool, I thought it wise to check that the cartridge in the Verey pistol was the correct colour of the day. We were sitting in the aircraft ready for take-off, and I tugged away at the Verey pistol which seemed to be stuck in its holder. Suddenly it came free and fired the flare backwards between the legs of the Wing Commander in the rear seat. They must have over-filled the petrol tanks and spilt fuel down the fuselage, and the rear cockpit went straight up in flames. We both leapt clear of the aircraft, the fat Wing Commander breaking the world record for the sitting high jump!

The Audax was completely burnt out. Hendon didn't seem to mind very much as it was a terrible old aircraft and they were glad to be rid of it. The subsequent Court of Enquiry exonerated me from blame for the incident as it was found that the Verey pistol had been put into its holder the wrong way round, with the retaining clip forced over the trigger.

Low-flying German bombers over our cities became a problem, especially when one of them dropped a stick of bombs across Buckingham Palace — fortunately missing it. One day, driving in my open car through a crowded street, I saw people scrambling for shelter. Looking up, I saw a bomber flying low over the roof tops, machine-gunning the street as it passed. I stopped my car and leapt out. Damn cheek!, I thought, as I dived into the nearest shop for safety.

This low-flying problem gave rise to the balloon barrage. Soon

London and other cities were festooned with huge gasbags, all suspended on wires carrying high explosive pellets lethal enough to blow the wing off any aircraft that might unfortunately get entangled. The London barrage extended nearly to Hendon in the north, and it was essential not to miss the aerodrome or one would fly straight into the barrage. In bad visibility and without radio, I always flew low along the Great North Road (now the A1), lobbed over the Mill Hill rise and turned sharply right into the aerodrome circuit.

When approaching London in bad weather from the west, I used to follow the Great West Road, turn left at the Southall gas works and circuit around London, past the Ruislip reservoir to the North Road, thence to Hendon aerodrome. One day, flying a Tiger Moth on this approach, I was passing Langley on the Great West Road, and suddenly became aware of balloons all around me. They had set up a new barrage to protect the Hawker aircraft factory there. My heart stopped beating for a moment! Thinking quickly, I dived down and flew low over the main road — guessing rightly that they would not have stationed their balloon winches in the middle of the traffic stream.

This balloon barrage system was extremely expensive in men and material. It probably justified itself in preventing low-flying attacks by German bombers, but it destroyed only a few German aircraft whereas about a couple of hundred of ours were brought down.

On 25 September, I was flying back in a Miles Whitney Straight from a staff visit in Devonshire, and about thirty miles south of Bristol my passenger started to get wildly excited, pointing up into the air. I looked up, and to my horror saw right above us about a hundred German aircraft — tier upon tier of Heinkel 111 bombers escorted on their flanks by tiers of fighters. I suddenly felt very naked in my little unarmed two-seater, and dived down to ground level, weaving in and out of the woods. However, the Germans ignored me and pressed on to devastate the Bristol aircraft factory at Filton, causing more than three hundred casualties.

With the successful outcome of the Battle of Britain, the daylight offensive ceased and night bombing started. At about seven o'clock nearly every evening we heard the wailing of the air raid sirens, soon to be followed by the throbbing drone of the night bombers. Then all hell was let loose as our anti-aircraft gunners got into action. There were deafening explosions as sticks of bombs crashed down. The clanging bells of fire engines and ambulances were heard as they raced through the streets. Searchlights swept the night sky and occasionally got a fix on an aircraft on which our gunners concentrated their fire, but so far as I know, few if any were shot down. Their heavy fire barrage did, however, help to boost public morale. Eventually after a few hours, the 'all clear' was sounded and one could go to sleep again.

Next morning, there would be the great clear-up. Bombed buildings to be shored up or demolished, water and gas mains repaired, telephone lines to be restored and railway tracks rebuilt. Craters in the roads were fenced off and diversion signs were everywhere. The ARP, fire and rescue services were magnificent. Unexploded or delayed action bombs caused a lot of trouble, and were dealt with by a dedicated band of extremely brave men. I well remember seeing an enormous bomb lying in the middle of Regent Street, with a man coolly sitting astride it while attempting to defuse the thing.

At the height of the blitz, I heard about a new top secret radar device being installed in night fighters to enable them to locate enemy bombers in darkness. This was known as AI (Air Interception). At last, I thought, there may now be a chance for me to do something useful and have a go at those bastards. I went to HQ Fighter Command at Bentley Priory and applied for a posting to a night fighter squadron. I stressed the fact that I had had past experience at Farnborough on instrument development, and that although in the Technical Branch, I was an experienced pilot and had always been officially assessed 'above average'. I submitted that I could do a useful job in developing the technique for the operational use of the new AI equipment. They turned me down on the score that with my rank of Squadron Leader, I would have to be in command of a squadron, or at least a flight, of night fighters and this would not be acceptable for an officer who had no previous experience of Fighter Command operations. It was a closed shop!

Many years later, I discovered that my old friend David Atcherley was at that time in command of a secret Flight of Beaufighter aircraft with which the AI technique was being developed. David needed technicians so badly that he put civilian scientists into RAF uniform in order that they could fly on his experimental operations against German night bombers. If only I had known this, I could have applied to him personally and he would certainly have accepted me. It was most galling to realise that by my failure then to contact David, I had missed my one chance of flying on active operations during the war.

At the start of the blitz, we all stayed in at nights. Life in Kensington Close was cheerful and there was plenty to do, as the building contained two bars, a restaurant, a comfortable lounge, a games room, swimming pool and two squash courts. Everyone was friendly — especially the girls. There were a number of them living there, mostly secretaries or nurses who defied the bombing and remained in their jobs. They were a warm-hearted lot who did their best to contribute to the war effort by giving all possible consolation to us lonely officers. The boys never had it so good! Despite the black-out and the rigours of the blitz, many of my RAF friends

stationed in the country, used to spend their weekend leaves with me. They could hardly wait to rush up to London to enjoy the pleasures of life at Kensington Close!

My friend, Pat Kirwan, a very amusing Irish author whom I had originally met at Henry Savage's cottage and who was now a successful film script writer, remarked that life confined within Kensington Close was like an unending ship's pleasure cruise without ever going ashore. Pat was engaged to Celia, one of the celebrated Paget twins, two beautiful and attractive girls both of whom were living in the Close. They were identical twins and so alike that I found it impossible to tell them apart. I asked Pat how he could tell which one he was with. 'I can't,' he replied, 'but I don't really mind. I love them both!'

After a few weeks of the blitz we got tired of being confined within Kensington Close every evening, so after waiting for a lull in the bombing, several of us would nip out in my car for a change of scene. Before long, we were going out at night as usual, the greatest hazard in my open car being not so much the bombs, but the rain of jagged shrapnel splinters coming down from the anti-aircraft barrage. The favourite haunts of the RAF in London were the Shepherd pub in Mayfair and the Wellington Club in Knightsbridge, where we forgathered with our many friends.

My favourite spot was undoubtedly the Renaissance Club in Kensington, which had been started early in the war by John Flanagan, my old artist friend, as a club for members of the artistic professions. It was patronised by artists, authors, actors and musicians, and many celebrities were regularly to be seen there, including Augustus John, Hannen Swaffer, Algernon Blackwood and Aneurin Bevan. John had had a close relationship with Gracie Fields for several years before the war, and Gracie herself always visited the Club whenever she was in London. My old friend Henry Savage, now evacuated from the beach and living in a room in Chelsea, was there nearly every night sitting in his favourite corner by the bar, and it was good to be in touch with the old chap again. Being close to the Free French HQ, the club was also patronised by French officers with whom we all got along with well.

Johnny Flanagan had hung pictures all around the walls which he hoped to sell to his patrons, but he soon found that selling drinks at the bar was far easier and more profitable. With his Irish charm, he made the perfect club host. His wife Margaret looked after the catering and provided surprisingly good dinners, considering the food shortages and rationing in force. She had a roster of attractive girls who served two or three evenings a week each as barmaids and waitresses, and so gave the place a pleasant and happy atmosphere. The club survived the blitz and remained highly successful until Johnny's death some years after the war.

One of the features of the club was a grand piano, at which in the evenings Walford Haydn, an orchestra conductor and a composer of merit, would sometimes sit. With his mane of white hair, he really looked the part. There would be a respectful hush, and Walford would play a short piano recital, after which he would bow to the audience to acknowledge their mild applause.

One night back in my flat, I turned on the radio and heard the announcement of Haydn's Symphony in B Flat Major (or some such). Next evening, I had a drink with Walford and told him that I had just heard his Symphony. 'I must congratulate you,' I said, 'It really was jolly good stuff!'

'That Haydn died a hundred and thirty years ago', he replied rather stuffily.

At the club, I met a charming and elegant lady named Diana, who invited me to spend a weekend at her country home in Surrey. It was a beautiful Walt Disney style thatched-roof house with extensive woodland grounds, including a lake. Diana was most hospitable and had a fine wine cellar. I spent several weekends there, and the peace of the countryside made such a welcome break from the discomfort and noise of the London blitz. One morning when her housekeeper brought a tea tray into my bedroom, she stood there with her hands on her ample hips, and said: 'It does Madam so much good to have a guest. She is very lonely here.' Then, with an arch smile, she added: 'It's many a year, Sir, since I've baked a wedding cake!'

Things seemed to be going well for me with Diana. On her next visit to London, I invited her to dine with me at the Renaissance Club. We were sitting comfortably at our table when Walford Haydn walked across to the grand piano. 'Who is that?' enquired Diana. 'He reminds me so much of my music teacher. I wonder if he could play one of my pieces, as I would like to sing.' My heart stood still! If there is one thing I cannot stand, it is a woman who sings. I don't mind soft, crooning voices, or the low husky ones like Eartha Kitt, but the full-throated ones who belt their songs out loudly and with that awful throb, simply make me curl up.

Diana went across to Walford to ask him to play a piece for her. Highly embarrassed, I disappeared quickly to the men's room where I waited for ten minutes or so, then assuming it would all be over, I returned to the clubroom. They were waiting for me! The moment I entered, Walford's hands crashed down on to the keys and off they went. It was indescribable — Diana's voice was more horrifying than anything I could have imagined. Our little romance was over — I never saw her again.

One day in my office, Jimmy Justice 'phoned me and asked if he could bring his wife round to my flat for a drink that evening. 'Why, Jimmy,' I said, 'I never knew you were married.'

'I got married this morning,' he replied, 'and I'm broke.'

‘Come round by all means,’ I said. ‘I’ll be delighted to see you both.’

Jimmy, as large and bearded as ever, duly arrived with little wife Dilys, of whom he seemed immensely proud. I thought to myself: ‘You poor, poor girl. Have you any idea what problems you have landed yourself in for?’ When Jimmy had drunk every drop of drink that I had in my flat, knowing he was broke, I invited them both to dine with me at the Wellington Club. Just before eleven o’clock, Jimmy looked at his watch and in his booming voice, said: ‘I’ve got to get back to my mother at Bromley, and the last bus home leaves in ten minutes. Would you please run Dilys back to her flat for me?’

‘What about your honeymoon, Jimmy?’ I enquired.

‘That’s alright,’ he boomed, ‘Had it this afternoon. Well, goodbye — goodbye.’ And he was gone.

Nearly everyone in London had their personal bomb story, and I had mine. Often at night after I had returned to Kensington Close and put my car in the garage, to save walking round to the front entrance I used to climb up the external fire escape stairs to my corridor. One night I did so, but had I gone round to the front entrance, the air raid wardens would have told me that my wing of the building had been evacuated owing to an unexploded bomb outside. Instead, I went to bed in my flat — the solitary occupant of the wing, and completely oblivious to the bomb just outside.

At about six in the morning, there was an almighty crash and I found myself sitting on the floor covered in plaster from the ceiling. Fortunately, there was no serious damage to the building other than to windows and plaster, but there was one thing that surprised me — the window glass and curtains in my flat appeared to have been sucked out by the blast, rather than having been blown in.

On another occasion, I was going to call for an attractive girl called Ronnie, whom I had recently met. She had a flat in one of the old Kensington houses, and arriving at her road in the black-out, I shone my torch to locate her house — number 17. I found 15 and 19, but there was an empty space where 17 should have been. I went to the air raid warden’s hut at the corner of the road and asked him what had happened to number 17. He told me that a few nights earlier it had been hit by a landmine and completely demolished — all fifteen occupants being killed. Sadly, I crossed poor Ronnie’s name out of my address book. Years later, however, I happened to meet her again — it seemed that she had luckily not been at home that night and so had escaped the bomb. She had been unable to contact me as she didn’t have my address.

Kensington Close was a strong building with steel girder construction, and about as safe as could be expected during the bombing. Many local residents, fearful of being buried under the debris of their houses, used to bring their bedding in at nights and

sleep along our corridors. One night, I came in late and walked past all the sleeping bodies on either side of the corridor, and right outside the door of my flat I found a girl fast asleep, with her dark hair framing the prettiest face I had ever seen. Early next morning, I opened my door and invited her in for a cup of tea.

Her name was Ruth, and she had recently come over from Ireland as she wanted to do something to help us with the war effort. I was instantly attracted to her, and she and I became close friends and were very happy together. All the time, however, she kept worrying me to find her a wartime job so that she could do something useful to help Britain. I told her she was doing a fine job looking after me, but this did not seem to satisfy her!

One day I came home and found she had gone. I was desolate! A week or so later she 'phoned me from Harrogate — she had enlisted in the WAAF (Women's Auxiliary Air Force) and hated it. All she was doing was scrubbing floors, carrying coal and cleaning barrack rooms. Could I possibly help?

I happened to know personally the Wing Commander in charge of the Air Ministry transport, and knew that he was proud of his team of smart WAAF drivers who drove the staff officers on their visits. I described Ruthie to him and told him she was an experienced driver and ideal for his team. Within three weeks, Ruthie was posted to the Air Ministry Transport Section as Acting Corporal (Unpaid), and we were together again.

During the following months we were very happy. Ruthie loved the job — she really was a good driver — and told me the most amusing stories about her passengers, especially when she carried members of my own staff who discussed me behind my back! Like all the Irish, she had the most unpredictable moods and life with her was never dull.

By May 1941, deliveries of American aircraft were pouring into Britain and North Africa, and increasing difficulties were being met in servicing them. Our British Air Commission in Washington had arranged the purchases and had ordered adequate quantities of spare parts, but they had completely overlooked the supply of special tools and handling equipment necessary to assemble and service the aircraft. Basically, even our mechanics' spanners would not fit the American nuts and bolts, which were different in size from the British ones. Special sling fittings necessary to hoist engines and wings, and special lifting jacks were not provided. The RAF in Egypt reported that American aircraft being shipped there in crates could not be properly assembled. Finally, we had a report from Aldergrove in Northern Ireland that a squadron of B-24 Liberator bombers being formed there could not become operational because of lack of special handling equipment — they could not even change a nosewheel that had a punctured tyre.

By now, in my Department at the Air Ministry, I had been appointed Assistant Director and had been promoted to the rank of Wing Commander. My Director sent for me to discuss the emergency, and told me he had arranged for me to go to Washington immediately and join the RAF Delegation there as his personal representative. He gave me the following brief-as to my duties:

‘You are to take the most urgent action to ensure that adequate supplies of tools and handling equipment are purchased and delivered to cover the requirements of all RAF squadrons equipped, or about to be equipped, with American aircraft. You will stay until these purchases have been completed, and you will arrange that suitable scales of tools and handling equipment are included with all future aircraft orders to be placed by the British Air Commission.’

I took a sad farewell of Ruthie, not knowing for how long we would be parted. I was now deeply in love and wanted desperately to marry her, but time would not permit. I gave her a ring to remember me by, and asked her to await my return. Then I set off for Glasgow and a passage by sea to America.

Chapter 15

U.S.A.

At this time during the war there were no passenger liners crossing over to America, and the only air transport was an occasional flight by long range flying boat which was reserved for VIPs. I found I had been allocated a passage in an armed merchant cruiser which had previously been a passenger liner with the British East India Line. She had been converted for naval use and armed with four six-inch guns and some anti-aircraft weaponry, and was being used for convoy escort work. There were about a dozen passengers, mostly military and Air Force staff *en route* to America, and we shared the Wardroom with the ship's officers. Black-out at night was severely enforced, not even a lighted cigarette being allowed on the deck, and in the event of an air raid or naval action, we were to be relegated to the bowels of the ship.

Our merchant cruiser was helping to protect a convoy of about fifty ships bound for Canada, which were steaming along at only 12 knots, and changing course periodically as a precaution against submarine attack. The ship's officers were all naval reservists and were bored stiff after twelve months without the sight of a submarine or any naval action.

One night I heard the engines opened up to full power, and in the morning found to my surprise that there was no sign of the convoy. We were told that an enemy warship had been reported approaching from the South Atlantic, and we were proceeding at full speed to head her off from the convoy. The ship's officers were delighted — action at last! I was far from delighted — I was supposed to be going to Washington on important duty, not to engage in a naval battle in mid-Atlantic. I wondered also what sort of a chance we should have with our four little six-inch guns. Fortunately, we didn't find the warship and in due course arrived at Halifax.

After a long, slow train journey to Montreal, and thence via New York to Washington, I reported to the RAF Delegation at the British Embassy, where I was well received. They found me an apartment nearby and set me up in an office with a full time secretary. As the USA was still a neutral country, we all wore civilian clothes and it seemed strange after the austerity and black-

out of London suddenly to find myself in a peacetime atmosphere of lush living and bright lights.

I made contact with the British Air Commission, but they seemed to resent the presence of a serving officer interfering with their work, and more or less ignored me. The BAC was a civilian organisation formed as an off-shoot of the Ministry of Aircraft Production in London and their staff were not over-bright. I was told that in setting up the BAC each Department of the Ministry of Aircraft Production had to send representatives to undertake their particular work in America. Naturally, it seemed, each Department had selected for this purpose staff who could most easily be dispensed with.

Realising that I was to receive no help from the BAC and that I was to be on my own, I started immediately to plan a series of visits to aircraft and aero engine firms to discuss our servicing requirements. The RAF Delegation gave me enormous help with these visits by arranging for me the services of Wing Commander Homer Berry, previously a free-lance American test pilot who had volunteered to join the Royal Canadian Air Force early in the war. Homer was a great character and seemed to know all the heads of the various firms on first name terms, and he accompanied me on my visits. After his introduction to the President of each firm, the rest was easy. All the firms were most co-operative and anxious to do everything possible to ensure that their aircraft could be satisfactorily operated after delivery to the RAF.

Mr Glenn Martin, President of the Glenn L. Martin Company, was horrified to learn that his Maryland bombers could not be properly assembled or serviced after shipment to Egypt. He gave me the most enthusiastic help to satisfy my requirements, and said: 'Whatever tools and handling equipment you may decide to order, I intend to have a kit of special tools placed in the cockpit of every aircraft that we deliver to the RAF.'

There was only one unfortunate incident. When we visited the Consolidated Aircraft Corporation at San Diego, Homer introduced me to Rube Fleet, their President. He turned to me and said: 'If you are from that goddam Limey Air Commission in Washington, Sir, then I'll trouble you to leave my office.'

Homer quickly put things right. 'Say, Rube,' he said, 'this guy's alright. He's from the RAF in England, not from that Air Commission, and he knows what he wants.'

All was now well and Rube gave me his full co-operation. It appeared that he was furious with the BAC who kept changing their requirements for modifications to the B-24 Liberator design, which involved continually stopping the production line. 'Every stop costs me a quarter of a million dollars,' grumbled Rube.

After each visit, I had a vast amount of work to do in my office,

listing the various items required for each type of aircraft, and working out the total quantities needed for the RAF. Then I had to prepare the necessary orders and steer these through the complex purchasing procedure of the BAC. I often worked until eight or nine o'clock at night, and had little time for social life.

I found the Americans to be a kindly and most friendly people, the majority of whom were pro-British as regards the war, although there was a minority group called 'America First' that was largely pro-German. Even these were friendly enough when I met them. American hospitality was then, as now, overwhelming but there was one characteristic that puzzled me — that was the surprising formality of their social etiquette. For instance, in my office during the humid heat of the Washington summer, I used to hang up my jacket, unbutton my collar and loosen my tie. When a visitor called, I had to straighten up my tie and put on my jacket. Then, after greeting him, we would both take off our jackets and loosen our ties. Another formality was a pleasant custom that might well be followed in Britain — after a party it was a social 'must' to send flowers to your hostess.

Introductions were much more formal than in Britain. At a party, one was introduced separately to every person present. If they did not quite get your name, they would ask you to repeat it. The extraordinary thing was that they all remembered your name afterwards — unlike in Britain, where one doesn't usually bother to listen to the name as one probably won't meet the person again anyway. This introduction formality caused me some concern when, in the mornings going down in the lift from my apartment, I used to see an attractive girl that I would like to have met. When I tried to catch her eye, she always looked away and gave me no chance to speak. Later on, I met her formally at a party, and asked her why she had been so reluctant to speak to me in the lift. She replied: 'Of course I couldn't. If I had spoken to you without having been introduced, you might have thought I was a pushover.'

American social etiquette seemed largely to be dictated by a certain Emily Post who wrote a daily column syndicated in papers throughout the States. For instance, in a hotel one day, I was going down in a lift crowded with men, when a lady entered. Immediately, they all whipped off their hats causing much confusion in the cramped space. It appeared that Emily Post had ruled that gentlemen should take off their hats when a lady entered an elevator. Yet, on reaching the ground floor, all these men walked past ladies sitting in the hotel lounge, with their hats firmly on their heads.

Although my thoughts were constantly with Ruthie back in London I felt the need for female company, but without proper social introductions it was surprisingly difficult to meet the girls. One night, I was having dinner in a restaurant with two RAF

friends, and mentioned that I had been in Washington for three months and had not had a date with a girl. John Mynors, a large and handsome man whom I had known for years and who was renowned for his success with the ladies, said: 'You may not believe this of me, Eddie, but I have been here six months and have not even kissed a girl.' Just then Bruin Purvis, a test pilot attached to the RAF Delegation, leapt to his feet and shouted, much to the astonishment of the other diners around: 'God damn and blast these Yankee girls. I've been here twelve months and have not got to first base yet!'

My secretary, Tommy Buck, was a highly efficient and serious-minded girl. We were very good friends and she often asked my advice about her personal problems. At twenty-four, she had been divorced twice, and now she was interested in two men — one, a Chief Petty Officer in the Navy based at Norfolk, Virginia, and the other, an army private in New York. One weekend, she would go down to Norfolk, Virginia, and the next up to New York, but she couldn't make up her mind which to marry. She consulted me, and I asked her: 'Which one do you really love, Tommy?'

She replied: 'Harry in New York.'

'Well then, marry Harry,' I advised.

'But I can't,' she said. 'Harry is only a private in the army, and if we get divorced I'll get so little alimony.' She was certainly security minded!

By early October, I was ready for a tour of the aircraft factories on the West Coast and travelled over to Los Angeles by a DC-3 sleeper. Most American airlines were then operating DC-3s, a twin-engined transport carrying twenty-one passengers, which later became the Dakota — that wonderful old workhorse which served us so well during the war. The DC-3 sleeper carried only fourteen passengers, and was equipped with upper and lower bunks rather like those on American trains. After dinner, the bunks were made up and we passengers retired for the night. A most attractive air hostess came to my bunk, fastened a strap across me, and then enquired: 'Is there anything else I can do for you?' Before I could think of the obvious answer, she had withdrawn and closed the drapes. Next morning, to my regret, this charming girl had disappeared — they had landed overnight to refuel, and changed crews.

On arrival at Burbank Airport, I was met by my old chum, Edward Ashley, with whom I was to stay while in Los Angeles. I had originally met Eddie, an aspiring film actor, at Henry Savage's cottage with his close friend Jimmy Justice. Like Jimmy, Eddie was usually broke but he had a lucky break just before the war when he got a contract with Metro Goldwyn Mayer and starred in their film 'Pride and Prejudice'. He met me in an enormous Cadillac, and took me to his sumptuous home in Beverley Hills which was complete

with swimming pool. I was astounded at his new affluence! Later, when he drove his Cadillac into a gas station and said: 'Fill her up and charge it to my account,' the attendant replied: 'Sorry Bud. No cash, no gas.' So, after all, it was the same old Eddie that I used to know! He explained that he was then 'resting' and looking for a new film part, but despite financial problems, he had to keep up appearances and continue to live in the style of a film star. 'People here are only interested in you so long as you are successful,' he said. 'When you aren't, they don't want to know you.'

Eddie was very good-looking and amusing, and he seemed to be immensely popular with the film set in Hollywood. We were invited to many parties in the fantastic homes of the film stars where I, as a Wing Commander from the RAF in England, was made especially welcome. Eddie's favourite girl at that time was the seventeen-year-old heiress, Gloria Vanderbilt. She was unspoilt and charming company, and we spent a lot of time with her. Tall and beautiful, she was in my opinion far more glamorous than any of the film stars that we met.

I spent about a month with Eddie during which time I managed to complete my visits to all the aircraft factories on the West Coast, from Seattle in the north to San Diego in the south. Sometimes, in the evenings, I would totter back to Eddie's home quite worn out after long technical discussions all day at an aircraft factory, and I would find Eddie lying languidly in his dressing gown on a sofa. 'I've had the most exhausting day,' he would say. 'My hairdresser and tailor were here nearly all morning, and this afternoon I've had to study the script of a new film.'

Most of Eddie's friends were connected with the film world, whom he had to cultivate for professional reasons. One evening, however, he said: 'I'm bored with all this social round. Let's go out tonight with a couple of college cuties I happen to know.' We collected two cheerful young girls, mine being a pretty brunette, and after dinner together we went to a palatial dance hall. As we entered, I noticed a girl attendant selling gardenias from a tray. A sudden thought occurred to me — how lovely my girl would look with a white gardenia in her glossy, dark hair. So I paid my dollar and bought the gardenia, and she retired to the cloakroom to fix it. When we entered the ballroom, I saw about two thousand girls there, every one of whom had gardenias in their hair. This was Emily Post again, who in her latest syndicated column, had told them that was the vogue now in fashion. I suppose she was tipped off to do so by some Gardenias Growers' Association.

I told Eddie about my lack of success with the girls in Washington, and he said: 'You may not believe me, but even I had failures during my first six months over here. Then I learned the secret — American girls are different from the English ones whom you and I

used to hunt. Here, the girls do the chasing. So I invented what I call the Green Light Technique, which works splendidly.' He explained that when asked to a party, he always briefed his hostess in advance as to his latest film and other exploits, so that all present would know about him. Then, arriving late, he would walk into the room with a bright smile and, with everyone looking at him, he would wander around meeting the guests and making (prepared) amusing wisecracks. He would note any particular girl that interested him and ignore her completely, while making a great fuss of other girls present.

'Within three weeks,' said Eddie, 'that girl will 'phone and ask me to a party. Bingo! That is the Green Light. Go right in and win — you can't lose.'

While in California, I managed to put in a long weekend in San Francisco to see my mother, whom I had not seen for twenty years. She was now a naturalised American citizen and was running a clinic on behalf of Coué and lecturing on his auto-suggestion theories. She seemed to be doing very well, and it amazed me how she managed to impress so many people with her teachings on a subject about which she could have known so little.

San Francisco is an interesting and beautiful city, certainly the most attractive one in the USA. Through my mother's influence, I was invited to be the guest of honour at a dinner given at the Western Women's Club, after which I was asked to make a speech. I found myself facing rows of eagle-eyed ladies and gave them a talk about Britain and the war effort, and about life in the London blitz. When I finished, the Chairwoman called for questions. Up sprang a lady who completely ignored my speech, and demanded irrelevantly: 'When are you British going to stop oppressing the poor, downtrodden people of India?' I could have replied: 'When you Americans stop oppressing your own downtrodden Indians,' but I thought it wiser to refrain.

Once back again in Washington, I set to work sorting out all the technical data I had collected from the aircraft factories on the West Coast, and preparing the necessary purchase orders. Then one evening, being invited to an Embassy party, I decided to try out Edward Ashley's Green Light Technique. At the party was an attractive girl that I had seen around the Embassy, so I completely ignored her — chatting up one or two of her friends. The plan worked — ten days later she 'phoned and asked me to her birthday party.

She was the wife of an Army Captain stationed away in Honolulu, and I was to be her escort at a dance at the Army and Navy Club. On my arrival at her apartment, she said: 'Haven't you brought my corsage? I can't possibly go to the dance without one.' I thought this was an article of lady's underwear, and was somewhat taken aback.

It transpired that as her escort, I should have provided a suitable bunch of flowers to match the dress that she would be wearing. Emily Post again!

She drove me to the Club in her car and we picked up a nice corsage en route. At the Club, my hostess drank heavily — whisky after whisky. Her speech became slurred and she could hardly walk straight. When the dance was over, I asked her for the keys of her car so that I could fetch it from the carpark. I intended to drive her home myself — but no such luck! She insisted on driving, sometimes heading straight at the headlights of oncoming cars. ‘I’ll scare them,’ she laughed. She certainly scared me! She shot through traffic lights and when at last she had to stop, I took the opportunity of opening the door to jump out. She grabbed hold of my jacket and pulled me back. ‘My dates always escort me back home,’ she insisted. Another hectic drive, and we eventually parked outside her apartment.

I got out, opened her door and bowed stiffly: ‘Thank you for a most memorable evening,’ I said. ‘I will now walk the three miles back to my apartment.’

‘You will see me to my door,’ she commanded.

‘Oh well,’ I thought, ‘better humour the silly bitch.’ I walked with her to the door, helped her put the key in the lock and opened it. Then I turned to take my leave.

She caught hold of the lapels of my jacket and started to pull. ‘I want you to come in with me.’

A sudden thought flashed through my mind that I was being ‘framed’ for divorce purposes, and I visualised flash photographers lurking inside. In a panic, I snatched her hands from my jacket, turned and ran. She chased after me screaming her head off. Along Pennsylvania Avenue we ran. I ran hard, but despite her long dress she kept close up behind me, screaming at the top of her voice. A cab driver pulled in alongside me. ‘Fifty bucks to get me out of this,’ I shouted. I jumped in and thankfully escaped.

So much for the Green Light Technique!

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Early in December, my task was completed and all my orders had been placed. By now the British Air Commission had set up a new Branch with a staff of six to cover aircraft repair and maintenance requirements and invited me to join them. This would have meant remaining in the comfort of America for the duration of the war, but I decided to return to London after nearly six months’ absence, and see my Ruthie again and marry her. My secretary, Tommy Buck, took me to Garfunkel’s Store and helped me choose a wonderful trousseau for Ruthie — all exciting silk and nylon things she could not possibly obtain in wartime England. Then, not fancying another two weeks at sea with a convoy, I arranged with the RAF

Delegation to get me a passage back in one of the B-24 Liberator bombers being ferried over from Montreal.

On 7 December 1941, while I was passing through New York on my way up to Montreal, enormous headlines appeared on the news placards: **PEARL HARBOR BOMBED**

Everyone looked stunned. Although there was no information yet as to the appalling damage and casualties, I could not help feeling a sense of exhilaration. America would surely now come into the war, and we would no longer be alone. With such a mighty ally, the outcome was now certain. We should win!

Chapter 16

London Again and the Military Gliders

On arrival at Montreal, I reported to RAF Ferry Command HQ at Dorval Airport which lay deep in snow. They were extremely busy preparing Hudson and Liberator bombers for the long Atlantic crossing over to England. The twin-engined Hudsons were being ferried across in batches with an experienced navigator in the lead aircraft, but the four-engined Liberators were flown over individually. The Liberator was not equipped to carry passengers, and my aircraft had two planks installed in the bomb bay on each of which four of us passengers sat facing each other. No heating, lighting or sound proofing was provided, and as the Liberator cruised up to 25,000 feet where the air temperature was minus 40°C, we unfortunate passengers had to sit uncomfortably in semi-darkness, semi-frozen and deafened by the noise. We just hoped that the pilot would not pull the wrong lever and drop us all out.

We had been warned that several passengers on earlier flights had suffered frostbitten fingers and toes, and so were kitted out in heavy, woollen sweaters and long, thick woollen stockings. No oxygen masks were available, and we had to hold rubber tubes in our mouths and thus could not talk to each other. The Flight Engineer kept coming down into the bomb bay to ensure that we did not fall asleep, in case the oxygen tubes slipped out of our mouths with the resultant risk of asphyxiation and frostbite.

After several hours we landed at Gander Airport in Newfoundland, which was being constructed as a staging post for aircraft to refuel before and after Atlantic crossings. In the icy wilderness, there was a single runway of enormous length to enable the heavily laden aircraft to take off safely. Snow ploughs continually travelled up and down this runway blowing huge plumes of snow high into the air, where it piled up into banks on each side of it. A few permanent buildings existed to house the Royal Canadian Air Force staff, and two typical RAF wooden huts were provided for use by transit aircrews, which were known as Eastbound Inn and Westbound Inn.

Squeezing between massive icicles which stretched down from

the eaves of the roof to the ground, we thankfully entered Eastbound Inn. Here, in the centre of the hut stood a standard RAF coke stove, around which a group of miserable-looking figures were huddled. Apparently, flights over the Atlantic were being delayed by bad weather and we were committed to remain at Gander for at least twenty-four hours. Bunks were available and meals were served, the dinner menu reading rather oddly:

Soup Fish or Cod Pudding

We took off at dusk the next evening, our Captain preferring to fly by night for ease of astro-navigation. Eventually, after about nine of the most unpleasant hours of my life, we landed at Prestwick Airport in Scotland. I tumbled out of the aircraft, numbed with cold and fatigue, and took a room in the Officers Mess where I slept all day to recover. I took the night train to London, which was crowded with soldiers and with not a seat available, so I sat all night on my suitcase in the corridor experiencing once again the austerity of wartime Britain and the blackout. I had been unable to contact Ruthie to let her know of my return from America, so on arrival at Euston Station at seven o'clock on a dark and dismal December morning, I rushed to the telephone to speak to her. I longed to hear her voice again, and for her warm welcome after such a miserable journey back home.

She answered the 'phone and seemed most surprised to hear from me. 'Darling,' I said, 'I'm longing to be with you again and am coming straight round to see you.'

'No!' she replied somewhat coolly. 'You can't do that as I am just off to work.'

'Take the day off,' I entreated, 'and we'll spend it together.'

But she refused and said: 'Take a flat again at Kensington Close and I'll come round to see you tonight.'

Somewhat crestfallen, I booked into Kensington Close and that evening she came to see me. After a rather strained reunion, she thawed out a bit and eventually went into raptures about the trousseau I had brought back for her containing all the silk and nylon undies that were unprocurable in wartime England. After that, we were back once again to our old happy relationship, but two days later she disappeared without warning and I was completely unable to trace her. A few days later she suddenly reappeared and spent an evening with me as warmly affectionate as ever, returning afterwards to her flat. At about two o'clock in the morning, she phoned me:

'Edward, you won't like what I have to tell you, but I can never see you any more.'

'Why on earth not?' I asked.

'Because I'm getting married today.'

I was dumbfounded. The bottom of my world seemed suddenly to

have dropped out. It later transpired that while I had been in America she had met, and fallen in love with a handsome young naval officer but had refrained from telling me about it. My unexpected appearance on the scene had put her into a state of confusion and she had switched between the two of us, before deciding to go ahead and marry him — in my trousseau, presumably! Three months later she was widowed when he went down with his ship, and I met her once more — but the old magic had gone and I was no longer interested. I did ask her how she could have spent that last evening with me the night before her marriage, and she replied: 'Because I was very fond of you. You had always been so good to me, and I felt I owed it to you.'

Greatly depressed, I returned to normal life in London and found the wartime austerity such a complete contrast to the lush living of America. The night bombing raids had by now eased off considerably as the Germans were spreading their effort over other cities in Britain. I rejoined my old Department at the Air Ministry and though the work was interesting, I felt restless and longed to get back to flying and take a more active part in the war effort. An old gliding friend of mine who had become a pilot with the Airborne Force, told me that an Airborne Forces Experimental Establishment (AFEE) had been set up under the auspices of the Ministry of Aircraft Production, and that the post of chief glider test pilot was still vacant. I rushed round to MAP HQ and saw the Director in charge of this development, and he questioned me closely about my gliding experience and general technical background. I felt I had impressed him and stood a good chance of getting that test pilot job.

About two weeks later, I received instructions that I was to be seconded to the MAP, a civilian organisation, and to report immediately to take over a new Branch being formed at their London HQ to control the technical development of military gliders. Another desk job! However, the work was far more interesting to me, as it involved close contact with various aircraft manufacturers and regular visits to the Experimental Establishment at Sherburn in Yorkshire where I was able to get in a lot of flying. By now, the Communication Flight at Hendon had acquired a Spitfire Mark IX which I was able to borrow for my periodic visits up north to Sherburn, which made those journeys most enjoyable.

In setting up the new Branch at MAP, I scoured around for staff with experience of gliders and was lucky to find Flight Lieutenant John Sproule, a well-known glider pilot, who was instructing army personnel on Hotspur gliders. I had him posted to my Branch right away, much to his disgust as he loved flying and hated the thought of a desk job. However, he settled down well and did excellent work as a trouble-shooter, visiting army units to discuss the glider problems

that were continually arising, which we could subsequently iron out with the manufacturers.

I discovered that my old friend, Robert Kronfeld, probably the most experienced glider pilot in the world, had been languishing in an internment camp in the Isle of Man, where he had been sent on the outbreak of war as an enemy alien. Thanks to Lord Sempill's influence with high authority, we got him commissioned into the RAF and appointed as chief glider test pilot at AFEE. He did an outstandingly fine job for us, but sadly was killed shortly after the war when testing an experimental tailless glider built for research purposes.

Four military glider designs had been commissioned by the MAP, all of wooden construction. The first was the General Aircraft's Hotspur, which carried eight soldiers seated side-by-side in line, and was towed by a single-engined light bomber. It had been designed to meet early Army requirements for a single flight operation over the Channel with a crash landing on skids, but the need for training Army glider pilots changed its role and involved considerable modifications for the purpose. More than 1000 Hotspurs were built for the training programme, mostly by furniture factories.

The larger Horsa glider, which became the mainstay of the glider force, was designed to carry twenty-five armed soldiers and be towed by twin-engined medium bombers. Horsa was the product of Airspeed Ltd, the firm that had made the Tern glider that I had crashed at Sutton Bank in 1932. The Horsa was highly successful and proved to have the lowest crash rate per flying hour of any aircraft yet built. In all 3655 Horsas were built, largely by a consortium of furniture manufacturers and other firms outside the aircraft industry.

As an insurance in case Horsa should prove unsuccessful, the slightly smaller Hengist was introduced. Hengist was designed by Slingsby in Yorkshire to carry seventeen armed soldiers. Unfortunately, during an early test flight its wings came off due to the faulty fitting of certain bolts, though the two pilots were able to escape by parachute. By then, Horsa was proving so successful that Hengist was dropped, though it had shown considerable promise.

The fourth glider commissioned by the MAP was the giant Hamilcar, designed by General Aircraft Ltd at Hanworth to meet an Army requirement for the transport of an 8-ton Tetrarch tank, or other equivalent military loads. Hamilcar required a four-engined bomber to tow it; it was successful, though an unwieldy brute to handle and very awkward to ferry around. A total of 390 Hamilcars were built.

From the beginning we experienced difficulties with the official system in that the army requirements in the field had to be referred

up through the War Office to the Air Ministry Directorate of Operational Requirements, and thence to my Department in the MAP. Sitting in the Air Ministry DOR was my old friend Toby Ashwell-Cooke, of the London Gliding Club in its early days. He was now commissioned in the RAF as a Squadron Leader, and his job in the Air Ministry was to filter the army requirements so as to cause the minimum interference in the aircraft industry, which was busy with production for the RAF.

Now Ashwell-Cooke was the most efficient chap, and he did a splendid job in filtering the army requirements with the result that most of them never reached me at all. I was horrified on one of my early visits to Netheravon, the main base of the Airborne Force, to be attacked by angry Colonels who wanted to know why their various requirements were not being met, and what was I doing about it. I soon discovered where the bottle-neck lay and arranged to keep closely in touch with them in future, so that I would be aware of the army requirements and could press Ashwell-Cooke to accept them. Even then we were not always successful, and later on the Army offered Ashwell-Cooke an appointment in the War Office with promotion to the rank of Colonel, on the principle that if you can't beat them, join them! He refused this offer as his loyalty was with the RAF, and they eventually solved the problem by having an Army Colonel attached to my Department as liaison officer, through whom I had direct contact with the Airborne Force. From then onwards, thanks to our co-operation with the glider manufacturers and to the ingenuity of John Sproule, we were able to meet most of their requirements.

We had to deal with many problems arising from the operation of gliders by the Airborne Force, and for this purpose we were fortunate to have the co-operation of Ken Wilkinson, a brilliant young scientist and engineer, who was in charge of the small Airborne Section at the RAE, Farnborough. He and his team successfully provided solutions to many of the operational difficulties being experienced. For instance, to enable a glider pilot to follow his tug when flying blind in cloud conditions or at night, they developed an ingenious instrument which indicated to him the slope and direction of the tow rope. This became known as the 'Angle of Dangle' and was a valuable contribution to the subsequent success of glider operations.

To meet army requirements, we had to arrange with the manufacturers for many extensive modifications to the gliders. For instance, as an alternative to troops, the Army wanted to carry heavy and bulky items of military equipment in the Horsa, including a six-pounder gun or 75 mm howitzer, together with a jeep, ammunition trailer and crew. The tail of the Horsa had to be hinged so that it could swing open and allow the jeep and gun to be driven in

when loading. The Army then scared me by fitting explosive bolts to the hinges so as to blow the tail right off after landing, and thus save time when unloading under active operational conditions. Whenever I flew in a Horsa after that, I kept a wary eye on the button that actuated those explosive bolts!

The major problem with the glider development programme was in adapting the bombers to tow them. With a heavily loaded glider in tow, the bomber's flying speed was reduced and its engines had to be run at a high power output. Consequently, engine cooling became a serious problem and we were faced with extensive flight tests to discover the best method of operating the bombers in order to give reasonable towing performance, and yet keep engine temperatures within acceptable limits. The AFEE carried out performance and handling trials of all suitable bombers as glider tugs, and upon receiving their test figures and flight recommendations, I had the final responsibility of clearing each tug/glider combination for operational use and in issuing special handling instructions for the tug pilots.

The best tugs proved to be the four-engined Lancaster and Halifax bombers for the huge and heavy Hamilcar, and the twin-engined Wellington III and Dakota for the Horsa. The Dakota, the military version of the American DC-3 airliner, was then entering the RAF and later on large numbers of this wonderful maid-of-all-work came into operation. Although intended as a troop transport, the Army used it for glider towing as well as for parachuting — both for soldiers and for heavy military equipment. They even parachuted jeeps and field guns out of it, these landing safely on crash pans fitted beneath them.

The RAF had formed No. 38 Wing at Netheravon to work with the Airborne Force, to tow their gliders and drop their paratroops. For a long while 38 Wing was equipped with the obsolete Whitley twin-engined bomber, which could not tow a fully loaded Horsa. Bomber Command, heavily committed with their offensive against Germany, refused to hand over any of their Wellington bombers to the Airborne Force, and a makeshift proposal was made to equip 38 Wing with Albemarles. The Albemarle was a twin-engined aircraft that Bomber Command did not want because its performance was sub-standard, and it had poor gun defence. A large number of Albemarles had been built, and they had been offered to the Russians who accepted them for paratroop operations. The aircraft were actually in process of being 'winterised' for the Russians when a number of them were switched over to 38 Wing.

Our test pilots at AFEE carried out trials of the Albemarle towing loaded Horsa gliders, and reported that the performance was unacceptable — engine temperatures were beyond limits and its rate of climb below safety level. As the result of these tests, I turned

down the Albemarle as a Horsa tug, and this stirred up a considerable uproar within 38 Wing who were committed to operate it. Wing Commander Peter May, commanding No. 296 Squadron equipped with Albemarles, 'phoned me stating that in his opinion our test pilots did not know their job and he would like personally to demonstrate to them that the Albemarle was perfectly capable of towing the Horsa if handled properly as he recommended. He was particularly anxious for the Albemarle to be cleared as a Horsa tug as his squadron was due to take part in the forthcoming Anglo-American airborne assault on Sicily from bases in Tunis.

I fixed up the demonstration at AFEE, and sat alongside Peter May while he flew the Albemarle with full fuel tanks, towing a fully loaded Horsa. He climbed the aircraft at the very low and almost uncontrollable speed of 95 knots, with its nose high up in the air and with his feet pumping away on the rudder pedals trying to hold a straight course. He just managed a rate of climb of 150 feet per minute, which I regarded as the minimum acceptable for safety, and in fact climbed up to 5000 feet using maximum take-off power all the way up.

I had to admit that he had proved his point, but he was a highly experienced pilot and I had my doubts as to whether the junior pilots of his squadron would be able to cope so well. Moreover, at the higher air temperatures to be experienced in Tunis, the aircraft's performance would be reduced and its fuel consumption greatly increased. Eventually, against my advice, higher authority agreed to accept the Albemarle as a Horsa tug subject to a reduced fuel load, which would enable it to carry out glider towing sorties of fairly short range.

During the subsequent Sicily assault, our Horsas were towed by four-engined Halifax bombers, while the Albemarles were relegated to tow the smaller American Waco gliders and for paratrooping. Peter May, however, true to his firm belief in the Albemarle, led the first assault towing a Horsa and just managed to arrive back at base, scraping in with nearly empty fuel tanks. On the second assault, four Albemarles towed Horsa gliders; one crashed on take-off, and two others ran out of fuel on the return journey and were lost at sea. A few days later, Peter May was shot down in his Albemarle while on a paratroop mission, and so died this very brave and determined officer. (A description of the Sicily glider assault is included at Appendix I.) Despite disastrous losses, that operation was successful as regards its objective — the capture of a vital bridge — and it gave the Airborne Forces valuable experience which contributed to the highly successful glider assaults on D Day and subsequently.

During the course of our glider development programme, a new and interesting project came under the control of my Branch as it

involved towing by an aircraft. At that time Malta, our main base in the Mediterranean, was being heavily bombed and urgently required more fighters for its defence, but our fighters did not have the range to reach Malta. Some were flown in from aircraft carriers in the Mediterranean but this involved a high degree of risk to the carrier, and a number of our fighters were lost at sea. Sir Alan Cobham, who had developed the technique for flight refuelling, suggested towing the fighters by night across enemy occupied France, until they were within safe range of Malta. He experimented with the idea and one day invited me to fly with him in a Wellington bomber which successfully towed two Hurricane fighters. The project was not adopted for operational use as by that time the development of drop tanks fitted under the fighters' wings gave them sufficient extra fuel for the range required.

Another odd project which came our way was the tank-carrying flying wing, the brain-child of my old friend 'Baron' Baynes, designer of the pre-war Scud glider. This was a tailless swept-back wing intended to be clamped on to the top of a tank and so enable it to be towed by an aircraft, the wing being jettisoned after landing. A one-third scale model was built as a glider for test at AFEE, with Kronfeld carrying out all the initial trials. He told me that it was the most uncontrollable aircraft he had ever flown, but eventually he got it right and it was sent on to Farnborough for further trials. It never became operational, but I often wondered how the tank tracks would have stood up to running along the ground at 80 mph or more during take-offs and landings!

The huge, unwieldy Hamilcar caused a great deal of trouble because it required a four-engined bomber to ferry it around. One day, I learnt that several hundred Wright Cyclone aero engines had become surplus and were available, and I thought that a basically simple installation of two Cyclones into the Hamilcar would make it capable of being ferried around by itself without the need for a tug. The Hamilcar manufacturers worked out a simple design scheme and confirmed that the powered Hamilcar was not only practical, but they estimated it could indeed carry some four tons of payload. The engines were to be quickly detachable so that the Hamilcar could revert to its glider role when required.

The Army were most enthusiastic about this proposal, but then we came up against the System. We had been able to carry out extensive alterations to the gliders without any interference, as they were not regarded as aeroplanes. Once engines were to be fitted, they became categorised as aeroplanes and subject to all the rules and design regulations of MAP officialdom. I found I had to hold a full-scale design meeting to which every Department of the MAP that might have the slightest interest in the project were to be invited. Nineteen representatives attended the meeting, all of

whom had to have their say and had to include their own special requirements. We had visualised a basically simple installation of two engines driving two wooden propellers. All sorts of safety requirements were insisted upon — variable pitch propellers, fire precautions, self-sealing fuel tanks, armour plating, radio installation with the necessary electrical system, etc.

While fully in agreement with essential safety precautions, I felt that in wartime when pilots were prepared to accept the far greater risk of flying in active operation against enemy action, they would have accepted the minor risk of a basically simple engine installation. The requirements of this meeting added so much cost and complication to the project, and the extra weight involved meant the loss of the useful payload we had expected for the powered Hamilcar, so that the project had to be dropped.

Altogether, between the Air Ministry and the MAP, I had about four years experience of the Civil Service in action. Now, the staff were all essentially nice chaps and anxious to help, but the system was so rigid and inflexible that it was difficult to get them to make decisions. They had always to refer a proposal to numerous other officials who might have some interest in it, for their comments, and this involved a frustrating waste of time. I always felt that if only the system would allow officials to accept more responsibility to make their own decisions, we could have done with about half the staff employed and greatly speeded up the business in hand.

The referring of proposals to other officials was known as 'Passing the Buck'. This was a useful procedure when one happened to be extremely busy and a pile of files would suddenly arrive in one's In-Tray. All one had to do was to pass the files out to a number of other Branches 'for their comments', and they would not re-appear for about three weeks — although then one had to read all the comments, which were often completely fatuous. There was the story, I believe to be true, that some official one day received a file with comments so outstandingly stupid, that he wanted to give his views on them in one short five-letter word — but he wrote instead: 'Round objects'. Later, the file came back to him from the originating official with the comment: 'Who is Mr Round, and to what does he object?'

Life in London after my return from America became very cheerful, now that the night bombing raids had greatly decreased. One night, soon after my arrival back at Kensington Close, I came into my flat and found to my surprise a young and beautiful girl dressed in her nightie, sitting in my armchair warming her toes by the electric fire. She seemed surprised to see me, and it transpired that her father, an Army Major, had been the previous occupant of the flat. She knew that her father had gone away on temporary duty, and having a spare key of the flat she had decided to move in. She

told me her name was Nadia, and that she was just seventeen. When her mother died, her father had sent her off to a boarding school away up north in Yorkshire. 'It was a horrid school, and I hated it,' she said. 'So when I heard that Daddy had left London on temporary duty, I ran away from school and came here.' Still brooding over my unfortunate affair with Ruthie, I was in no mood to accept responsibility for this delectable and unexpected visitor, so I fixed her up in a flat of her own. Thereafter, she certainly brightened the lives of a lot of lonely batchelors living in Kensington Close!

After a while, I moved out of Kensington Close and took a larger flat in another block, which had a small kitchen. I thought it would be nice to be able to entertain a lady friend to a cosy little supper at home. Soon afterwards, I met a charming girl called Mary, who was an attractive model with a peek-a-boo hair style and very much resembled Veronica Lake, the reigning film star of that period. I invited her to supper and in view of food rationing and shortages at that time, I cooked up an omelette from powdered egg and powdered milk, with sardines on toast to follow — which were somewhat burnt. The next time Mary came to see me, she brought her toothbrush with her, and told me that after that dreadful supper she thought she had better move in and look after me.

Mary was a kind and gentle person, very affectionate, and we had two happy years together. During that period, I was working extremely hard on the military gliders, carrying a heavy load of responsibility, and Mary's calm companionship in the evenings served to ease the strain considerably. I managed to get her a job in the Air Ministry as PA (Personal Assistant) to a Director, and so saved her from being conscripted into the services or factory work. Every Friday evening she would go home to her mother, leaving me free at weekends to chase around town with the boys, but by Sunday evenings I was only too glad to welcome her back home again. This was the perfect arrangement for a harmonious life!

In the Shepherd pub, Mayfair, one Saturday night in March 1942, I met my old friend Victor Beamish who was now a Group Captain in Fighter Command. He had a fine war record, having been awarded the DSO and Bar, DFC and AFC. Although on the staff of his Group HQ, he kept flying on operations and told me he regularly went over to France on fighter sweeps that were intended to harass German defence preparations.

'Eddie,' he said to me, 'you ought to come along with me one day. I can get you a Spitfire at Biggin Hill and you'd love it! We fly along the coast and shoot up trains, road transport, and anything else that's moving.'

A week or two later, before I had a chance to accept his offer, Victor's Spitfire was hit by a stray bullet through the radiator. On

the way back over the Channel, his engine seized and he came down in the sea and, very sadly, was drowned. Soon afterwards, my old friend Dick Atcherley took over from him, and he too was shot down on a fighter sweep and wounded, but luckily was rescued from the sea and recovered.

The Renaissance Club in Kensington remained my favourite haunt in the evenings, because many interesting notabilities gathered there and I could be sure of meeting friends. One of the more colourful characters there was McCartney, a silver-haired politician who claimed to be the chief Communist agent in Britain. Communism at that time was considered to be respectable as Russia was then, of course, our ally. 'Mac' was a highly amusing old rogue, who lived a life of luxury with a private suite at the Berkeley Hotel, and was usually surrounded by glamorous young women.

He frequently talked about the coming revolution when we would become a communist state, and I asked him whether he wouldn't miss his lush life at the Berkeley Hotel once we all became proletariat workers. He pointed a stubby finger at me. 'You,' he said, 'will become one of the proletariat. I shall be a Commissar.'

One evening he asked me to drive him over to the Savoy Hotel where he was due to attend a meeting. Waiting for him at the Savoy was Aneurin Bevan with two other socialist Members of Parliament, and a 'Red' journalist who I believe was Hannen Swaffer. They invited me to join them for a drink and I could not help wondering how, in the midst of wartime austerity, true socialists could sit there in the luxurious surroundings of the Savoy Hotel, drinking champagne and smoking expensive cigars.

During the conversation that followed, I was horrified to realise that at this critical stage of the war they were plotting the overthrow of the Prime Minister. Appalled at such treachery intended against Winston Churchill, our great leader to whom the whole nation owed so much, I walked out in disgust and left them.

One sunny day in May 1943, while on a week's leave in Torquay, I was lying in my swimsuit on a beach nearby, drowsily half asleep, when I became aware that everyone around was rushing away. Sitting up, I saw about a dozen FW 190 German fighters approaching in line astern low down over the sea, machine-gunning the beach as they came. I leapt up and with bare feet fled over the shingle to shelter behind some brickwork. The fighters then circled around the town, dropped their bombs, and flew off out to sea again. The Home Guard, caught by surprise, dashed out of the pub to their guns — but were of course too late. When I returned to the towel on which I had been lying, I saw a blackened hole right through the middle of it, and was glad I had woken in time!

One day I flew over to Bourne, near Cambridge, to see my old friend Mick of Halton days, who was now in command of a Bomber

squadron based on this satellite airfield. I flew from Hendon in an old Hawker Hart which had a tail skid instead of a tailwheel, so I had to land and taxi in on the grass. In his office, Mick proudly showed me the push-button telephone system he had installed for instant communication with his aircrews at their dispersal points around the airfield. He tried to demonstrate the system to me, but it didn't work. It subsequently transpired that my aircraft's tail skid had hooked up and carried away all his telephone wires!

Soon after this, Mick had trouble with his eyesight and was taken off active flying. He had completed his tour on bomber operations and was posted to the Air Ministry in London with promotion to the rank of Group Captain. One day, I met him walking down the Strand with the sun glittering on the new gold braid on the peak of his cap, and with a beaming smile on his face. 'Why the happy smile?' I asked him.

'Well,' he said, 'with my new glasses, I can now see the girls on the other side of the road as well as on this side.'

Eventually, Mick was posted to South East Asia Command HQ at Delhi in India, where he met his downfall. He wrote me a sad letter saying that India was no place for the boys — there were at least one hundred men to every girl. There was a long queue every evening waiting outside the Wrennery, including even Majors and Colonels, all hoping to make a date with a Wren. He happened to meet a rather drab little Wren that he had known in London but had not bothered with, so rather condescendingly he offered to take her out. She told him she could meet him the following Tuesday week and then, thumbing through her diary, she said she had another evening free a month after that. Poor Mick was duly deflated!

While in London I volunteered to do fire watching one night a month on the roof of Westminster Abbey. A group of us would assemble in the evening, and dressed in tin hats and overalls, we would take up our positions on duckboards around the roof, armed with stirrup pumps and buckets of water and sand. If there was no air raid alert, we could go down below where we were given supper and a bed to sleep on. As soon as the alert was sounded, we would rush up to the roof and stand by for action.

On the eve of 15 June 1944, at about 11 p.m., the air raid sirens sounded and we fire watchers took up our stations on the roof of the Abbey. A whole series of aircraft came over that seemed to us to be fighters. Many were caught in the beams of our searchlights and the anti-aircraft guns blazed away at them. To my surprise, one after another of these fighters appeared to be hit and dived into the ground with loud explosions. I thought to myself what an astonishing job our gunners were doing — not realising that these 'fighters' were in fact Germany's latest weapon, the V1 flying bomb, each of which carried a ton of explosive. We stayed on the roof until morning as no

'all clear' was sounded, and altogether 73 of these missiles were dropped on London within the first twenty-four hours.

Early in 1944, the development and preparation of our military glider force was complete and plans for the D Day invasion of Europe were being drawn up. My Branch was asked to consider glider requirements for the Far East war then being fought in Burma, but planned to be extended onwards to Japan itself. We shipped a Hamilcar glider out to Karachi for tropical trials, but under hot weather conditions the Halifax bomber proved unable to tow it off fully loaded. Ken Wilkinson and his team at Farnborough then developed an ingenious scheme for the Hamilcar to be towed off the ground by two Halifaxes, one of them releasing after climb up to height, and the other continuing the tow in level flight. I witnessed a demonstration of this twin-tug take-off, which was most impressive — two four-engined Halifaxes roaring along the runway in close formation with eight trails of black smoke pouring out, towing the huge Hamilcar behind them. However, this scheme was not adopted because the Hamilcar at Karachi, being of wooden construction and intended for a short life under temperate conditions, began to warp and crack up in the heat. We quickly realised that none of our existing wooden gliders would be suitable for the Far East war.

The Americans had also been developing military gliders, and it was decided to send a mission over to Washington to study their progress and exchange ideas. The Glider Mission consisted of two Colonels of the Airborne Force, and Ashwell-Cooke — with whom they were not on speaking terms. There was also a Wing Commander from 38 Wing Operations, with myself (by now promoted to Group Captain) as Head of Mission. We sailed to New York in comfort on the *Queen Elizabeth*, arriving there five days later.

Queen Elizabeth, and her sister ship *Queen Mary*, were the largest liners afloat and were so fast that the German submarines could not catch them. They sailed unescorted and carried out the most valuable work in transporting the American Army over here. The ships were modified to carry 15,000 servicemen on the voyage east, all eating and sleeping in shifts. Luckily for us, *Queen Elizabeth* was nearly empty on the voyage back to America.

Upon our arrival in Washington, we were received by Colonel du Pont, head of the Army glider development programme — roughly equivalent to my job in Britain. He gave us his complete co-operation and arranged visits for us to study all aspects of the work in hand. I was astonished to find that they had no less than seventeen glider projects under development, and they were even towing DC-3 airliners minus their engines. We all agreed that the Waco CG-4A 'Hadrian' glider, which had already been well proved

in operation, would suit our requirements best. The Waco was of steel tube construction, fabric covered, and although smaller than our Horsa it could carry fifteen armed soldiers or a variety of military loads. A Dakota could tow two fully loaded Wacos, as indeed had already been done successfully in support of Orde Wingate's operations in Burma (see Appendix I). A total of 12,393 Wacos were built on sixteen production lines, mostly by Ford.

We heard that the American Navy also had a glider development programme, but were surprised to find that through mutual rivalry, the Army had little or no knowledge of this activity. We arranged a visit to the naval base at Philadelphia and found they had developed an amphibious glider intended to land in shallow lagoons during their island-hopping operations in the Pacific war. The programme was not pursued, but on our return to Washington we were closely questioned by Army staff as to what we had seen at Philadelphia.

On 6 June 1944, the D Day invasion of Europe took place, and the initial Anglo-American airborne assault included 502 Horsas and 34 Hamilcars. This was completely successful, over ninety per cent of the gliders landing near their targets, and all their objectives were duly captured. With the invasion going well, the British glider development programme was regarded as completed and my Branch at MAP was to be closed down. John Sproule and I were both due to return to regular RAF service, and we were horrified to learn we were both to be posted to India. We knew that the war in Europe would be over before very long, and God only knew how long the Far East war would last. The thought of years of heat, dust, flies and stagnation appalled us.

John Sproule managed to pull a fast one by getting himself recalled to the Navy — he had been a flying instructor with the Naval Air Service pre-war, before being transferred to the RAF to train pilots on gliders. He was duly promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Commander and later became a naval helicopter pilot of considerable renown.

My posting was to command the huge RAF engineering base at Cawnpore, with promotion to the rank of Acting Air Commodore. Cawnpore was well known as the most ghastly place, and that posting would have meant goodbye to any hope of return to active flying. Sitting dejectedly at lunch one day at the Royal Aero Club, I chatted to an old friend of mine who was now a director of British Overseas Airways Corporation, and he told me that BOAC was to be revived from its wartime recession by the secondment of 180 RAF aircrew with a high degree of priority. He was interested in my background of experience in the technical development field, and said he would apply for me to build up and organise their proposed new Development Flight.

I rushed to the Air Ministry to try and delay the date of my posting

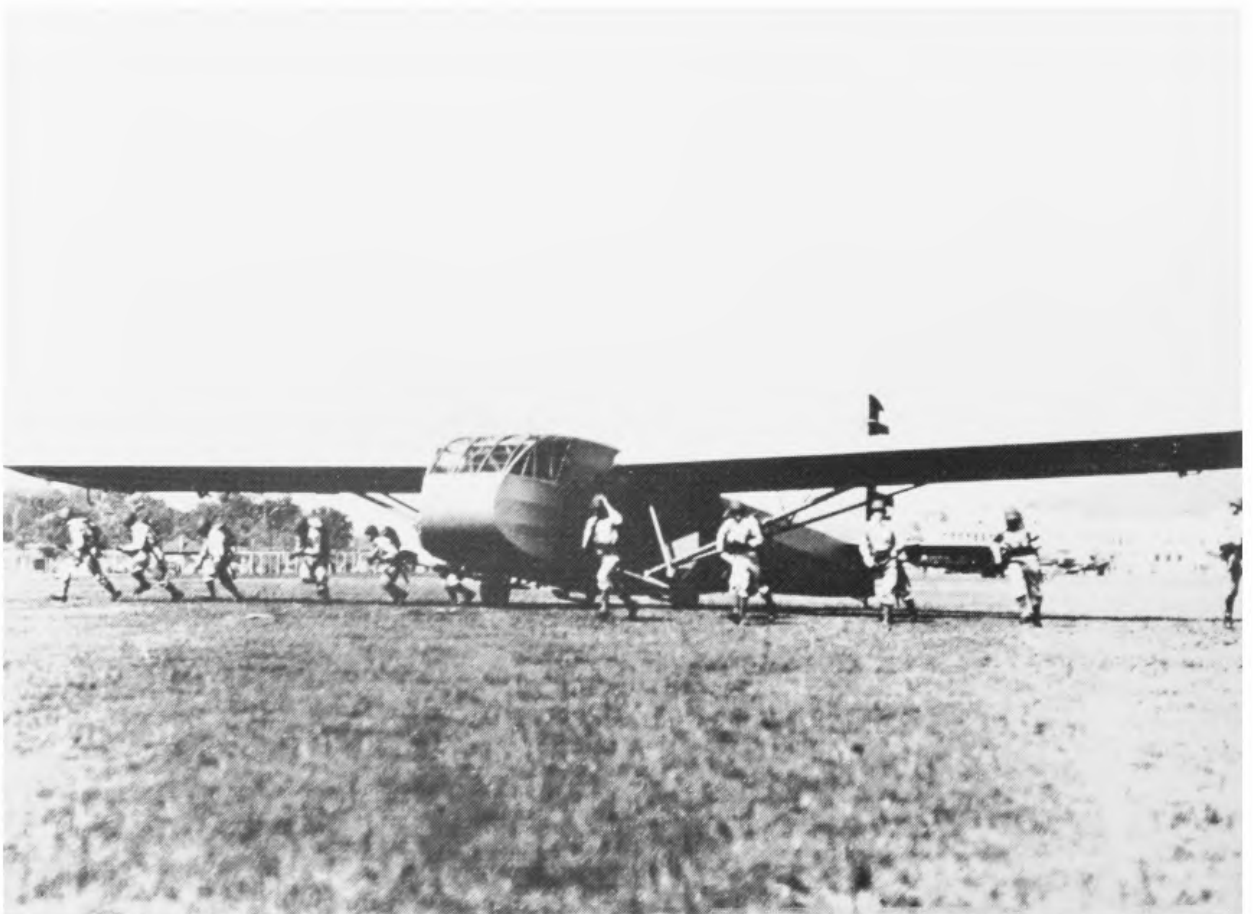


The Author – sketch by Edward Lacey, 1941.



Horsa glider.

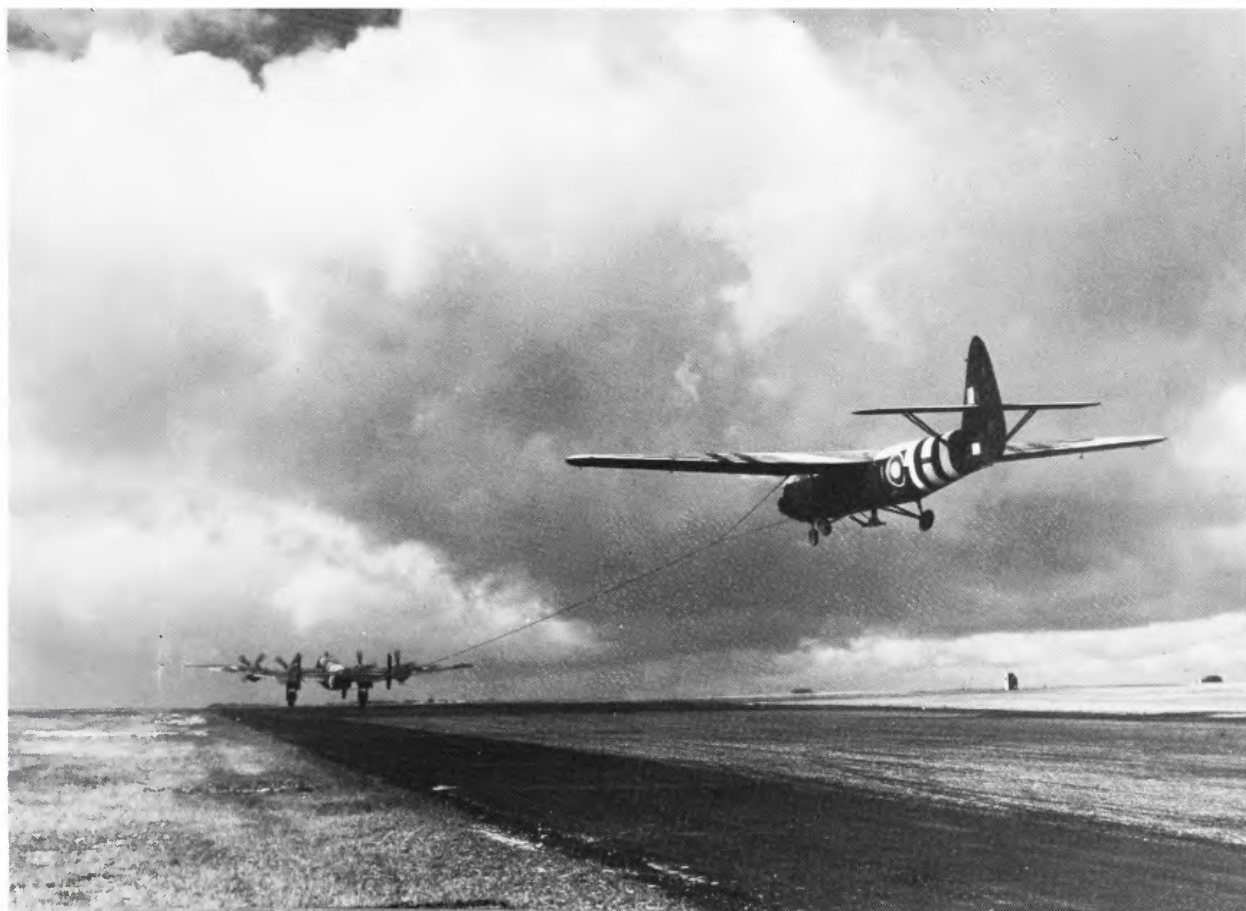
CG-4A WACO glider with troops emerging. (R.Ae.S.).





Tetrarch tank emerging from Hamilcar glider. (RAF Museum).

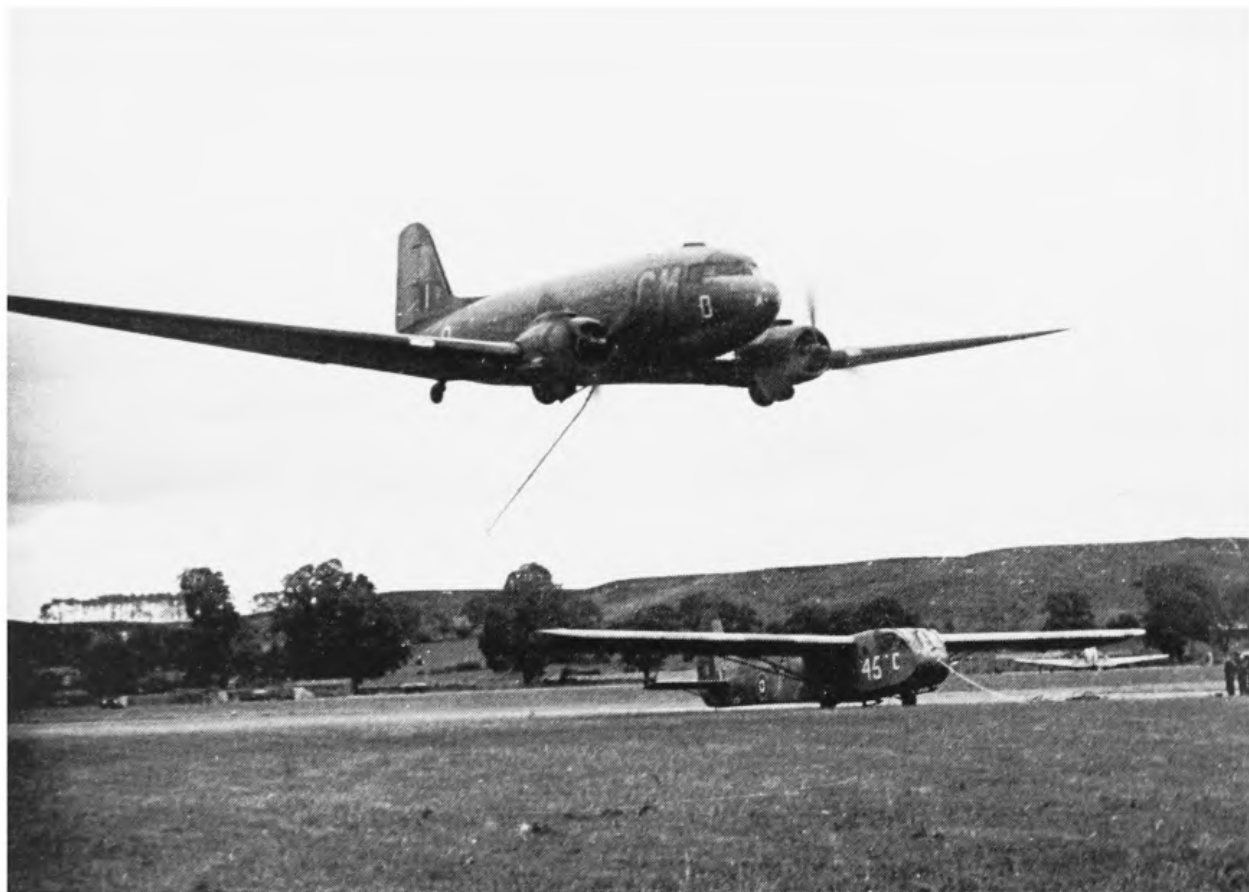
Halifax bomber taking off with towed Horsa glider. (RAF Museum).





Hotspur gliders used for training. (Aeroplane Monthly).

Dakota about to snatch a WACO glider off the ground. (RAF Museum).



to India, and while waiting in the outer office of the Director of Personnel, I chatted up his PA — an attractive little redhead called ‘Smudge’ who kept wriggling about in her chair as we talked. I took her out to lunch, and she promised me she would keep my file at the bottom of the stack that she placed every morning on the Director’s desk. Day after day, I waited impatiently until suddenly, to my intense relief, BOAC’s application for me to be seconded to them was approved and I was appointed manager of their proposed new Development Flight at Hurn Airport, near Bournemouth.

Chapter 17

BOAC

My chiefs in BOAC told me that in order to fly with them, I would need to obtain an airline pilot's 'B' licence valid on four-engined aircraft, so I arranged for a concentrated course of flying at a Bomber Command Operational Training Unit. Within three weeks I managed to check out by day and night on Lancaster and Halifax bombers, and working hard every evening, I read up the syllabus required for the technical examinations which I passed successfully. For some years now I had been flying only single-engine aircraft, and it was a great experience to find myself handling these big four-engined bombers. I had done no night landings since those with my squadron some thirteen years earlier, but with the up-to-date runway lighting and the aid of a glide slope indicator, I found that these large and sturdy aircraft were far easier to land at night than were the old Bristol Fighters on a grass airfield lit only by paraffin flares. One of the biggest thrills was when my instructor demonstrated the feathering of propellers on a Lancaster. At a height of 12,000 feet, he proceeded to feather all four propellers at the same time, and with the engines stopped, we glided along in uncanny silence!

Unfortunately, I had no time to work for the astro-navigation licence which required a six-month course of study. At that time it was mandatory for BOAC Captains to be qualified on astro-navigation, and it was somewhat disappointing to me that my subsequent flying with the Development Flight had to be as co-pilot only, except for local inland flights.

BOAC was the long-haul forerunner of today's British Airways, and their main base at that time was at Hurn Airport, near Bournemouth. The existing London Airport at Croydon was too small for the post-war airliners and Heathrow as we know it today, had not yet come into operation. In March 1945 I reported to Hurn Airport, where I found Ronnie Buck, a young BOAC Captain, in charge of the Development Flight and Bob Haigh, a senior maintenance engineer, sitting in their offices about half a mile apart and barely on speaking terms. Buck was a brilliant pilot but highly temperamental, and he seemed to distrust all engineers. He particularly resented the unexpected arrival of an RAF Group

Captain as manager of his unit. I took over a block of offices and a hangar at the airport, and somehow welded Buck and Haigh into a team. We acquired a total of four aircrews to form the Flight Test Section with Ronnie Buck as Superintendent, and Bob Haigh recruited a number of engineers and built up an efficient Maintenance Section.

Our work was to try out along the BOAC routes various new types of civil aircraft, aero engines and flight equipment shortly to be introduced, and to issue reports and recommendations as to their suitability for airline service. We carried out intensive flight trials of the aircraft, checking their handling characteristics and measuring fuel consumption and speed at various altitudes and power settings, from which we issued cruise control instructions for use by airline pilots. We tested out the Lancastrian (a civilian conversion of the Lancaster bomber), the Avro York, Vickers Viking, Airspeed Ambassador (later to be called the Elizabethan) and the de Havilland Dove. We also tested various aero engines intended for future civil aircraft, and a large variety of new radio and radar navigational equipment now coming rapidly into airline use.

We could not, of course, fly across Europe while the war was still on, so most of our test flights were made across the sea from Hurn Airport to Lisbon and return. From Lisbon we often went on to Cairo via staging posts at Malta or El Adem, and thence on to Khartoum for tropical trials and to Nairobi for high altitude take-off and landing tests. We particularly liked the staging post at El Adem, near Tobruk in British-occupied Libya, where the accommodation and restaurant were most efficiently run by German prisoners of war, who much preferred to work there rather than languish in a P.O.W. camp.

On one occasion after the Allied invasion of France was well advanced, we were cleared to fly direct to Marseilles. Passing the Channel Islands, we noticed puffs of black smoke all around us, and suddenly realised that the Germans were still in occupation there. We had forgotten all about them, and although completely cut off in the islands, they had the impertinence to shoot at us!

BOAC fixed me up with a nice flat overlooking the gardens in Bournemouth, which was certainly one of the most pleasant places in which to live, with every amenity, miles of sandy beaches and lovely scenery in the surrounding countryside. We pilots were very popular with the local hostesses as we were able to bring in from abroad supplies of brandy and other drinks, as well as hams and pineapples, bananas and other tropical fruits, all unobtainable in rationed England.

One night at closing time in a local pub, the landlord approached me and asked if I would look after a customer who had over-indulged and passed out cold. 'He's one of your lot at Hurn

Airport,' he said. I drove the drunk back to the airport, where he was identified as a Customs officer who was to be on duty at midnight. We revived him with coffee and got him safely installed at his Customs desk in good time. The next day he came to my office and thanked me: 'I'd have lost my job if you hadn't looked after me.' He winked, and added: 'Let me know whenever you are coming in from abroad, and I'll see you through alright!'

BOAC had taken over the Harbour Heights Hotel at nearby Sandbanks as a rest house and social centre for their staff. This was used both by the landplane aircrews based at Hurn Airport, and the crews of Empire Flying Boats operating from Poole Harbour. I made many friends with BOAC Captains and staff, and even Ronnie Buck finally overcame his dislike of RAF Group Captains and we became good friends. I felt privileged to be accepted into this community despite my complete lack of airline experience.

This was the age of the truly great airline Captains, some of whom — such as O. P. Jones — were well known and became household names. They flew long hours over the world's air routes in slow, unpressurised aircraft through all weathers, without modern radio navigational aids and without adequate weather forecasting. They carried enormous responsibility for the safety of their aircraft and their passengers, and they upheld British prestige throughout the world. The aircrews, as well as the engineers, were utterly loyal to their Corporation and the possibility of strikes then was unthinkable — though sadly this seems no longer to be the case.

As the war in Europe neared its end, Bournemouth became the repatriation centre for the Royal Canadian Air Force. All the main hotels were taken over for their returning personnel who were kitted out in new uniforms and given an advance of pay. I was made an honorary member of the Staff Mess and attended many parties, some very wild — they seemed to have unlimited supplies of Canadian Club whisky, which they dished out half a tumblerful at a time. I have never met such a cheerful bunch of fellows and, even when they frequently passed out flat during their parties, I never saw any incident of an unpleasant nature.

VE Day came amid terrific celebrations and the feeling of great relief that this long war in Europe was now over. Although black-out was ended and the lights were on again, shortages continued and it was to be years before rationing could stop. Bournemouth then became the repatriation centre for 'GI Brides' some 70,000 of whom were being sent to join their husbands in America. The hotels were full of these brides — an astonishing collection of women whom American servicemen had met and married while over here. Many were shy and charming, and a little nervous at being sent to a strange country away from their families and friends, to join husbands they might not have seen for months or even years. A raucous minority,

however, were quite horrifying — getting drunk, screaming and fighting with each other. God only knew where the GIs had found them, and what our American friends must have thought of them on their arrival there.

About this time I suffered the psychological shock that everyone experiences during their lifetime. It was a wet Sunday morning, and as I looked out of my window at the dismal scene of pouring rain, I realised that it was my fortieth birthday. A man in his thirties — even at thirty nine — is still considered young. But at forty, I had to face up to the fact that I was now middle aged, and that my youth had gone by. For months I felt depressed, until suddenly I started to laugh as I looked around at all the old fogies of fifty or more, so I cheered up and enjoyed life once again. Incidentally, my various lady friends never seemed to notice my transition into middle age. I had no complaints!

Airspeed Ltd wanted us to try out the big eighteen-cylinder Bristol Centaurus engine under airline operating conditions, in advance of its use in their new Ambassador aircraft. For this purpose I got hold of a Vickers Warwick bomber, which had two Centaurus engines, and planned the necessary fuel consumption tests at various altitudes and power settings. To my astonishment, none of our BOAC pilots would fly it, explaining that the Warwick was an RAF aircraft and, not having a civil Certificate of Airworthiness, it would have invalidated their personal insurance policies.

In desperation, I managed to locate Captain 'Sonny' Banting, a retired Vickers test pilot who had wide experience on the Warwick, and he agreed to carry out 200 hours test flying for us over a four-week period, for a fee of £200. Every morning at dawn, Sonny Banting took off for Benbecula in the Western Isles of Scotland, returning to Hurn the same evening, and he produced a perfect set of test results which were greatly appreciated by Airspeed. On Sonny's return flights from Benbecula, he often brought us crates of eggs, which were still on ration in England at one per person per week, and we watched the delicacy of his landings back at Hurn Airport with some trepidation!

BOAC at that time were operating Avro York airliners on their long-haul Empire routes, but the York had insufficient range to cross the Atlantic. Consequently, BOAC were anxiously awaiting the introduction of the Avro Tudor, a fully pressurised new airliner which was intended for transatlantic operation and to supersede the uneconomic Yorks. For use with the Tudor, Rolls-Royce developed their famous Merlin engine as used extensively during the war in Spitfire, Hurricane and Lancaster aircraft, and had now produced the new Merlin 600 series. They asked us to carry out performance tests of this new engine under conditions that the Tudor would be

required to operate over the Atlantic, and for this purpose they installed four Merlin 600s into a Lancaster bomber for our use. This aircraft was fitted with additional fuel tanks, which gave it fifteen hours flight endurance.

I went as co-pilot on several of these performance tests, crossing the Atlantic to Montreal via Gander at heights of up to 25,000 feet. We used to land at Shannon Airport in Eire to refuel before the westbound crossing, where we enjoyed a splendid steak dinner — unobtainable in rationed England — then we took off for the ten-hour flight over the Atlantic. After 500 miles we were completely out of radio contact, except with an occasional ship, until some 200 miles off Newfoundland when we would pick up the Gander radio range beam and home in on it to Gander Airport.

Gander Airport had completely changed since my previous arrival there in December 1941. Then it was extremely primitive with only two wooden huts for use by transit aircrews. Now, it had become a busy international airport with comfortable accommodation and excellent restaurant facilities. I noticed a number of pretty, blonde girls working there as maids and waitresses, and asked the Airport Manager how he managed to obtain these girls when so far from any urban civilisation. He told me that they all came from fishing villages around the coast, many of which had no external communication except by boat. To girls from such isolated villages, Gander Airport must have seemed a metropolis, with aircrews of many nationalities constantly coming and going. The Airport Manager told me he had a long list of eager applicants for jobs there but, he added rather sadly, they rarely last more than six or eight months as they usually got pregnant. However, he said, this probably was not a bad thing as it would help to offset the in-breeding prevalent in those isolated fishing villages.

In the cramped Lancaster cockpit the pilot and co-pilot sat at the controls, with the radio operator, navigator and flight engineer at their desks behind them. We carried packed food and flasks of coffee to sustain us over the ten-hour Atlantic crossing, and although the cockpit was heated, conditions were rugged, noisy and uncomfortable. On one of our earlier flights we were asked to carry a Rolls-Royce representative, and as there was no room for him in the cockpit, we installed a reclining chair in the rear fuselage. He and I agreed to take turns in the co-pilot's seat, and this led me into an unfortunate situation.

It was bitterly cold in the unheated rear fuselage, and the first time I went aft to sit in the spare seat I arranged to call the representative on the intercom when I had had enough. As we were then flying at 25,000 feet, it was essential to keep plugged into the aircraft oxygen supply system, and he was to use the portable oxygen set when he came aft to change over with me. I dozed off for

a while and when I woke up, my oxygen mask had become a large ball of ice from the condensation of my breath. The microphone was frozen up and I was unable to call the representative on the intercom, so unplugged myself from the oxygen system and made my way forward, scrambling over the two deep wing spars, and just reached the cockpit before passing out. The flight engineer hastily plugged me into the cockpit oxygen supply and revived me.

Once on our arrival at Montreal, the BOAC Station Manager at Dorval Airport asked us if we could fly on to Los Angeles to pick up certain spares from the Lockheed Aircraft Corporation, which were urgently required to repair one of BOAC's Constellation aircraft. We agreed to do the trip, having the necessary range, and planned to land at Pittsburgh to clear customs into USA and thence onwards non-stop to Los Angeles. As we neared Pittsburgh, we found that the airport was closed through fog and we were diverted to Cleveland, but that airport too was closed. The weather was deteriorating fast as fog from the Great Lakes was spreading all round the district, The Regional Controller told us on the radio that about 180 aircraft in the vicinity were all trying to land, and he asked us how much fuel endurance we had. We were then stacked up for four and a half hours before getting permission to land at Detroit. Unfortunately, through bad visibility we landed in error on Detroit military airfield where they had no Customs facilities. They seemed surprised at the unexpected arrival of a strange bomber from England, and we were held in detention until morning when Customs officers arrived to clear us.

We eventually left for Los Angeles and all went well until over the Rocky Mountains, when one of our four Merlin engines failed. We landed at Palmdale, an abandoned airfield somewhere in the Mojave desert, where in the shimmering heat our Flight Engineer strove unsuccessfully to rectify the fault. Evening was drawing on, and not wishing to be stuck out there for the night, we decided to risk a take-off on three engines and duly arrived safely at Burbank Airport. We had to wait in Los Angeles for a week while the necessary spares were sent from Rolls-Royce, and thoroughly enjoyed ourselves — thanks to the bounteous hospitality provided by Lockheed's. Rolls-Royce, however, were most upset that their latest civil aero engine was to be seen unserviceable in the heart of the American aircraft industry.

On our return flight to Montreal, Ronnie Buck took off in the evening and climbed to height over the Rockies. At sunset, I took over from him to fly through the night so that he could sleep and be fresh in the morning for the approach and landing at Dorval airport. I flew steadily along right across America following their radio range beacon system, and seven hours after having seen the sun set behind me, I had the curious experience of seeing it rise again over

the horizon in front of me. We reached Dorval after a non-stop flight of 12½ hours.

I was thoroughly enjoying my work with the Development Flight and my life in Bournemouth, when suddenly a letter arrived from the Air Ministry informing me that upon completion of two years' secondment to BOAC, I was due to return to regular RAF service. As our flight trials of the Avro Tudor were just about to start, BOAC applied for me to stay with them for another year, but the Air Ministry replied that this could only be done if I resigned from the RAF. They pointed out that I had done eighteen years' service and had only two years to go before being qualified for a pension, which I would otherwise lose. I had no choice, and sadly left the Development Flight which I had built up from scratch. I had so much wanted to stay with them to undertake the flight trials of the Tudor, and subsequently of the Handley Page Hermes, the Vickers Viscount and the de Havilland Comet — the world's first jet airliner, the prototype of which was already undergoing flight trials by the manufacturer.

As it happened, the Tudor proved a great disappointment and was not accepted by BOAC after the Development Flight trials. Despite this, it was operated by British South American Airways until grounded after two disasters when *Star Tiger* and *Star Ariel* both disappeared over the Atlantic without warning. Although no explanation of these disasters has ever been given, my opinion is that the Tudor, which was our first pressurised airliner, probably suffered the same fate that subsequently befell the Comet — fatigue fracture of the fuselage skin, leading to explosive decompression. This is borne out by the fact that Freddie Laker later obtained approval to operate Tudors as freighters — but without pressurisation. He bought up the remaining aircraft cheaply, and made a considerable commercial success with them.

Shortly after leaving BOAC, I heard with great regret that Ronnie Buck had killed himself. Temperamental to the end, and apparently annoyed because the engineers had not got the radio equipment in a Dove aircraft ready in time for a planned flight test, he took off without it. The weather deteriorated and, being without any radio homing aid, Ronnie let down blind over the sea and flew low in bad visibility towards land, hitting the cliffs east of Bournemouth. So died — quite unnecessarily — one of BOAC's finest young Captains.

Chapter 18

Transport Command

Upon my return to RAF service, I was lucky to be given a responsible appointment as Chief Engineer Officer of Transport Command, the HQ of which was in Bushy Park on the western outskirts of London. I was able to live in London again and glad to be back with all my old friends there. It seemed strange, however, to be back in uniform with the RAF after four and a half years seconded away from it, but I quickly settled down to the routine once more.

Transport Command operated some seventy four-engined York military transports and one hundred and ten twin-engined Dakotas, together with a variety of other aircraft. The Command included No. 38 Group, the Airborne Forces Group with which I had been closely associated during the war, and also the Communication Flight at Hendon. After VJ Day, when the Japanese surrendered, the Command had established a daily service of York transports from Lyneham in Wiltshire to Singapore, via staging posts at Malta, Cairo, Baghdad, Karachi and Colombo. To maintain the regularity of this service was one of my main responsibilities as Chief Engineer Officer, and it necessitated occasional flights to Singapore to inspect staging posts *en route*.

In those days, the British Empire covered about a quarter of the world. All the countries on the air route to Singapore and Australia, as also on the East African route from Egypt right down to the Cape, were under British control. This British control was very much appreciated by us pilots, though possibly not quite so much by the local inhabitants, as all airports *en route* were efficiently manned by British staff. The only awkward airport on the Singapore route was Karachi where, for some odd reason, no one was allowed to leave an aircraft until an official entered with a huge Flit gun and liberally sprayed all the occupants — hence Karachi's radio call sign: 'Flitgun'. I often wondered what sort of disease they imagined we could have brought to them, that they had not already got!

During my BOAC days, and subsequently with Transport Command, I had become used to the fact that most of the world's air routes were controlled by the British or the Americans, and that English was the language spoken at every airport. It therefore came

as a complete surprise to me once when landing at a French colonial airport, to find black customs and immigration staff talking in French. It had never occurred to me that, except for their local tribal dialect, black men spoke anything other than English!

The scheduled service to Singapore took four and a half days, with night stops at Malta, Baghdad, Karachi and Colombo. It was somewhat irritating that our operations staff did not consider me, as an engineer officer, acceptable to fly as Captain of their aircraft. So, although I had far more flying experience than most of their pilots, and as a Group Captain was the senior officer on board, I had to join the crew as 'supernumerary pilot'. I made my first trip to Singapore soon after VJ Day when it was liberated from Japanese occupation. We landed at Changi airfield where I saw the forbidding Changi gaol in which thousands of British prisoners had been held by the Japs under appalling conditions, many having died of illness and deprivation. It therefore cheered me to watch a gang of Jap prisoners working on the reconstruction of the runway under the watchful eye of a British army sergeant. 'Jump to it, you bloody Nips,' he kept yelling, and he certainly made them work!

We had forty-eight hours break at Changi before the flight home. The Officers Mess was comfortable and on arrival, feeling rather exhausted from the heat and humidity, I stripped off and had a shower, then retired to bed for a sleep. When I woke up, I saw a Chinese girl standing by my bedside, with her arms folded and looking at me placidly. I had no clothes on under my sheet and asked her to go outside while I got up, but she did not understand and just stood there impassively. Time went by and it became more and more embarrassing, until I heard footsteps outside the room and shouted for assistance. A brother officer came in and I explained my predicament to him. He told me the Chinese girl was my amah (or servant) who was to look after me. She was waiting to dress me when I got up.

'But I'm naked,' I said.

'Don't let that worry you,' he replied, 'She's used to it. She won't notice anything.'

I wondered what he thought I must have had lacking!

Once on a night stop at Negombo, the RAF station near Colombo, there was great excitement in the camp. Apparently, the first contingent of WAAFs was due there the next morning, and the men were impatiently awaiting their arrival. To give all ranks a fair chance with the girls, the CO had ordered that officers were only to go out with officer WAAFs, Sergeants with Sergeant WAAFs, and so on for the other ranks. Early next morning the whole camp turned out to meet the coaches bringing the WAAFs to Negombo — the men were overjoyed to see the crowd of pretty girls that had arrived in their midst. The officers, however, were bitterly

disappointed — there was only one officer WAAF, and she had a face like a horse!

A sad sequel to this story occurred about eight months later. On my way back from Singapore in a York carrying a load of homeward-bound servicemen, we night-stopped at Negombo where the medical officer asked me if we had room for two 'walking repatriates'. I agreed to take them, and early next morning two little WAAs appeared with their tunics unbuttoned over their swollen tummies. They were surprisingly cheerful throughout the flight back and were the life and soul of celebrations at our various night stops, but upon seeing the coast of England approaching, they both burst into tears. The party was over!

My experience with York operations on the Singapore route enabled me to solve a problem that had worried BOAC during my time with them. BOAC also operated Yorks on the same route, and were beset with continual engine trouble through loss of compression, with consequent delays and expense. Their Yorks had the same Merlin engines as those of Transport Command, which seemed remarkably free from any trouble of this sort. In trying to solve this problem, I had checked BOAC's flight operating procedures in comparison with those used by Transport Command, and found they were much the same. I had also checked the types of fuel and oil used, and again there was no difference. It was a complete mystery.

The answer proved to be that the experienced BOAC engineers, when servicing the aircraft at stations *en route*, really looked for trouble and used to turn the propellers around by hand to check the engines. If they suspected any loss of compression, in order to safeguard their licences they insisted on changing the cylinder blocks, which delayed the flight schedules considerably. On the other hand, our less experienced engineers at Transport Command staging posts only carried out the standard pre-flight checks on the aircraft, and did not undertake any further work unless required to rectify faults reported by the pilots. Slight loss of compression would not have been noticed by the pilots, and their engines seemed to run just as well and gave no trouble from this score.

In my job as Chief Engineer Officer, I was directly responsible to the Air Officer Commanding-in-Chief, Air Marshal Sir Ralph Cochrane, who was a highly efficient staff officer and greatly respected by us all. Unfortunately, like many of the flying staff, he had a deep distrust of engineers in general. He firmly believed that most of the unserviceability experienced with aircraft was caused by the engineers messing about with them during their routine inspections. Once, to prove his contention, when he was due to fly down the route to Singapore on an official visit, he instructed me to have all four engine cowlings on his York aircraft sealed, and that no

work was to be done on the aircraft during the whole flight out there and back again. Reluctantly, I sent a signal accordingly to all staging posts *en route*, and kept my fingers crossed that no serious incident would arise.

After the York had landed at Singapore, I received a signal from our Station Engineer there that all compression had been lost on its port outer engine. What was he to do about it? I signalled back: 'Change the cylinder blocks — but don't tell the old man.' Subsequently, it was somewhat irritating when at staff meetings the AOC frequently had a dig at me, quoting his 'trouble-free' flight to Singapore and return, which he ascribed as being due to his decision to keep my over-zealous engineers away from his aircraft.

It was most unfortunate that soon afterwards a disaster occurred which strengthened his distrust of engineers. One of our Yorks at Lyneham, which had just completed an overhaul, was given an air test at night prior to its dawn departure for Singapore. Shortly after take-off, all four engines cut out. In darkness, the pilot had no chance of effecting a safe landing, and the resulting crash killed all four members of the crew.

I attended the subsequent Court of Enquiry into the accident, which disclosed that all four engines had failed due to the thermostatic valves being fitted the wrong way round. These valves were intended to restrict the flow of coolant liquid through the radiators until the engines reached their normal operating temperature. By being fitted the wrong way round, they shut off the flow of coolant as the temperature increased, with the result that the engines over-heated and seized up solid.

According to the manufacturer's instructions, these valves had to be removed and cleaned in paraffin after 1000 hours running. The unfortunate fitter who did the job did not know which way round the valves had to be replaced. He asked his Corporal, who asked the Sergeant. The Sergeant in turn asked the Station Engineer Officer, who replied: 'Tell him to put them back the way they came out.' The fitter then replaced them the way he thought they had come out, but unfortunately the wrong way round.

These engineers were found guilty of negligence and duly reprimanded. The AOC naturally blamed the engineers for the accident, but in my opinion the blame really lay with the manufacturer concerned. Such vital valves should not have been designed in the first place so that they could have been fitted incorrectly in this way.

The AOC caused me some further embarrassment on another occasion. For his routine staff visits, he used a VIP-furnished Avro Anson, a small twin-engined transport aircraft, which was housed with the Communication Flight at Hendon. One day, the Station Engineer Officer at Hendon 'phoned me in a panic, and told me that

in accordance with the AOC's personal orders, he had fitted a whole lot of the latest radio and radar navigation and blind landing equipment into the Anson. Having completed the installation, he had weighed the aircraft and found that it now had only 180 lbs of payload available without exceeding its maximum permissible all-up weight. What could he do about it?

Somewhat piqued, as I had not previously been told about this installation, I discussed the problem with the Avro firm. They arranged to introduce a special modification to the Anson landing gear which would permit an increase of 250 lbs to its all-up weight. With this modification, the VIP Anson could now just carry the AOC together with his Aide-de-Camp and two suitcases!

Life back in London was enjoyable and I was lucky, through the generosity of my old friend Francis Winham, to have been leased a beautifully furnished five-room flat right in the heart of Mayfair, for the peppercorn rent of only £6 a week. Francis was one of the big property developers in London whom I had originally met some ten years earlier through my old artist friend, John Flanagan. I was having coffee with John one morning in his studio, and he said: 'Would you like to meet the most beautiful woman in London?'

'Yes, please,' I replied smartly.

'Well,' John said, 'I am painting her portrait, and I'll introduce you.'

So he took me round to meet Gwen Winham, a most striking beauty in her early twenties. While we were chatting, her husband Francis came in and invited us to dine with him that evening. From that moment, Francis became one of my closest and most valued friends to whom I always went for advice whenever I was in trouble. 'You young idiot,' he would exclaim, and then help to extricate me from whatever scrape I had managed to get myself into. Strangely enough, although a highly successful and wealthy businessman, Francis had a Bohemian streak in him, and he had great affection for my old poet friend, Henry Savage, and enjoyed the company of his circle of literary and artistic friends.

One day the 'phone rang in my office at Transport Command HQ. It was Marlene, a former girl friend of mine, calling from Brussels. She was in a panic. 'I am to get married next week to a Frenchman,' she said, 'and I don't love him. I can't go through with it.' She asked me to meet her at London Airport that evening, as she wanted to talk things over with me.

This was quite a considerable shock to me. I remembered Marlene vividly. I had first met her just before the war as an enchantingly pretty sixteen-year-old Belgian girl staying with friends of mine in Dorset. To amuse and impress her, I used to fly over occasionally in a Hawker Fury and do some aerobatics above their house. Then, with the onset of war, I forgot all about her. Five

years later after the British Army had liberated Belgium from German occupation, an Air Force friend of mine told me he had just returned from Brussels where he had met a most attractive girl who was running the British Officers Club there. She was asking everybody if they had news of Edward Mole. It was, of course, Marlene.

I then borrowed a Proctor from the Communication Flight at Hendon and flew over to Brussels where I met Marlene. It was a very happy reunion. She had had a dreadful time throughout the war. Her father — a Colonel — had been put into a concentration camp where he died, and she and her mother became refugees living from hand to mouth in constant fear of arrest by the Germans. I wanted so much to see more of Marlene, but conditions in Brussels were difficult with stark shortages of everything, and there was little we could do together there. Moreover, Marlene's family happened to be very much of the upper class, and strict chaperoning was a considerable handicap.

The problem was solved by some friends of mine in London, who invited Marlene to come over to stay with them for a week. I took her out every day and we had a wonderful time together. Then one morning I was having coffee with my old friend, Francis Winham. 'Francis,' I said, 'I can't think what on earth I can do with Marlene today. We have done all the usual sights and exhibitions, and it is pouring with rain. What do you suggest?'

Francis looked me straight in the eye. 'Take her out for a good lunch at the Berkeley Hotel. Then back to your flat with you for the afternoon. What do you think she has come over here for?'

'Good Lord,' I said, 'I hadn't thought of that.' So I followed his advice which was entirely successful, and Marlene and I passed the rest of the week very happily together.

On my next visit to Brussels, in the bar of my hotel I was fool enough to introduce Marlene to a Senior Captain of Sabena, the Belgian airline. Three weeks later, Marlene became an air hostess with Sabena, and I realised then that I had lost her. Having myself been with an airline, I knew only too well the relationship likely to develop between an air hostess and the Captain or members of the crew during long-haul flights overseas. The next time I went to Brussels, Marlene was in Johannesburg, and the time afterwards — she was in New York. I gave up!

Now, six months later and quite unexpectedly, Marlene had telephoned me. She arrived at the airport completely distraught, and I took her back to my flat where we talked half way through the night. It appeared that her family had arranged a marriage for her with an eligible young Frenchman. The wedding was to be one of the social events in Brussels and three hundred guests had been invited. Marlene hardly knew the Frenchman and did not love him,

so on the spur of the moment she decided to run away from it all and come over to me.

I realised then that she was giving me the opportunity to marry her, but I needed time to think things over. I was enjoying life in London as a bachelor but, on the other hand, she was quite the most attractive girl I had ever met. In the morning I 'phoned my friends in Dorset with whom I had originally met Marlene before the war, and they agreed to have her stay with them for a while until she recovered from the shock of her broken marriage plans. I drove her down there, and on my return to London I pondered over the situation. Retain my freedom, or marry this exceptionally attractive girl? After a week, my mind was made up. I would marry Marlene. So I 'phoned my friends in Dorset to tell them I was on my way down there to fetch Marlene, but to my bitter disappointment they told me that her young French fiancé had been over there and taken her back to Brussels. That was the last I heard of this delightful but elusive girl!

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In October 1946, in an effort to revive the sport of flying which had ceased to exist during the war, I got together with three friends and we formed the Ultra Light Aircraft Association. Our aim was to encourage the development of ultra light aircraft, which were to be cheap and simple to build by amateur constructors, and so enable young men of only moderate means to fly. Ron Clegg became our first Chairman with Maurice Imray as Secretary, and his brother Ian dealt with operations. I handled all technical matters, and when a few months later Ron Clegg had to leave for abroad, I took over as Chairman in his place.

The Association received a lot of help and encouragement from the Press and aviation authorities, and especially from Peter (now Sir Peter) Masefield who became our first President. The late Mossie Preston, then Secretary General of the Royal Aero Club, gave us free facilities at the Club to hold our meetings and to publish our monthly News Bulletins. I was able to negotiate with the authorities that ultra light aircraft, then defined as being under 1000 lbs all-up weight, with engines not exceeding 40 hp and landing speed not greater than 40 mph, could be allowed to fly under a Permit to be issued by them on the recommendation of our Association. This avoided the considerable complication and expense of obtaining an official Certificate of Airworthiness for our aircraft, and made the way open for amateur constructors and designers.

Our membership grew rapidly, and we recruited a number of qualified flying instructors and aeronautical engineers who gave their services voluntarily to help our cause. Despite frustrations

through lack of suitable engines, new designs of ultra light aircraft began to appear as well as various pre-war aircraft which were rebuilt successfully by our members. After three years, a number of our members had formed co-ownership groups to fly RAF surplus Tiger Moths and Miles Magisters, which aircraft were outside the ultra light class as defined. So, in October 1949, in order to include the operation of these larger aircraft, we changed our title to the 'Popular Flying Association'. Since then, the PFA has grown from strength to strength, and now has over four thousand members and some four hundred ultra light aircraft are at present on the British Register (see Appendix II).

In May 1947, I acquired a light aircraft which had been in storage throughout the war. This was the Bibi Be550, a Czechoslovakian side-by-side cabin two-seater powered by a 62 hp Walter Mikron engine — one of the best light aero engines ever produced. I was able to keep the Bibi free of charge at Hendon airfield, and used it extensively, attending various air rallies to promote the activities of the Association. I entered the Bibi in a number of air races and once again obtained third place in the Isle of Man race, as well as a second in one of the National Air Races. Petrol rationing was still in force, private car owners being allowed only enough coupons for 200 miles per month. The smallest coupon for aviation fuel was for fifty gallons, and as the Bibi's tank only held twelve gallons, I always made sure that my Jaguar car was close at hand when filling up!

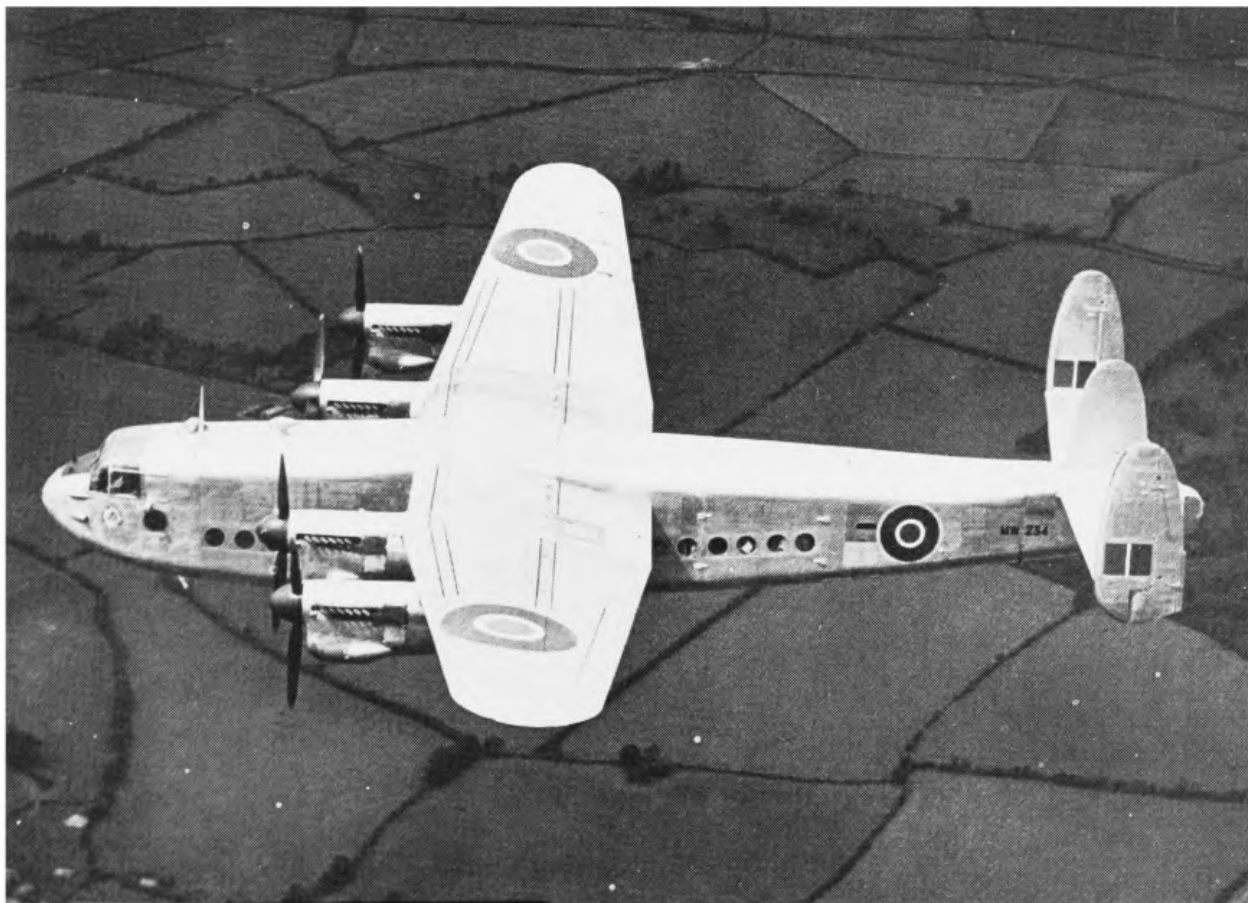
During that time, I met the girl who was eventually to become my wife. It was at a swimming pool at Hampton Court near our HQ, which we both frequented after work on hot afternoons. Her name was Joan, a vivacious blonde with large blue eyes and an enchanting smile, and with a figure that caused all heads to turn as she passed by in her bikini. I fell for her instantly. There was a difficulty in that she seemed to be the mascot of a group of young muscle men who spent their time alongside the pool practising weight-lifting and wrestling, and they seemed to resent my intrusion into their midst. However, I had always specialised in swimming and diving as sports, and in the water I easily out-performed these muscle boys. In the end I stole the girl away from them.

Joan worked as a secretary with a Mayfair firm quite near my flat, which was very convenient as we were able to spend most of the time together. She loved flying with me in my Bibi two-seater, and entered whole-heartedly into the activities of the Ultra Light Aircraft Association. God knows what our Committee would have done without her — she installed a typewriter into my flat and in the evenings carried out most of our correspondence. She was a treasure and highly popular with us all.



Glider mission to USA – the Author centre.

Avro York. (Aeroplane Monthly).





Joan in 'Zaunkoenig'

"Bibi" at Deauville Air Rally, 1947.

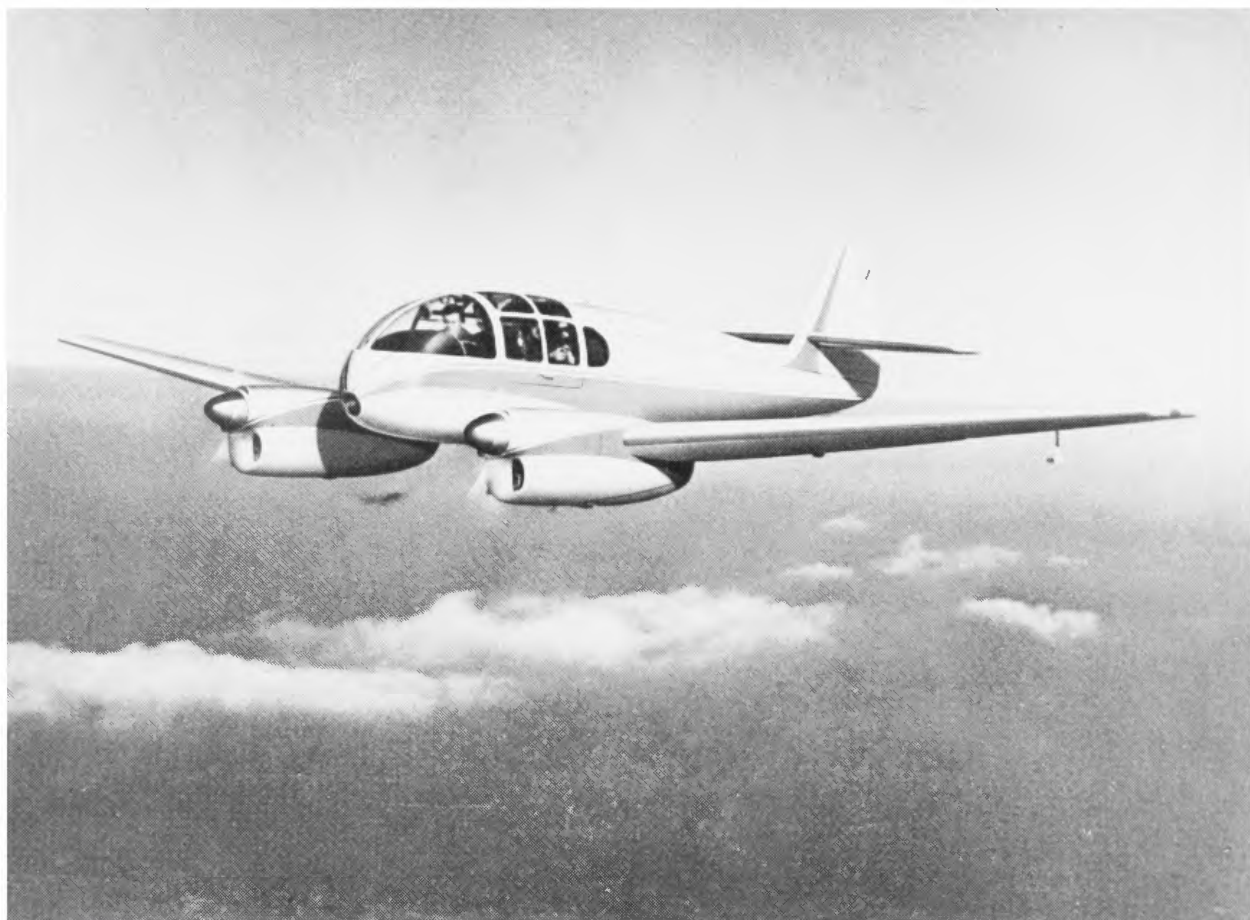




Author with Topsy Belfair.

Author (on left) with Capt. Teddy Davis and his Proctor V at an air rally in Switzerland.





Super Aero 45 (Peter Clifford).

Meta-Sokol. (Aeroplane Monthly).



Early in 1948, Transport Command had to arrange the delivery of a batch of Avro Anson twin-engined trainers to Bulawayo in Rhodesia, which were required by an RAF flying school out there. This provided an opportunity for me to get some flying and navigational practice, so I decided to ferry one of the Ansons out myself. Our operational staff, ever doubtful as to the ability of engineers to fly, insisted on me having a preliminary check-out on an Anson XIX by one of their instructors at Hendon. He put me through the most rigorous series of tests including single-engined landings and overshoots, both by day and night, and even a blind take-off on instruments. I passed all these tests successfully, but one of them nearly ended in disaster.

We were approaching for a single-engined landing at Hendon, undercarriage down and with one propeller feathered, when at a height of about 700 feet my instructor suddenly called out: 'Now overshoot'. I carried out the correct procedure by giving the live engine full throttle and operating the 'undercarriage up' lever, with a view to climbing away for a further circuit of the airfield. The instructor shouted: 'My God, the hydraulics have failed!' Without hydraulics the undercarriage would not come up, and with its extra air resistance the aircraft, while flying on only one engine, could not climb. The instructor then dived down behind my seat and started to pump like mad on the emergency hydraulic system. By then, we had passed across the airfield and were sinking slowly. To my horror I saw beneath us houses and streets full of traffic, and struggled to hold the aircraft on a straight course against the pull of the offset engine at full power. Gradually, as the undercarriage slowly came up, we stopped sinking and started to climb. We had been down to 300 feet, and it was a very near thing! Thereafter, single-engined landing practice was banned at Hendon airfield.

In February 1948, I collected my Anson from a storage depot and found to my surprise that it was an ancient Mark I version of wooden construction. However I checked it out, and with a radio operator set off on the delivery flight. This old Mark I had a very limited range, so that I had to plan the flight with frequent short hops for refuelling. We made Bordeaux and Marseilles successfully, and then when landing at Ajaccio in Corsica the wing flaps would not come down. I made a very fast tail-up landing taking up most of the runway, when some French wit in the control tower called out on the radio: 'Why you run so fast? We will not bite you!'

I had the flap mechanism repaired by the RAF at Malta, then pressed on to El Adem, Cairo, Wadi Halfa and Khartoum. Until now, navigation had been simple, but after Khartoum the Nile stretched out over hundreds of miles into a wide, overgrown swampy area known as 'The Sud'. There was no indication of the main course of the river, but somehow by dead reckoning I found

Malakal, an emergency refuelling airfield. Here we were refuelled from four-gallon cans by Dinka tribesmen.

These Dinkas were some of the most primitive natives in Africa. They were immensely tall — six to seven feet high — very thin, and they wore no clothes whatever. They had very long, thin legs and the curious habit of standing on one leg with the other foot resting on the knee, and looked like a lot of storks standing around our aircraft. I suppose their very long legs had evolved as the result of thousands of years of wading about in the marshy Sud.

We then experienced trouble with the Anson that was to dog us for the rest of our journey. We just could not start the engines. In the tropical heat, my radio operator wound away with a handle outside the engine nacelles while I sat in the cockpit twiddling the ignition booster device, but the engines would not start. The heat in the cockpit under the perspex cabin roof was indescribable, and after an hour or so we were both too exhausted to continue. We decided to stay the night and to try again in the cool of early dawn.

The British District Commissioner at Malakal kindly put us up for the night, and he told us how much he liked the Dinkas. Simple, friendly and honest folk, they wandered around the Sud with their herds of cattle and had no clothes or other possessions whatsoever. They were completely defenceless and prior to British rule in the Sudan, they had suffered cruelly from the brutalities of Arab slavers from the north. They were completely happy to be under British rule which gave them protection from slavers and other raiding tribes, and was providing them with medical services, schools and housing.

At dawn next morning, the engines started up easily and I realised that the trouble was due to loss of compression when they were hot. Subsequently, we had to plan for our take-offs to be at dawn each morning. We flew on to Juba, where our take-off had to be delayed by two lions that sauntered slowly across the runway. Thence on to Kisumu at the north-east corner of Lake Victoria, where we found an attractive hotel right on the bank of the lake. Thinking I would like a refreshing dip, I wandered out in my swimming trunks — but the hotel porter warned me: 'I wouldn't do that, Sir. The banks of the lake are infested with crocodiles!'

We went on to Tabora in Tanganyika and thence to Kasama in Northern Rhodesia, passing through the inter-tropical front — a wide belt of monsoon-like heavy rain and thunderstorms that stretched right across Africa during that season. We had to cross high ground reaching up to eight or nine thousand feet, and the poor old Anson could not climb above 11,000 feet — so I pushed it along with engines at full power, struggling over the mountains through rain that seemed almost solid and with lightning flashes all around us. My radio operator could not get any navigational bearings

because of the heavy static interference, so I pressed on by dead reckoning and was relieved when we found Kasama airfield.

The next stop was Salisbury in Rhodesia, which I reckoned we could make non-stop though the official route was a dog-leg to the west via Lusaka. That would have meant refuelling at Lusaka with further delay through our engine starting difficulty. All went well until approaching the Luangwa river valley, when we had to fly low under a huge build-up of thunder cloud. Having crossed the valley, I found that the cloud was right down on the ground on the other side, so I turned back — but the cloud was now down on the ground on that side as well. I was trapped in the river valley and flew up and down it for a while at about two or three hundred feet, looking for a way out — but without avail. Below was the broad and muddy Luangwa river with its slimy looking, grey-green banks probably, I thought, full of crocodiles. Suddenly — consternation! — both engines cut out. We had exhausted the auxiliary fuel tank, so I hastily changed over to the main tank and, recovering from the shock, decided there was nothing for it but to climb up blind into the storm above. It was a very rough flight with the poor old Anson bumping and heaving about, but after an hour or so we flew out of the storm into sunshine and saw the Zambezi river down below.

We reached Salisbury with only ten minutes' fuel left in the tanks. The Airport Manager told me I should not have made the direct flight from Kasama as this crossed a prohibited region. The Luangwa river area was infested with tsetse fly. 'Had you come down there,' he said, 'you would have had to walk out, as we couldn't have got in to fetch you.'

Next morning I reached Bulawayo after eleven days of hard flying, and handed the Anson over to the Station Engineering Officer. He looked at it disdainfully. 'Another bloody Mark I,' he grumbled. 'That's no use to us out here. I asked for the all-metal Mark XIX. That old wooden crate is only fit for burning!'



Back again in England, the jet age had really begun in earnest. The de Havilland Comet, the world's first jet airliner, was flying as also was the Vickers Viscount with its four prop-jet engines. Exciting new types of jet fighters and the Canberra jet bomber were being developed for the RAF. Consequently, I welcomed the opportunity to gain experience with the operation of jet engines when we were asked by the Bristol Engine Company to undertake some route flying trials with their new Theseus prop-jet engine. I co-operated with the Company to arrange for the installation of two Theseus engines into the outboard positions of a four-engined Lincoln bomber, with which we carried out performance trials on the route between Lyneham and Malta.

Shortly afterwards, the AOC informed me that I had been selected for secondment to the National Gas Turbine Establishment at Farnborough, as the RAF representative on jet engine development. I was delighted, as this was certainly the most exciting appointment that I had ever received, but I did feel some regret that after less than two years back in regular RAF service, I was now to be seconded away from it once again for an indefinite period.

Chapter 19

Farnborough Again

In September 1948, I reported to Hayne Constant, Director of the National Gas Turbine Establishment at Pyestock, just beyond the western end of the main Farnborough runway. I had known Constant, and also several of his senior staff, when I was a Scientific Officer at the RAE twenty years earlier. They made me very welcome and it was rather like coming home again. Farnborough seemed much the same except that the huge balloon shed had gone, and the small, muddy, grass airfield was now replaced by an enormous runway stretching one and a half miles into the distance.

Constant told me that my duties were to liaise between his Department and RAF squadrons that were now being equipped with jet aircraft. I was to maintain a series of visits to the RAF units and report back details of their jet engine problems for the information of his technical staff. I called on Fighter Command HQ at Bentley Priory and obtained their willing co-operation and approval for me to visit any of their squadrons as and when I wanted.

In order to give me a good grounding into the technology of jet engines, Constant arranged for me to attend a two-week course at Power Jets Ltd to study the theory and mechanics of gas turbines. This was the site of the original Whittle workshop at Lutterworth, where he had built the first successful jet engine. The great Sir Frank Whittle himself gave us some of the lectures.

I had known Frank Whittle some sixteen years earlier when we were fellow students on the RAF Engineering Course at Henlow. He was at that time a quiet and somewhat serious young officer, who did not indulge in the wild parties that some of us got up to, but he was greatly respected as a brilliant pilot and technician. Whittle had earned his commission the hard way by enlisting as a boy apprentice, and upon passing out exceptionally well, he was selected for a cadetship at RAF College, Cranwell. He had what seemed to us ordinary pilots some odd views about aircraft being powered by means of jet thrust through a nozzle.

‘What!’ we thought, ‘No propeller? He must be round the bend!’

I remember him discussing with me his theory that the behaviour of air shock waves in supersonic flight could be compared to the bow

wave of a ship in water. It was astonishing that, at a time when the maximum speed ever obtained by an aircraft was only 400 mph, he should be considering the possibility of supersonic flight. He was certainly a visionary!

On leaving Henlow, Whittle was sent to Cambridge University where he obtained a first class honours degree in Mechanical Sciences. He had already patented his ideas for jet propulsion but he experienced great difficulty in getting any official backing for his invention. Even the pundits at Farnborough who were working on a gas-turbine propeller engine, did not consider straight jet thrust was practicable.

Whittle persevered and eventually succeeded in getting a small Government contract for him to construct an engine of his design in conjunction with the British Thomson Houston Company. This first experimental engine was successfully built by Whittle with a small team of enthusiasts at Lutterworth, but its early trials gave rise to various troubles and anxieties. Several times, the engine over-speeded out of control, scaring all the bystanders, and causing considerable damage to itself. After re-building, it suffered further extensive damage from a burst turbine, nearly sinking the hopes of all concerned. Eventually, however, despite the mechanical setbacks and the continued shortage of cash, their efforts were crowned with success and the experimental engine ran well and produced the thrust expected from it. A second engine was built and secretly installed in a specially designed Gloster aircraft — the E28/39 — which flew successfully on 15 May 1941.

Subsequently, in view of the urgency of the war situation, the Government nationalised Whittle's company (Power Jets Ltd.) and gave contracts to various aero engine firms to develop and produce jet engines on the now proved Whittle principle. This naturally upset Frank Whittle very greatly. He must have regarded the jet engine project to be his special baby and would have wanted to be in control of its further development. The outcome of this disagreement was that Whittle was knighted and awarded a grant of £100,000, but the RAF lost one of its finest technicians by his subsequent retirement. Little was it realised then how Whittle's invention was to revolutionise military aviation and air transport throughout the world.

Upon completing my course of instruction at Power Jets Ltd., I carried out a series of visits to fighter squadrons that were now being equipped with de Havilland Vampire and Gloster Meteor jets, and found they were making the transition from their previous piston-engined aircraft extremely well. The pilots loved the jets not only because of their greatly increased performance but also because the absence of a bulky engine right in front of the cockpit greatly improved the pilot's view — especially when landing. Jet engines

ran so smoothly after the roughness and vibration of the old piston engines, and there was no longer any tendency for the aircraft to swing on take-off. The lack of a large diameter propeller at the front enabled the aircraft to be designed with a low-level tricycle undercarriage, with consequent ease and stability when landing.

The main operational snag was the very high fuel consumption of the early jets, with consequent short duration of flight. It was customary for a pilot to be recalled by radio after only twenty minutes from take-off, so as to ensure that he would have enough fuel for one overshoot in the event of a missed landing. Another snag was the prevalence of 'wet starts' — the pilot would go through the usual routine of starting up his engine, but it would fail to light up and there would be a flood of kerosene all over the apron.

The engineers also liked jet engines, which were far less complicated than the old piston ones and gave less 'petty unserviceability'. Their main problem was trying to establish the safe life of turbine blades, especially after a pilot might have overheated them. There were several occasions when, as a jet aircraft took-off, a stream of turbine blades would suddenly spew out of its jet pipe. Another unforeseen snag once occurred with a Meteor aircraft while starting up — the mechanic stood as usual in front of the wing holding a cord to pull the wheel chocks away, when the pilot opened up the engine to test it. The unfortunate mechanic was sucked right into the air intake, and all they could see of him were his boots!

In order fully to appreciate the operational problems of jet aircraft, I arranged to be given a conversion course on to Meteor aircraft at a fighter station. At that time, the two-seater trainer Mark VII Meteor had not yet come into service, so I was sent off in a single-seat Mark IV powered by two Rolls-Royce Derwent 5 engines, each developing over one and a half tons of thrust. I had not flown fighters for a very long time and was looking forward to the experience. After a careful briefing by an instructor, I wrote the handling drill on a notepad strapped to my knee, the take-off procedure being something like this:

1. Hold the aircraft on the brakes and run up the engines to 14,000 rpm
2. Release the brakes.
3. At 75 knots, raise the nosewheel.
4. At 125 knots, rotate and take off.
5. At 145 knots, undercarriage up.
6. At 175 knots, flaps up.
7. Climb away at 300 knots.

When lined up on the runway, I held the aircraft on the brakes and opened up the engines to 14,000 rpm as instructed. I released the

brakes and then — whoosh — a violent shove in the back and we were off. The next thing I knew, we were in the air climbing steeply at 300 knots, and I had not carried out any of the rest of the drill. However, I soon settled down and sorted things out, and found the Meteor delightful to fly and quite docile to land. Within a week, I had fully completed my check-out on the aircraft.

About that time, Meteor pilots had experienced several cases of engines flaming out at high altitude, but Rolls-Royce considered that this was caused by the pilots themselves and refused to believe it could be the fault of their engines. My instructor invited me to take a Meteor up to 35,000 feet and experiment with throttle settings so as to check the possibility of the engines flaming out — but he warned me that if they did so, not to try to re-light them until down below 15,000 feet or I would get a wet start. It was a lovely clear day and I climbed steadily up to over 30,000 feet. The view was magnificent — from over Norfolk, I could see right across the south of England as far as the Isle of Wight. As I climbed, I had to throttle the engines gradually back to avoid exceeding the maximum turbine temperature limits. When nearing 35,000 feet, as I eased the throttles slightly back, both engines quietly faded out and there was a 'deadly hush'. I glided down to 15,000 feet, re-started successfully, and was later able to convince the Rolls-Royce technicians from my personal experience that their engine could indeed flame out at altitude.

Besides visiting the RAF squadrons, I made frequent visits to firms to study the progress of new types of jet aircraft and engines, and to keep NGTE staff fully in touch with developments in hand. I was also fortunate in being able to get a lot of flying with the Experimental Flying Section at the RAE where I had the opportunity to try out various types of aircraft new to me. This Farnborough appointment was the most interesting and rewarding period of my RAF career.

During this time, Joan stayed on in my Mayfair flat and loyally continued to carry out most of the typing and secretarial work of the Ultra Light Aircraft Association. I remained Chairman of the Association and came up to London for an evening every week to attend our Committee meetings, and at weekends Joan and I used to fly together in my little Bibi two-seater to various air rallies, promoting the Association's activities. While at Farnborough, I managed to purchase on behalf of the Association the unique little Zaunkoenig experimental ultra light aircraft (described in Appendix II), which had arrived at the RAE with other German aircraft sequestered as war booty.

In the summer of 1949, Mr E. O. Tips of Avions Fairey in Belgium, who was an enthusiastic member of the ULAA, offered me the extended loan of his latest aircraft — the Topsy Belfair — for

demonstration over here. This was an up-to-date version of his original tipsy B side-by-side two-seater which I used to demonstrate before the war, but it now had an enclosed cabin instead of an open cockpit. The tipsy had always been one of my favourite light aircraft, and I was delighted to accept his offer. My Bibi had served me well for two years, but it was now eleven years old and due for an extensive overhaul. With the offer of the new Topsy Belfair, I decided to part with the Bibi but was greatly shocked when later on the new owner spun it into the ground and killed himself and his passenger.

I collected the Topsy Belfair from Belgium and kept it at Farnborough, where they gave me special dispensation to operate this non-radio aircraft. With its 65 hp Walter Mikron engine, it had a remarkable performance — cruising at 95 mph on less than three gallons of fuel per hour. Its take-off and landing runs were absurdly short — the Farnborough air traffic control officers were always amused by the Topsy taking off and landing on the hundred-yard lead-in to the main runway without actually reaching the runway itself. I used it like a car to make my frequent visits to RAF stations and the aircraft firms.

The Topsy Belfair was a very pretty little aircraft and it was much admired wherever I took it. It could well have become a best seller had it not been for the lack of suitable engines — the Czech-built Walter Mikron was no longer available and we could not then obtain currency approval to buy American engines. This promising little aircraft finally ceased production with the untimely death of Mr Tips.

In July 1949, members of the Royal Aero Club were invited to participate in the Spanish Air Tour. My friend Donovan was most anxious to go, and arranged the hire of a Fairchild Argus four-seater for me to take him on the tour, which was to be for seven days around Spain as guests of the President of the Royal Spanish Aero Club, the Duke of Almodovar del Rio. We took Joan with us, and set off first for an air rally at Deauville in France. On this first leg of the journey, I realised that we had a really dreadful old aeroplane — in the two-hour flight to Deauville it had consumed nearly a tankful of engine oil, and its sparking plugs tended to oil up. Thereafter we could only do short hops in order to replenish the oil tank, and at every stop I had to remove the engine cowlings and wash out fourteen spark plugs in petrol before starting up again. Moreover, the wooden propeller kept coming loose, and I had to tighten up its securing bolts at every stop; and incidentally, the propeller came right off the aircraft during flight shortly after I had returned it to the owners!

That summer was a particularly hot one and there was a drought all over France. We flew via Tours, Limoges, Toulouse and

Perpignan, and at each stop Donovan, who suffered from a duodenal ulcer, rushed to the aerodrome restaurant calling for milk. There wasn't any available — instead, he bought chocolate, which in the heat of the aircraft cabin melted all over his clothes. We finally reached Barcelona in time for the opening banquet of the Air Tour, which Donovan had to miss because of his tummy trouble.

The next day on the way to Valencia, three of the engine cylinders oiled up and the vibration became so bad that I had to pull off a precautionary landing in a field. Donovan lay down on the grass under the shade of the wing while I washed out all the sparking plugs. We took off successfully and carried on to Valencia and thence to Madrid, at each of which magnificent banquets were arranged — which poor Donovan again had to miss.

The Air Tour went on to Jerez in the south of Spain, where they were entertained royally by the Duke himself. I decided to skip this leg and spent a whole day at Madrid Airport with Spanish mechanics working on my plug oiling problem, with some success. We rejoined the Air Tour at Pamplona in the Pyrenees where there was to be a fiesta for two days, and *en route* I noticed that the baggage labels given to us showed that Donovan and I were to be in one hotel — the Seminario, with Joan in another — the Servicio Domestico. Naturally, I preferred to have Joan with me in my hotel, so I switched her labels with those of Donovan's. On landing at Pamplona, Donovan by now completely exhausted, lay down on the ground near the aircraft, while I went to check in and find a taxi. When I got back he had completely disappeared and no-one knew what had happened to him.

I took Joan along to our hotel and found to my surprise that it was a monastery. The Franciscan monks were somewhat startled as Joan walked in dressed in her abbreviated shorts! Apparently, in view of hotel shortage in Pamplona, some of the male members of the Air Tour were being accommodated in a monastery, and female members in a convent. It subsequently transpired that poor Donovan, having been found lying prostrate by our aircraft, had been taken away in an ambulance and duly delivered with his baggage to the convent! However, we sorted things out and our tour ended very happily.

Towards the end of 1949, I was advised by the Air Ministry that I was to be posted overseas to Fayid, a huge hutted camp in the desert by the Suez Canal, where I was to be in charge of the Engine Repair Section. They told me that I had been specially selected for this posting as there was no accommodation for women at Fayid, and it was preferable for me as a bachelor to be sent there, rather than a married officer who would have to be separated from his wife and family. I hated the thought of monastic life in a desert camp again, and this appointment seemed to be going backwards in my career.

Then came another shock. My posting to Fayid involved reduction in rank to Wing Commander. I had already been a Group Captain for over six years, and applied for an interview with the Director of Personnel at the Air Ministry to see about it. He told me that all wartime promotions were on a temporary basis, and that my substantive peacetime rank was to be as Wing Commander. I pointed out that several of my colleagues of equal seniority had already been confirmed as substantive Group Captains, and why was I being passed over? Then came the blow — it appeared that all promotions were dealt with on the basis of a seniority list compiled by marks allotted from annual confidential reports rendered upon each officer. In my case, I had been seconded for special duties outside regular RAF service for six out of the past eight years, and no confidential reports had been rendered on me during this period.

‘I have examined your documents and we seem to have practically no information on you,’ said the Director. ‘My advice to you, old man, is to go on out to Fayid and soldier on for a few years. You should catch up again all right.’

I went back to Farnborough and considered the position. My RAF career had suffered a serious set-back. I had done over twenty years’ service and would be eligible for a pension upon retirement. I was forty-two years old, and if I decided to retire, I had better do it now rather than wait until perhaps too old to start a new career. So, very sadly, I tendered my resignation from the Service that I had loved so much.

My resignation was accepted — but they kindly added: ‘with regret’, and they granted me the right to retain my rank of Group Captain.

Chapter 20

Jamaican Interlude

After more than twenty years of sheltered life in the RAF, it came as quite a shock to realise that I had now to face the world on my own. I needed time to adjust and felt that a complete break was necessary while I thought things out. So I decided to make a trip to Jamaica and look into the prospects of starting a flying club out there.

In February 1950, I sailed from Bristol in the S.S. *Ariguani*, a 'banana boat' that provided comfortable cabins and good food. This was the ideal way of travel. With only seventy one-class passengers, we had the run of the whole ship and soon we all seemed to know each other. Within two days, we had left the British winter behind us, the sun shone warmly and a canvas swimming pool was rigged up on deck. After twelve relaxing and enjoyable days, we entered the exciting and colourful Kingston harbour.

A friendly Jamaican whom I had met on board, made me a member of the Liguanea Club where I stayed. This was a luxurious country club on the hill slopes just behind Kingston, with all sports facilities including a golf course, tennis courts, a cricket ground and swimming pool. It was far more pleasant than being in a hotel, and indeed much cheaper. While there, I made friends with the local Director of Civil Aviation, Kerith Saunders — a retired RAF Wing Commander. Kerith was in charge of Kingston Airport at Palisadoes, and through him I was able to get in a lot of flying with various light aircraft.

At Palisadoes I met Major Bertie Nathan, a wealthy and influential local magnate, who had been a pilot with the Royal Flying Corps in World War I and who was most anxious to fly again. Unfortunately, he was unable to obtain a flying licence on medical grounds, having lost both feet in a mountain climbing accident in Switzerland. He invited me to make an extended stay with him at his home near Montego Bay on the north-west coast of Jamaica, and he chartered a Cessna 170 four-seater which was housed at the local airport.

Every morning in the cool air before breakfast, we put in an hour or so of local flying with the Major handling the controls, and twice a week I flew him over the mountains to Kingston to attend to his business there. The Major was one of the finest types of Englishman,

full of enthusiasm for life and taking a keen interest in all Jamaican activities. He was widely respected by whites and blacks alike. I spent six glorious weeks with him and his charming family at Montego Bay, enjoying lavish hospitality, wonderful swimming and sailing, and with parties by night dancing under the moon to Jamaican calypso music.

One day, Kerith Saunders tipped me off that the post of Director of Civil Aviation in the Bahamas was likely to become vacant. I decided to return home and apply for it, and had a nice trip back in another banana boat. I was delighted to see Joan again having missed her very greatly, and we settled down happily together once more.

While I was away, Joan had loyally continued to work for the Committee of the Ultra Light Aircraft Association, and on my return I resumed my role as Chairman. During the next six months, while awaiting the official announcement of the Bahamas' vacancy, I was able to give full time to the Association. Groups of our members were forming all over the country, and I was kept busy visiting them and in attending air rallies to stimulate recruitment of new members.

Soon after my return I was contacted by Mr A. R. Ward who, with his partner the Hon. A. W. H. Dalrymple, had designed and built the exciting Chilton single-seat ultra light aircraft that I had tried out before the war. This was a sporty little aircraft, fully aerobatic, that had impressed me greatly. Unfortunately, they had only built four Chiltons when the advent of war put a stop to the project. Subsequently, their little factory was damaged during the war and most of the design plans and all the production equipment were lost. Ward told me that he still had one of the Chiltons and offered it to me for demonstration if I could arrange for the complete overhaul that it would require after nine years in storage.

This was the machine that Ranald Porteous, Auster's chief test pilot, used to demonstrate before the war and with which he had broken the world speed record for the ultra light class at 125 mph. It was powered by a 40 hp French Train engine, for which spares were no longer available. I managed to persuade the Chelsea College of Aeronautical Engineering at Redhill aerodrome to undertake the overhaul as an exercise for their students. They stripped the Chilton right down and re-built it completely, making up all necessary spares as they went along. While this work was in hand, I arranged for the inclusion of a number of modifications to improve its performance.

They made a splendid job of the overhaul, and just before the 1950 summer break the little aircraft was proudly wheeled out. The Chilton gleamed glossily in the sunshine, and all the staff and students of the College turned out to witness its first air test. I found

that the tiny machine handled beautifully and carried out some spirited aerobatics with it, which seemed to please them immensely.

Now that the Chilton was flying again, I was invited to demonstrate it at various air displays, where it helped to promote interest in the ultra light movement. I entered the little aircraft in the *Daily Express* International Air Race which took place that September, and which attracted seventy-six entries. The start was from Hurn Airport with the first turning point around Bournemouth pier, and then eastwards along the coast past all the seaside resorts to Dover, thence around Kent via Ramsgate and Margate, to finish up at Herne Bay. Official observers were posted at pier heads along the route, and the whole race was organised as a spectacular event for the crowds of holiday-makers at the various resorts.

Before the start of the race at Hurn Airport, the handicappers closely examined my aircraft and I could see they were puzzled. Then I was horrified to find that the little Chilton, which was by far the smallest aircraft in the race, had to start level with a larger and much faster one, and I had no hope of winning. In fact, although I averaged 143 mph over the course, which was nearly 20 mph faster than the Chilton had ever been flown before, I came in towards the end. Deeply disappointed, I took the matter up with the handicappers after the race and they told me that during their inspection they had noticed that a lot of alterations had been made to the aircraft, and they could not estimate its speed. Consequently, to be on the safe side and to avoid a runaway win, they admitted I had been handicapped too severely.

All the time and trouble I had taken to improve the Chilton's performance had been completely wasted. I never flew in another race after that, as it seemed the result depended not so much on the skill of the pilot as on the whim of the handicappers. I was therefore most amused when, in the following year's *Daily Express* Race, Hugh Kendall in another Chilton confounded the handicappers by making a runaway win, finishing some seven minutes ahead of the field. He must have souped-up that Chilton very considerably, but despite their most rigorous examination of his aircraft after the race, the handicappers were unable to fault him.

In due course the vacancy for the appointment of Director of Civil Aviation in the Bahamas was announced, and I applied for it. Just at that time, staying with Joan's family was Mr Seymour Cocks, a prominent Member of Parliament, who invited me to lunch at the House of Commons to meet his friend, the Rt. Hon. James Griffiths, then Colonial Secretary. I got along very well with him, and subsequently was called in for several interviews at the Colonial Office. Soon afterwards I was delighted to learn that my application had been successful and I was to be appointed Director of Civil Aviation in the Bahamas.

I felt rather sad to have to leave the Ultra Light Aircraft Association, of which I was a Founder Member and had been Chairman for the past three years. However, the Association (by now re-named the Popular Flying Association) was firmly established and growing fast, and the Committee had been strengthened by new and experienced flying enthusiasts, including Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett of RAF Pathfinder fame. The time had come for me to say goodbye.

My main worry was what to do about Joan. She was a lovely girl and we had been together for three years, during which time she had loyally worked hard to assist me with the Association. Moreover, I felt that her introduction of Seymour Cocks was probably a contributory factor in my getting the Bahamas appointment. I could hardly take her with me to the Bahamas as a girl friend, but although she would have made an attractive and loyal wife, I dreaded the stifling permanence of marriage.

I had a long discussion on the problem with my old friend, Francis Winham, who was a fountain of wisdom on these matters. We drew up a list of pros and cons of marriage, somewhat on the following lines:

Pros — companionship

— a comfortable home

— a fuller social life

— someone to share one's joys and sorrows

— children and family life

— to be looked after in sickness and old age

— and so on.

Cons — the age gap (Joan was only twenty-one, I was forty-four)

— extra expense

— extra responsibility

— loss of freedom

— no more girl friends

— the mother-in-law

— etc.

I expressed my feelings by marking each of these items out of ten points, and the result showed 70 points against marriage with only 30 in favour! Francis turned to me and said: 'That shows you are not yet ready for marriage. Much as I like Joan, I think your marrying her would be a mistake.'

I pondered hard for a while, and suddenly made up my mind. 'Francis,' I said, 'I love that girl. I can't possibly go away and leave her behind. If taking her with me to the Bahamas means marriage, then so be it!'

Two days before the date of my departure we were married at

Caxton Hall. Then we set sail for the Bahamas, looking forward to a life of peace and happiness together.
Or so we thought!

Chapter 21

The Bahamas

In January 1951, we sailed from Liverpool on the *Reina del Pacifico*, a beautiful ship of 17,800 tons, white-painted and with yellow funnels, which was bound for Bermuda, Nassau and thence onwards to South America. Thanks to the courtesy of the Colonial Office, we had been given first class tickets but soon wished we were travelling tourist, as the first class passengers were mostly elderly folk or business executives. All the fun seemed to be on the tourist deck below where a young and cheerful crowd could be seen playing deck games and enjoying themselves immensely.

Our ship was widely known as the 'Rolling Reina', and once out into the rough Atlantic we soon discovered why. I never realised that a ship could roll so much without turning right over. She also pitched — her bow plunging down into the sea which washed right over the fore-deck, then rearing upwards towards the sky and coming down again with a loud crash on to the water. Poor Joan was desperately ill, as were the majority of the passengers, and she remained in her cabin for most of the twelve-day voyage to Bermuda.

While moored off Bermuda, we welcomed the chance of stepping ashore on to terra firma and away from that rolling horror. We were taken ashore in a lighter, and both feeling somewhat shaky, we sat down gratefully on a long box which we saw on the deck. A ship's officer came up to us and said: 'I wouldn't sit there if I were you.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because old Mr Williams is in there. He died on the way over'.

It appeared that Mr. Williams had been poorly, and on his doctor's advice had taken a sea cruise for his health. That dreadful voyage had finished him off. I asked why they had not buried him at sea.

'Well,' said the officer, 'he had booked for Bermuda, and we are delivering him there.'

Upon leaving Bermuda, I sent a cable to Nassau announcing the time of our arrival. As the Director of Civil Aviation's house at the airport would have been unoccupied for several months, and knowing Joan's fear of spiders and creepy crawlies, I requested that the house should be fumigated and thoroughly disinfected before

our arrival there. I had not realised that the Deputy DCA, expecting to be appointed Director, had moved into the house and was occupying it. He met us at the Nassau docks and seemed to be very disgruntled. It appeared that the Colonial Office had failed to notify him as to my appointment, and the first news he had of it was the receipt of my cable. On our arrival at the house, we found it empty of furniture and so thoroughly fumigated that it was impossible to breathe in it!

After a few days, we had bought some furniture and were able to move in. The house was a pleasant three-bedroom bungalow situated on a little ridge overlooking Oakes Field, the airport at that time. It was somewhat isolated, being surrounded by uncultivated scrub and bush, and to improve our security I thought it wise to practise revolver shooting around the house to warn off any possible intruders. Within a few days, however, we were burgled and the only things stolen were my revolver and all the ammunition!

At first I found my new job extremely difficult as my Deputy, clearly resentful of my arrival, continued to run the airport himself giving me no co-operation and no information as to what was going on. After a few weeks, however, he suddenly announced his resignation as he had accepted a new appointment with the local airline. He left, taking with him our secretary, and leaving me without any knowledge of the job or continuity of airport management.

This was a major crisis. Joan rallied round and moved into the office as temporary secretary. I sent for the senior air traffic control officer — one Hartis Thompson, a white Bahamian who had served with the RAF during the war. I told him that from that moment he was appointed Deputy Director and that I relied on him to help me sort out our problems and keep the airport running smoothly. Hartis proved to be a tower of strength, reliable and absolutely loyal. We worked together through many evenings reading through the Departmental files and records until we were fully in the picture and became firmly in control of the airport operation.

The Bahamas are a string of several hundred coral islands stretching for about seven hundred miles in the Atlantic off the east coast of Florida. About twenty of the islands are inhabited, of which the most important is New Providence on which the capital, Nassau, is situated. Oakes Field, the main airport at that time, was only two miles from Nassau and uncomfortably close as, with the prevailing wind, all the aircraft took-off straight over the town. Oakes Field had originally been started by the great pioneer, Sir Harry Oakes, whose brutal murder in 1941 shocked the world. It was developed by the RAF during the war for use as an operational training unit and a Coastal Command base, and now had become an important international airport.

The Bahamas depended heavily upon tourism, and efficient air transport was becoming more and more vital to their economy. Pan American operated eight round trips a day with Convairs and DC-4s between Miami and Nassau, BOAC came in twice a day *en route* between London and Jamaica via New York or Bermuda, using Constellations and Stratocruisers, and Trans-Canada Airlines operated several flights a week *en route* between Montreal and Jamaica using DC-4M 'North Stars'. Several smaller airlines extended these routes down to the West Indies, and to various points in Florida.

Bahamas Airways, the local airline, operated a network of flights around the out-islands using amphibian flying boats. Their pilots were expert at this work, knowing all the safe alighting areas and mooring their aircraft against local jetties or even anchoring them off-shore. They provided an invaluable communication service between the out-islands and Nassau, and carried out emergency medical flights. Today, however, nearly all the inhabited out-islands are provided with airstrips bulldozed out of the coral rock, and the costly flying boat operation has been replaced by conventional landplanes.

The population of the Bahamas was about 130,000 of which the great majority were black descendants of the old slave days. Three thousand or so white Bahamians were largely the descendants of the original British settlers, the Eleutharian Adventurers, who colonised the islands in 1647. Upon getting their freedom from slavery, most of the blacks took their masters' names and set up a shanty town over the hill behind Nassau. It was said that the former white families, to preserve the purity of their race, would send any babies of doubtful colour 'over the hill' to join their namesakes there.

Although discrimination against colour was strictly against the law, it was in fact rigidly practised during my time in the Bahamas — although, of course, not so today. The hotels and bars along the sea front would only admit white visitors, and blacks, other than staff, would never be seen there. This arrangement was accepted by all in view of the importance of tourism to the economy, as it was thought that American visitors would resent the presence of blacks in their hotels.

I had my first experience of the discrimination when I met the Chairman of the Airport Board, a Mr Adderley, who was black. He was an Oxford-educated lawyer, and a most charming and cultured gentleman. After our monthly Board meetings in my office, I used to invite him home for a drink — but he always politely declined. One evening when refusing my invitation, he said to me: 'You must try to understand. If I were to come to your home, you would no longer be received by your other friends.' Instead, he invited my wife and me to his home where we were welcomed by his family.

A further example occurred when a BOAC aircraft from London *en route* to Jamaica developed a technical fault, and had to stop over for the night. All the white passengers were taken to one of the smart hotels on the sea front, while the black ones were packed off to a second rate one 'over the hill'. Unfortunately, one of the black passengers was Mr Norman Manley, a prominent politician who was leader of the opposition party in Jamaica and who soon afterwards was to become Prime Minister. He was furious at the discrimination against him and this led to a political row, with the unfortunate BOAC Station Manager being hauled over the coals. He should, of course, have advised the Governor as to the arrival of a VIP, and Mr Manley would probably have been invited to stay as an honoured guest at Government House. Instead, he bore a grudge against the British ever afterwards.

At the airport, all the air traffic controllers were white. They became a problem because they considered their pay inadequate to compensate for the responsibility of their work and for night shift duties. When the winter tourist season started, a number of the controllers resigned to take up better paid jobs in Nassau. Moreover, with the controllers disgruntled, discipline became slack and I had a serious complaint from BOAC that an aircraft of theirs flying in at night from Bermuda, had called Nassau on the radio for over an hour before getting clearance to land. I investigated this complaint and found that the controller on duty that night had been seen drunk in the airport bar, when he should have been on watch in the control tower. I had, of course, to fire him.

The shortage of air traffic controllers became critical, and despite my repeated applications to the Airport Board, no increase in their salaries could be granted. Eventually, I was forced to close down the airport at nights, which was a most serious action as we were the main international airport in the region. To overcome the problem, I decided to recruit black controllers but our local pilots were horrified. 'The American pilots,' they said, 'would never stand for this and take orders from blacks'.

'They will have to,' I replied, 'and in any case the black controllers will be up in the Control Tower and out of sight.'

I recruited eleven keen young black Bahamians, who seemed well educated and intelligent. After an intensive course of training organised by my deputy, Hartis Thompson, nine of them were confirmed in their appointments and carried out their duties reliably and well. To them, the pay was more than adequate and the job was attractive as it offered them the security of a civil service career with a pension at the end of it. The experiment proved completely successful, and before long I had the Airport open again twenty-four hours a day.

Another problem that plagued me during the whole of my time at

the Airport, was how to control the black taxi drivers who seemed to be beyond the law. Previously, BOAC had provided a coach service to town in order to protect their passengers from the extortionate fares charged by the taxi drivers. Within a week, all four tyres of the coach had been slashed, and later the coach was burned out. I used to see the taxi drivers waiting by the Airport Terminal, lolling back in their huge American cars, all wearing large, expensive-looking wrist-watches, and probably earning far more than I did. When an aircraft had landed, they used to gather round the Terminal exit and grab the passengers as they came out. A rich-looking passenger might find four or five taxi drivers pulling him in different directions at the same time.

To sort this out, I arranged for the taxis to be lined up in a rank outside the Terminal, and put one of my Airport Police on duty by the exit, who as the passengers emerged would signal each driver in turn to pick up the fare. This led to a visit in my office by the President of the taxi drivers' union, a most amusing rogue who roared with laughter as he told me some of the dreadful antics that his boys got up to. He warned me seriously that his members objected to control by my Airport Police, and that any policeman giving them orders was liable to have his house burnt down!

Further trouble arose when the taxi drivers began to use the passenger toilets in the Terminal building, instead of going to the staff ones which they said were too far away. Unfortunately, they seemed inexperienced in the use of normal toilets and stood on the seats. Not aiming carefully, they often fouled the wall behind the seat and this naturally led to complaints from the passengers. I had to ban the taxi drivers from the Terminal building, and this led to a question being asked in the House of Assembly as to why the DCA was discriminating against the black drivers. The Airport Board then granted me funds to build a new toilet near the taxi rank, but within a week this was found to be completely wrecked!

I never managed to solve the taxi driver problem during the whole of my time in charge of that airport. A year or two after I had returned to England, I was interested to read that the taxi drivers, objecting to some new regulation to control them, had blockaded the approach road and brought the airport to a halt. They completely disrupted the whole tourist trade for that season.

During the hot and humid summer months the tourist trade dwindled and many of the hotels and bars closed. Thousands of the black Bahamians would then go over to Florida as labourers on temporary fruit-picking employment. Resort Airlines, a Miami charter company, had the contract to transport these labourers to Florida, and their General Manager came to see me with a peculiar problem. It appeared that a large proportion of them suffered from VD, and many were refused entry by the American immigration

authorities. Resort Airlines, having brought them in, had then to take them back again, and this involved a number of wasted flights and expense.

At Resort's request, I curtained-off a section of the hangar so that passengers for each flight could be inspected prior to embarking. The aircraft Captain would request each passenger to drop his trousers while he checked for symptoms of VD. After a while, this procedure had to stop as it was not effective, and the Resort Captains objected to being referred to locally as the 'Cock Squeezers'. The problem was eventually solved by our Principal Medical Officer who agreed, at Resort's expense, to give every labourer an injection of a million units of penicillin prior to embarkation. 'It won't do them any harm,' he said. 'Even if they haven't got VD, it will probably clear up some other complaint that they might well have.'

A Butlins Holiday Camp had been built on Grand Bahama Island about 120 miles from Nassau, on a site called West End only 60 miles from the coast of Florida. I was asked to go over there in order to license their newly built airstrip, as they wanted to start flight operations. I was astonished to find that the airstrip had been laid north to south, whereas the prevailing wind was east to west and there would be a steady 10 – 15 mph wind across it most of the time.

I then heard of the fantastic list of errors made by the British constructors of the Camp, who had been told to build it just like the successful British ones and to site it as near as possible to the Florida coast. They built it at the extreme western tip of the island alongside a poor beach facing north, whereas only a few miles to the east there were several much better beaches facing south. To mix their concrete, they first used the local coral sand which was not silica, so that when the pre-fabricated walls of the chalets were hoisted up for erection, they cracked in half. Instead of tiled floors with mat coverings, they used wooden floors with carpets — which were much appreciated by the termites, white ants and silver fish! They had not realised that communal shower and toilet blocks would be unacceptable to American tourists, and expensive alterations had to be carried out to provide showers and toilets for each chalet. Butlins would have done much better to have used local contractors who, though more expensive, would have known the local conditions.

The Camp (or Vacation Village) was ready to open with about one-third of its capacity completed, and Butlins had made a contract with Resort Airlines, the American charter company, to fly their visitors in from industrial centres such as Detroit and Pittsburgh. Reluctantly, I licensed Resort to operate commercial flights into that West End airstrip subject to certain restrictions, but they failed to obtain ratification of this licence from the American authorities.

They operated for a short time carrying passengers on a 'non-paying basis', but this fiddle was soon spotted by the American authorities and the operation was stopped. Butlins (Bahamas) Ltd then folded up.

Later on, an American syndicate wanted to take over the Butlins Vacation Village as a casino, and applied for a gambling licence. The Bahamas Development Board backed the project as it would have brought more tourists and money into the islands, but the Church was against it. When the Governor discovered that the American syndicate was a front for a group of gangsters which had been ousted from gambling joints in Miami, he stopped the project.

I made many friends with the local pilots, most of whom had served with the RAF during the war. Two of them, Colyn Rees and Philip Farrington, had been RAF flying instructors, and we got together to form the Nassau Flying Club of which I became Chairman. Thanks to generous donations from local well-wishers, we were able to buy our first aircraft — a Luscombe Silvoir cabin two-seater, which had belonged to Colyn Rees. We also acquired a new Ercoupe cabin two-seater presented to us by Sir Sydney Oakes. The Governor of the Bahamas, General Sir Robert Neville, consented to be our President and the Airport Board gave us every encouragement including free hangarage and free operation at Oakes Field.

We decided to open the Club by holding a garden party and flying display at Oakes Field. The usual events were included such as aerobatics, crazy flying, balloon bursting and flour-bag bombing, and the climax was to be made by Colyn Rees diving the Luscombe down and passing through some goal posts which were specially erected for the purpose. The opening ceremony was a flight by our President, H. E. the Governor, in the Club's Luscombe with Colyn Rees as pilot. After a gentle and dignified circuit around the airfield, to my horror I saw the Luscombe dive steeply down and shoot right through those goal posts. After it had landed, I hurried over to apologise to the Governor, but he took it very sportingly and said he had enjoyed the flight.

The Club was a great success and we were able to train a number of local enthusiasts, some of whom went solo in the Ercoupe after only two or three hours of dual instruction. The Ercoupe was an extraordinary machine, designed to be driven just like a car. Its only controls were a steering wheel and a footbrake, and it was almost impossible to stall. To take off, one simply opened the throttle and drove down the runway like a car, then at 45 mph or so, you pulled the steering wheel back and up she went. By some interconnection between its rudder and aileron linkages, it banked itself correctly during turns, and its very strong undercarriage could absorb the shock of even the worst landings. The only disadvantage was that a

pupil who had learnt to fly on the Ercoupe without any rudder pedals, had to learn all over again if wishing to fly an aircraft with conventional controls.

One of our keenest pupils was Pitt Oakes, younger son of the wealthy Oakes family. Pitt was the most charming young man, but he had one great weakness — alcohol. Once Pitt got going in a bar, there was no stopping him. Unfortunately he had far too much money, and was surrounded by a bunch of hangers-on who encouraged him in his drinking habits. Pitt had lost both his British and local car driving licences through drunken driving charges, and when he decided to join the Club and take up flying, our Committee were appalled.

This put me in a very difficult position. I pointed out that we could hardly refuse him membership of the Club as his brother, Sir Sydney, had given us an aircraft. Consequently, we agreed to accept him but the instructors decided to make his flying training as tough as possible. He proved to be a brilliant pupil and within a few weeks had passed with complete success all his flying tests, and also a specially difficult written examination which we set for him. He then came to my office to collect his flying licence. As I gave it to him, I said: 'Pitt, you have earned this licence the hard way. Against the advice of every member of the Committee I am granting it to you, but for God's sake don't let me down and fly when you're drunk.'

Some weeks later at lunchtime on a Sunday, the manager of the Country Club phoned me and asked: 'Is Pitt Oakes flying? He left here drunk half an hour ago and said he was going to the Airport.'

I phoned the Control Tower and they confirmed that Pitt was then taxiing out in the Ercoupe. 'Stop him,' I ordered, and they had the fire tender pull up on the taxi track in front of him. Pitt climbed out of the aircraft and promptly fell flat on his back.

I had no option but to cancel his flying licence and phoned his mother, Lady Oakes, to explain. She took the news very well and arranged for Pitt to go to an alcoholics' institution in Miami for a cure. While there, Pitt got drunk and fell out of a window, breaking his arm. Poor Pitt! Such a charming, generous and enthusiastic young man, and a very good friend of mine. He died of alcoholism at the early age of twenty eight. What a waste of a young life that offered so much opportunity!

One day I received an invitation from my old friend Kerith Saunders, the DCA in Jamaica, to attend a conference there. Kerith had arranged for Agostini, the DCA in Trinidad, and for a representative of the American CAA in Miami, to attend and we had an interesting week discussing air traffic problems throughout the Caribbean region. I was particularly pleased to see Jamaica again with its superb mountainous scenery, which was such a welcome relief after the flat islands of the Bahamas.

While in Jamaica, I met 'Sonny' Banting, my old friend from earlier BOAC days. He was now Manager and Chief Pilot of a local airline, Caribbean International Airways, which operated three PBY-5A Catalina amphibians between Jamaica, the Cayman Islands and Tampa, Florida. Poor Sonny had just had the misfortune to write off two of these aircraft. The first accident occurred when he collected a Catalina after its overhaul at Tampa and, due to a fault in the fuel line installation, both engines cut out together. In landing on the rough sea below, the aircraft broke up and Sonny and his wife spent a miserable night in an inflatable life-raft before being picked up the next day. Shortly afterwards, when taking off in another Catalina from the Cayman Islands with a full load of passengers, the steward failed to close the rear door properly. During the take-off run, the sea poured into the rear of the aircraft making it impossible for Sonny to raise the tail. With the aircraft sinking, Sonny tried to run it ashore on to a nearby beach, but when he saw passengers climbing out on to the wing, he had to cut the engines to avoid the danger of them falling into the propellers. The Catalina then sank. Soon afterwards, the third Catalina became damaged in a taxiing accident at Kingston Airport, and the airline had to close down.

At Oakes Field, our aircraft accident arrangements were good. We had two modern fire engines, a crash tender and an ambulance, which were manned twenty-four hours a day in a state of instant readiness. Once a week, for practice, we gave the crash crew a surprise alert and timed their arrival at the point indicated. For air-sea rescue, I made arrangements with the Harbour Master at Nassau to maintain a register of the local owners of boats equipped with ship-shore radio, who had volunteered to be called out in case of emergency. On the whole, I was reasonably satisfied that all was well.

It therefore came as a surprise to me when in the cinema one night my name was flashed on the screen announcing an emergency 'phone call. It was from Mr Stubbs, our Director of Public Works, who told me that the Governor had ordered him to arrange a secret exercise to test our aircraft crash procedure. He had lit a fire three miles out in the bush to simulate a crash, but when he 'phoned the Airport Control Tower to alert the crash procedure, the controller on duty refused to co-operate. 'The Governor is waiting out there with his watch to time the crash crew's arrival,' said Stubbs, 'and what are you going to do about it?'

I hastened to the Control Tower, where the controller on duty told me he thought the alert message was a hoax, as there was no aircraft within a hundred miles of Nassau at the time. After all, it was his job to know that. If he had sent the crash crew out, it would have meant closing the airport until they returned, so he quite

properly refused. I was told that his 'phone conversation with Stubbs went something like this:

Stubbs: 'There is an aircraft crashed and on fire three miles west of Oakes Field.'

Controller: 'You must be mistaken. No aircraft has been flying in the vicinity for the last hour.'

Stubbs: 'I tell you this is an aircraft crash alert. I am Mr Stubbs, Director of Public Works, acting for the Governor'.

Controller: 'And I am Queen Mary.' Upon which, he hung up.

By then I could see the bush fire blazing and as it seemed to have got out of control, I ordered the crash crew out to deal with it. For the next hour or so until the crash crew returned, I had to close the airport and a BOAC aircraft arriving from Bermuda had to be kept circling around for half an hour before we could give it clearance to land. This incident led to a comment in the local Press as follows: 'A certain Very High Personage has been playing soldiers, and succeeded in closing the Airport last night and putting an aircraft at risk'.

A few months later we had a real alert when an American Air Force SA-16 Albatross amphibian crashed at sea one night a few miles south of the Island. My air-sea rescue arrangements with the Harbour Master worked well, and thanks to ship-shore radio, we were able to locate the wrecked aircraft successfully despite the darkness. As the result of this, I received a personal citation from General Richardson, commanding the Patrick Air Force Base in Florida, commending me for my efforts in ensuring that smooth operations were maintained in conducting the search.

Two months later, we had another alert. After dinner one night, I was sitting in the balcony of my house looking out over the airport, when the runway lights came on and I saw a Dakota take off. Suddenly, it shot up into the air, turned right over and hit the ground where it burst into flames and cartwheeled through the bush like a giant catherine wheel. It was a horrible sight! I rushed to the scene of the accident and found the crash crew already there, but there was little they could do owing to the heat of the flames. When the fire was finally under control, I searched around the wreckage and noticed scattered in the bush nearby a number of cases of whisky, mostly smashed. I also found tell-tale evidence as to the cause of the accident — the elevator locking boards were lying on the ground just below the tailplane. These should have been removed from the aircraft before flight, and the pilot had taken off with his elevators locked in the up position. There were four occupants, burnt beyond recognition, whose bodies we took to the mortuary.

The aircraft was an American Air Force Dakota from the Patrick

Air Force Base in Florida, and the next day they sent over a group of officers who held a Court of Enquiry in my office. When the Court had concluded its business, I invited the Colonel in charge to have a drink with me at home. I told him about the whisky and that we had rescued several cases undamaged, and asked him what was I to do about them. He replied: 'Thank God you kept quiet about that whisky during the Enquiry. It would have been highly embarrassing and would have led to most unfortunate repercussions back at Base.' It appeared that Scotch whisky in Florida was about twice as expensive as in Nassau, and the Air Force crews used to stock up when passing through Oakes Field. The Colonel added: 'It is nearly Christmas time. Keep the whisky and distribute it to your staff and especially to your crash crew, who have done such an excellent job.'

A few days later I received a second citation from General Richardson of the Patrick Air Force Base, commending me for my assistance and co-operation with the accident investigation, which was 'much beyond that expected of an individual.' I wondered if my whisky 'cover up' had anything to do with it!

At that time, the Bahamas was a British colony and social life was extensive, especially during the winter season. The white population consisted broadly of three groups — white Bahamians, expatriate tax exiles and the Government set. The white Bahamians, many of whom were descendants of the original settlers, were mostly businessmen and they included the 'Bay Street Boys' — a group of wealthy and powerful politicians who controlled almost everything in the Bahamas. Whatever unkind remarks may have been made about the Bay Street Boys, it should be remembered that it was entirely through their efforts that the Bahamas had been developed from a poor colony without any natural resources into one of the world's most successful tourist centres.

The expatriates were wealthy tax-exiles — British, American and Canadian — who lived apart in luxurious homes, often with expensive yachts, and enjoyed the benefit of the Bahamian tax-free economy. The Government set, to which I belonged, was mostly headed by retired British Colonial Office officials who were glad to accept appointments in Nassau at very modest salaries and who led a quiet social life among themselves, being unable to afford to mix very much with the others.

When Joan and I arrived in Nassau, we were immediately welcomed into the Government set, and found ourselves involved in a series of rather boring dinner parties held by kindly but elderly hostesses. Joan was only twenty-one, and here began the first of our troubles. 'I don't want to mix with all those old bags,' she said, and refused to entertain them back at our home. This was embarrassing for me, as part of my duties as a Director was to co-operate with the

other departmental heads. Within three months or so, Joan became pregnant, and that gave her a good excuse to drop out of the social scene, leaving me to attend the parties on my own.

Our daughter, Jackie, was born on the following Christmas Day — a welcome Christmas gift! I was delighted, and hoped Joan would then become happier with her life in the Bahamas. Instead, she became more and more morose and discontented. She had always been fond of horses so, to give her an interest, I took the opportunity to buy her a racehorse whose owner could no longer afford to feed it. I arranged with the Irish manager of the Oakes family stables to house and feed the beast, and he offered to train Joan as a jockey so that she could enter and win the annual Ladies' Race next winter.

Joan now cheered up enormously, but her life became all horses. At 4.30 every morning the alarm clock would go off and Joan would leave for practice gallops around the racecourse, returning by nine o'clock exhausted, and going off to bed. I hardly seemed to see her in those days. Her social life was entirely with the racecourse fraternity, and I heard astonishing stories from her as to how they rigged the weekly races. Apparently four of the owners took it in turn to fix the Daily Double, leaving the other races to the punters. The favourite was either pulled by the jockey, or was given copious draughts of water to drink just before the race, or it had ice packs strapped around its knees to stiffen them, and doping was of course practised. Joan told me of a jockey who was severely beaten up in front of the other jockeys as a warning to them. He had been paid £10 to pull his horse, but someone else paid him £40 to win!

During this period, I led a separate social life on my own and although we remained on friendly terms, our interests drifted widely apart. As manager of the airport, it was frequently my duty to meet VIP arrivals as they disembarked from their aircraft and to escort them personally through immigration and customs formalities, and send them by car to their destinations. Nassau had an astonishing concentration of the world's celebrities and I was privileged to meet so many of them. Film and stage stars, politicians and the aristocracy — I received two Dukes and nine Lords that season alone! These celebrities often remembered to invite me to their various parties, and before long I found myself right in with the expatriate set.

We in the Bahamas, a British colony, naturally treated our aristocracy with due respect, but this was not always the case with American officials. While waiting one day in the 'aliens' queue to the immigration desk at Miami Airport, with His Grace the Duke of Sutherland standing nearby, I was somewhat amused to hear a loud voice call out: 'Mr Dook Sutherland next'.

One of the most colourful of the VIPs that I met was Arthur

Vining Davis, President of the Aluminum Corporation of America. He kept a couple of executive aircraft in readiness for him at the airport, and was living on his luxurious yacht in the harbour. He invited me to dine with him one night, and told me enthusiastically about his plans to develop some land he had bought on Eleuthera Island, where he intended to build an estate with two hotels, a golf course and some villas. The development was based upon a ten-year plan — and he was ninety-three years old at the time! A story was told about him that some friend asked him why he kept on working so hard at his age. ‘You can’t take it with you, you know,’ said the friend.

‘In that case,’ he replied, ‘I won’t go.’

The hurricane season occurs during the months of July to September, when these great storms brew up over the warm waters of the Caribbean and the Gulf, and move northward towards Florida — sometimes travelling right up the American coast as far as New York. These storms are carefully monitored by the Americans, who send out regular hurricane warnings on the radio. That summer we had the warning of a severe hurricane crossing Cuba with wind speeds up to 135 mph, and moving directly towards Nassau. We took the laid-down precautionary measures, and upon receiving the twelve-hour warning I closed the airport and all the aircraft were flown away to Miami. I had the hangar and control tower guyed by steel ropes, and all windows were battened over.

With the six-hour warning, I took Joan and the baby for safety to a friend’s stone-built house in the town, and then returned to my house at the airport. Here, I had taken all the necessary precautions — filled the baths with water, stocked up with candles and battened over the windows. My little dog, Rusty, and I were the sole occupants of the airport and we waited for the hurricane to strike. With still a few hours to go, I lay down on the couch for a sleep.

Upon waking some hours later, I was surprised to find that all seemed peaceful. Outside, it was a bright moonlight night with a starry sky and hardly a breath of wind. The hurricane, it transpired, had suddenly changed course and veered to the east, and had blown hell out of Cat Island whose inhabitants weren’t expecting it.

With the advent into BOAC service of the Comet, the world’s first jet airliner, we realised that Oakes Field was too small and in any case too close to Nassau for safety. There was the alternative airfield, Windsor Field, which had been built for the RAF during the war and had been left derelict ever since. Located about ten miles west of Nassau, it was complete with full-length surfaced runways and hangar accommodation, and it was far more suitable than Oakes Field as a main international airport. That September, the Bahamas Government decided to send Harold Christie, with myself as adviser, to London to negotiate the purchase of Windsor

Field. Harold was a prominent local politician and a most delightful character, and his charm in negotiating with Air Ministry officials in London resulted in Windsor Field being handed over free to the Bahamas Government, and Oakes Field being returned to them at the original price paid for the land before its development as an airport. This was a most generous gift by the British Government.

On the return flight to Nassau in a BOAC Stratocruiser, an unusual incident occurred. After a fuelling stop at Shannon, we passengers settled down for the long haul to Bermuda. Some hours later the Captain announced in matter of fact tones: 'Fasten your seat belts, please. We are now landing at Reykjavik' — as if it was the most natural thing in the world to find ourselves in Iceland rather than Bermuda! Being *en route* to Nassau, I was dressed in light tropical clothing without an overcoat, and disembarked from the aircraft into a freezing blizzard of snow. Apparently the aircraft had been diverted up north to bypass bad weather over the Atlantic, and the next day we went on to Bermuda via Gander in Newfoundland.

On my return to Nassau after three weeks' absence, I was met by Joan with an air of considerable coolness. Her whole life now seemed to be centred on her horse trainer and the racecourse. Early in January 1953, the trainer was suspected of injecting a racehorse in the paddock right under the noses of the stewards, and a specimen of its saliva was sent to Miami for analysis. Two days later, before the result was announced, he quit Nassau leaving his wife and two children, and Joan came to me in a state of panic. She told me she intended to leave me and join him in Miami. I tried to talk her out of it, and suggested that we should return to England and start a new life together again — but she then broke the news that she was pregnant by the trainer, and insisted upon going to join him. She agreed to leave our baby in my care.

Very sadly, I saw her off at the airport on her way to Miami and gave her funds so that she could come back to me if he should let her down — and that was the last I ever saw of her. Completely shattered, I went down to our favourite beach where I lay down and wept. I reflected back over the many happy times we had spent together during the past five years, and wondered how things could have gone so wrong between us. Perhaps I was to blame for concentrating too much on my job and neglecting her.

I went back to our house and there I saw our twelve-month-old baby, Jackie, smiling happily at me from her playpen. I picked her up and hugged her, and thought to myself: 'You poor motherless child! I will do my best to bring you up on my own and will give you all the love and affection that I used to have for your mother.'

I engaged a smiling black nanny to look after Jackie, and all my friends rallied round to support me. Apparently my wife's affair

with the racehorse trainer was common knowledge on the island — to everyone, it seemed, except me. I then found that I was in great demand by the various Nassau hostesses as a spare man, and enjoyed a constant round of parties — sometimes two or three on the same evening. I had several favourite hostesses of whom I became very fond, and found out that I was known by them as the ‘eligible escort’.

There seemed to be a considerable shortage of spare men at these parties. The fathers and brothers of many visiting families would be working back home in America or Canada for most of their time, while the wives and daughters enjoyed the Nassau winter season. A number of unattached men were around, mostly British, who were referred to as ‘professional house-guests’. They came out to Nassau early in the season and moved around from one home to another as guests of the various hostesses. One of them told me that the only money he ever had to spend was the taxi fare when moving from one home to another!

After a few months, this round of artificial gaiety palled; I longed to get back to England and reality, and I had my daughter’s future to consider. I also longed to get away from my home, which seemed to be haunted by the ghost of Joan. I had an interview with the Governor, who was most sympathetic, and agreed to accept my resignation. I recommended that my loyal and trustworthy deputy, Hartis Thompson, should take over my job and was pleased to hear that he was duly appointed.

In May 1953, I was in a Stratocruiser on the sixteen-hour flight back to London with my baby, Jackie, in her carry-cot beside me. I had never been afraid to accept responsibility, and was sublimely confident that I could cope on my own with the upbringing of a daughter — but I had no idea then of the problems that this was to cause me later on! Here I was with the baby on my way back to England, with no home and no job to go to, and I wondered — what next?

Chapter 22

On Final Approach

Upon arrival in London, I took a flat in Dolphin Square, a large block of apartments where I had friends. In helping me to solve the problem as to what to do with my baby, the management introduced me to another tenant, Madeleine McLoughlin, a prominent journalist who had a similar problem. She had a baby girl the same age as Jackie that she had placed in a children's residential nursery at Sevenoaks. This proved to be a charming place run by Mrs Richards, a motherly matron assisted by two daughters. About a dozen infants were there, all looking happy and well cared for, so I decided to place Jackie with them. Every weekend Madeleine and I took turns to fetch and deliver the two little girls who stayed at Dolphin Square with us, and thus the immediate problem was solved.

I managed to obtain a quick divorce and was granted custody of the child. As it happened, Jackie became accepted at the nursery almost as one of the family and was allowed to stay on there until old enough to go to boarding school, and during all this time I was able to have her with me every weekend. I learnt to cook and became sort of combined father and nursemaid to her. I adored that child! As I used to tell my friends, she was the only girl I had ever known who was always pleased to see me, and who never stood me up.

My next problem was to find a job. It seemed to me that this was now the opportunity to start up in business on my own. I had wide experience in both the technical and operational sides of aviation, and decided to set myself up as an aviation consultant. My old friend Major Weaver, chairman of the Coventry Victor Motor Company, was kind enough to let me have a spare room free of charge in his London offices, which I furnished. I had letterhead paper printed and, being quite competent on a typewriter, before long — I was in business!

Needing capital, I commuted half my RAF pension for £5000, a lot of money at that time, which I reckoned would keep me going for two years — living quietly. Just after the cheque arrived, I met the most charming man who invited me to join him in a business deal he was handling. 'I can double your money in two years,' he said, 'and will repay you quarterly.' Delighted, I told my old friend Francis



Chilton. (Popular Flying Association).

John Watt's Druine Turbulent G-ARBL at Sywell 1973. (Popular Flying Association).





Zaunkoenig experimental ultra-light aircraft at Farnborough. (Aeroplane Monthly).

Luton Minor. (Popular Flying Association).





Tipsy Junior. (Aeroplane Monthly).



Author in the cockpit of a sailplane, 1933.

Author in Dart Kitten.





Dakotas and Waco gliders lined up for take-off prior to Arnhem assault.
(Aeroplane Monthly).

Tipsy Nipper. (Aeroplane Monthly).



Winham about this lucky break. He was horrified. 'Give me that money at once,' he told me, 'and I'll put it into one of my companies and pay you interest on it until you need the cash.'

Francis had saved me from becoming a victim of someone whom I discovered later to be a notorious con-man. In common with many other newly retired officers, I was an innocent in the cold world of commerce and had nearly come unstuck on my first effort in business. Thereafter, I relied completely on Francis' helpful advice on all financial matters.

I advertised my services in the aeronautical journals, and before long had an approach from a scrap dealer who had bought 73 Mosquito bombers which were surplus to RAF requirements. He had paid £100 each for these aircraft and was anxious to have a report on their condition and to know if they were flyable. I travelled around the country inspecting these Mosquitoes and checking their logbooks. They were mostly in beautiful condition, having been properly serviced throughout their lives by the RAF. The scrap dealer and I then tried to find a market for the aircraft, but this proved very difficult. Months went by and the scrap dealer could no longer pay the hangarage fees — so the aircraft were pushed out into the open and began to deteriorate. The scrap dealer became desperate, but he had a lucky break when the Israeli Government offered him £2,000 each for the aircraft upon delivery to Israel. I helped him find ferry pilots to deliver the aircraft, and most of them arrived safely in Israel except for one or two which were stranded *en route* in the Libyan desert. The scrap dealer, greatly relieved, said he intended to buy a country club with his profit, and never wanted to see an aeroplane again!

My contact with this business brought me an enquiry from a Canadian aerial photographic company who wanted a photographic reconnaissance Mosquito. I managed to buy one from the Navy for £600, which had been flown only four hours since new and had been cocooned in storage ever since. The Canadian company offered me £3000 for it, and sent their pilot and an engineer over to inspect the aircraft. After a short test flight, they flew it back to Canada via Prestwick, Iceland and Greenland, and I had brought off my first successful deal.

Another scrap dealer approached me to help him dispose of 24 Sea Otter amphibians which he had bought cheaply from the Navy. With these aircraft were included 40 spare Bristol Pegasus engines, which I found to be unused and stored in their original packing cases. The Sea Otters were in poor condition and really only fit for scrap as it would have been far too expensive to get them certificated for civilian operation. The 40 unused Pegasus engines were of interest, however. I knew that the only country in the world still using the Pegasus was Finland, whose trainer aircraft were

fitted with them. After an approach to the Finnish Embassy in London, I managed to sell the engines to their Air Force for £16,800, taking a nice commission on the deal.

The original Mosquito business had brought me in touch with Hugo Marom of the Israeli Embassy in London, who was a most likeable and friendly official. One day he asked me if I could help his Government acquire 25 Vampire jet fighters which were being offered for sale by the Norwegian Air Force, but for political reasons Norway could not sell these surplus aircraft to Israel. I had a friend, Billy Williams, in Sweden who was managing an import/export company there, and I discussed the matter with him. He was able to get an import licence for the Vampires into Sweden and an export licence for them from Sweden to Israel.

A meeting was held in Copenhagen attended by Hugo Marom with Colonel Almog of the Israeli Air Force and a senior officer of the Norwegian Air Force, together with Billy and myself. Colonel Almog was dark and fierce-looking, and was reputed to have killed more British personnel during the post-war Palestinian troubles than anyone else in Israel. I had to share a room with him in the hotel!

After hours of negotiation, a contract was drawn up whereby the Norwegians would deliver the aircraft dismantled to a Norwegian port and the Israelis would send a ship to load and deliver them onwards to Göteborg in Sweden. Billy would arrange the import and re-export documentation, and then the ship would return to Haifa. A price of £220,000 was agreed, from which Billy and I were to split 10 per cent as our commission. Unfortunately, just as the aircraft had been duly delivered to the Norwegian docks, dismantled and ready for shipment to Sweden, war broke out between Israel and Egypt and the Swedish Government cancelled their export licence. The deal was lost!

In the summer of 1956, I met at the Royal Aero Club, an interesting Egyptian, Mostafa Sadek, who had been a Wing Commander in the Egyptian Air force. Mostafa was a large, strikingly handsome man with tremendous charm of manner. He was the uncle of Queen Narriman of Egypt and as such he had lived for two years in the Royal Palace as ADC to King Farouk. His stories of life with the autocratic and unpredictable Farouk were fascinating.

When Farouk was overthrown by Colonel Nasser, Mostafa had to leave Egypt hurriedly and went to Kuwait where he had friends. There, he became a favourite of the ruler and was appointed Director of Civil Aviation. He had come to England to attend the Farnborough Air show and to purchase aviation equipment. Mostafa told me that the Ruler still used an old Viking aircraft for his transport between Kuwait and Beirut where he had his summer

palace, and this old twin-engined unpressurised aircraft took four and a half hours to cover the route in considerable discomfort.

I suggested that the Vickers Viscount would be far more suitable for the Ruler's use. The Viscount was the first of the four-engined prop-jet aircraft, fully pressurised and extremely quiet, which could cover the Kuwait-Beirut route in half the time of the old Viking and at a comfortable altitude. Mostafa agreed, and we approached Vickers' who pointed out that there was a long waiting list of customers for the Viscount. However, they appreciated the importance of a sale to Kuwait and undertook to take a Viscount 'off the shelf' if we could confirm the order. They gave me the full specification of the aircraft and authorised me to go ahead as their agent to negotiate the sale.

In October 1956, I flew out to Kuwait where Mostafa arranged accommodation for me in the Ruler's guest house — there being no hotels in Kuwait at that time. I found the place fascinating, a mixture of the primitive old town and modern development. Much of the old mud defence wall was still there, but new monster buildings were being erected by a consortium of five British contractors. Kuwait was then a British Protectorate and after the discovery of oil, the oil companies were paying the Ruler a dollar a barrel for it.

With his new wealth, the Ruler had started upon a major development programme for his State, but this seemed to have been rushed ahead too quickly without adequate planning. Fine roads had been built which ran several miles out into the desert, and then ended nowhere. They had built a magnificent hospital — probably the finest in the Middle East — but it could not function properly through lack of qualified staff. On the other hand, their Technical College, over which I was shown, was superbly equipped but had more teachers than pupils!

Mostafa was the most wonderful host, and showed me around everywhere. I was surprised to note that he never bothered to lock the door of his house, or of his car, as he told me there was no theft in Kuwait. This was because the law prescribed that the penalty for theft was to have the right hand cut off — but such an extreme penalty was hardly ever invoked as the threat of it made an effective deterrent. Adultery was also unknown, because the unfaithful wife was liable to be stoned publicly to death, and the unfortunate lover would be put into a sack, hoisted up and clubbed.

A Cadillac car was placed at my disposal and stationed outside the guest house, with the driver always available. Apparently he slept in it! One day he took me to the European beach for a swim, but to my annoyance I was not allowed to go on it, as it was strictly reserved on the Ruler's orders for families. Single men had to go elsewhere to an inferior beach. It seemed that the European wives had complained

at the way the Arab boys stared at them in their swimsuits — which was hardly surprising as their own women wandered around clad from the top of their heads to their feet in long black drapes, with just a slit for their eyes to see through.

Mostafa was busy preparing the way for me to meet the Ruler, but this was not straightforward as protocol demanded I had first to meet certain officials of less exalted rank. He warned me never to discuss business at the first of these meetings, but merely to sit, drink coffee and talk pleasantries. A day later the official concerned would invite me to meet him again to discuss the business in hand. As the days went by, I found these formalities most frustrating; it seemed that it would take at least ten days before I could meet the Ruler and get his decision to buy the Viscount.

Day after day went by and on 1 November 1956, the shock news came through that Britain and France had started to attack Egypt and were bombing military installations there. Mostafa told me that under the circumstances the Ruler could not possibly receive me, and he ordered that I was to be confined to the guest house until his further instructions. I was glad to remain in safety there, as gangs of Arabs went marauding around the town smashing up British and French shops and properties. Day by day I listened to the news on the radio — the bombing of Egypt continued but there was no sign of any troops landing there. Eventually, after seven days our troops did land and after a short scuffle at Port Said, they were half-way down the Suez Canal when, as the result of American political pressure, they were ordered to stop.

The whole of that Suez operation was incredibly badly planned. From our wartime experience of assault operations, we should not have started the bombing of military installations until a few hours before the paratroop drop, and not more than a day or so before the arrival of the main waterborne invasion force. By bombing away for seven days we had lost the element of surprise, and succeeded in arousing world and American hostility to our efforts, which forced us to withdraw ignominiously. At that time, the main Egyptian army was heavily engaged fighting the Israelis in Sinai across the Canal, and there could have been little or no opposition to our invasion if properly timed. We could have secured the Canal within 48 hours, and so put an end to the Egyptian–Israeli war. We might then have offered the Canal Zone to the United Nations to be administered as an international waterway.

In view of Arab hostility to Britain, no British airline was now operating out of Kuwait. As soon as I was allowed to leave, I managed to get a flight to Baghdad where I encountered an unpleasant incident. While walking along a main street I was passing a group of Arabs, when one of them turned to me and spat in my face! I was glad when I got back to London.

The following May, Mostafa Sadek came to London again and told me the Ruler had bought a Convair 240 belonging to an Australian airline, which happened to land at Kuwait. He had been fascinated by the rear airstairs that let down under the tail of the aircraft, so decided that this was the aircraft for him. He bought the Convair on the spot and took over the complete crew on contract. Mostafa had sent the aircraft to Zurich for a plush refurbishing of its interior, and he offered me a flight back in it to Kuwait as supernumerary pilot. I went over to Zurich with him and was astonished to see the Convair's cabin furnishings. It had a deep-pile red carpet with red and gold wall hangings, and there were no seats but just two settees and a number of cushions around the edge of the floor. I could hardly believe it, but in the middle of the cabin floor there was a gas cooking stove!

The Captain of the aircraft was Bob Gibson, an Australian pilot, with whom I became very friendly. He told me he was fed up with his job as the Ruler's personal pilot as he had to be on instant call at all times, yet he hardly ever flew. Bob was planning to start up a freight airline to carry fruit, meat and vegetables from Beirut to Kuwait, and he had the support for this venture from Sheikh Douaj, a wealthy Kuwaiti merchant. Eventually he succeeded and established his airline, Trans Arabia Airways, based in Beirut and equipped with three DC-6B passenger/freighters. I was appointed as their UK representative and purchasing agent for a number of years, until they were bought up and merged into Kuwait Airways. This proved to be a most pleasant and profitable agency which involved frequent visits to Beirut that I enjoyed.

Upon our arrival at Kuwait, Mostafa introduced me to Sheikh Abdullah Mubarrak the Deputy Ruler, a handsome, black-bearded man with an immensely powerful presence. He thanked me for having come out as a pilot in his aircraft and asked me what was my fee. As I had only flown out in the aircraft to get a free flight to Kuwait, I could hardly ask for a fee, so I replied: 'I require nothing, Your Highness. It has been my honour to serve you.'

Sheikh Mubarrak turned to Mostafa and said: 'This gentleman will stay in my guest house for so long as he may wish to remain in Kuwait. Then see that he has a first class passage back to London.'

The next day, a despatch rider arrived at the guest house with a gift from Mubarrak — a magnificent gold wrist-watch!

While in Kuwait, I was introduced to Mr Al-Khalid, President of Kuwait Airways, who asked me as a consultant to advise him why his airline was losing so much money. I made an investigation and found that Kuwait Airways was being run as an associate company by BOAC, and it had to bear BOAC's heavy overhead charges. For local flights around the Gulf, it was operating three Dakotas which seemed to be reasonable, but for its long-haul flights it had two

Handley Page Hermes four-engined airliners which BOAC had sold to them.

The Hermes was an unfortunate aircraft whose engines had a reputation for unreliability. A British airline manager once told me he could not have operated Hermes except for his close proximity to Bristol, the source of supply for engine spares. Kuwait Airways' two Hermes were based in Beirut where they seemed to have spent most of their time under repair in Middle East Airlines' workshops. As MEA was a competitor to Kuwait Airways on the same routes, it was not surprising they were in no hurry to complete their repair work on the Hermes. Moreover, the Hermes aircrews who had been seconded from BOAC, refused to be based in Kuwait and had to be accommodated 800 miles away in Beirut, where BOAC had gone to the expense of renting them fully furnished luxury flats.

When I rendered my report to Mr Al-Khalid, he forced BOAC to buy back the two Hermes at the price they had sold them to him — which was about double the market price. He chartered two DC-4s together with aircrews from America, and had the whole operation based at Kuwait. From then onwards, Kuwait Airways prospered and later became a major international airline. Al-Khalid offered me the job as General Manager, but thinking of my responsibility for my daughter in England, and of her schooling, I had to refuse.

On my way home to England, I stayed one night in Beirut at a hotel used by most of the airlines. Sitting in the lounge that evening, I became aware of a commotion as an excited group of MEA staff escorted a statuesque blonde into the hotel. I recognised her at once as a girl I had met in London, who we had known as 'the Zombie'. She had been brought by a friend of mine to a party in my flat which I gave for Mostafa Sadek, and caused quite a sensation — tall, with a superb figure and strikingly beautiful. Mostafa fell for her at once and she became his companion for the remainder of his stay in London.

After Mostafa returned to Kuwait, he sent me a cable: 'Send out the Zombie to Kuwait as air hostess to His Highness the Ruler. Get her a white uniform with red flashes.' Not wishing to get involved in such a delicate matter, I replied by cable that I could not recommend her for the appointment as she was only eighteen and lacked experience, and I offered instead to find him an older and fully experienced airline hostess. I heard nothing more from him, and now here she was in Beirut!

She seemed very pleased to see me and told me that Mostafa had sent her the airline ticket and £200 to cover her expenses on the journey. She had never been abroad before, so I had a long talk with her and warned her of the problems she was going to meet as a single girl resident in Kuwait. From what I heard later on, she certainly startled the whole community!

During my visits to Beirut in connection with the Trans Arabian Airways agency, I became friendly with their Chairman — Mr Boulos Farah — a charming and hospitable man who often entertained me in his beautiful home. Boulos was proud that having originally come to Lebanon as a penniless Palestinian refugee, he had made good in business and was now an extremely wealthy and influential man.

One day he drove me out over the mountains behind Beirut to see the development work he was carrying out on some land he owned out there. On the site, irrigation ditches were being dug by a gang of about fifty labourers, all dressed in rags and looking completely destitute. As there was no habitation within many miles, I asked Boulos where his workforce was accommodated.

‘Oh, those people?’, he replied. ‘They are Palestinians allowed here on temporary work permits. They just sleep under the bushes.’

And Boulos himself was a Palestinian!

Back in London, I pondered over my future. Although my aviation consultancy business had been profitable so far, it was an uncertain source of income. With the prospect of becoming the purchasing agent for Trans Arabia Airways it was clear that I would need a registered company for trading purposes. I was lucky to find a suitable company which was available for sale, with the rather splendid title: Aircraft & General Finance Corporation Ltd.

This company had been founded in 1932 but had ceased trading with the outbreak of the war, and had been in suspense ever since. I bought it outright and took offices at a smart address in Piccadilly. My friend from the old gliding days, Lord Sempill, joined me as Chairman of the company and so gave it an air of respectability. I was also lucky to find the perfect secretary, Peggy Burvill, who has loyally stuck by me ever since. We were now trading as aviation brokers and as purchasing agents for overseas airlines, which business developed very successfully.

During all this time, I managed to keep myself in flying practice and to maintain my professional licence. I flew a lot with the Popular Flying Association, which I had helped to found and of which I was still a member, but the most rewarding flying was with my friend Teddy Davis, whom I had earlier co-opted into the PFA as Treasurer. Teddy had bought a new Proctor V four-seater which he kept at Croydon Airport and maintained meticulously. Every summer at that time, international air rallies were held by various countries in Europe, to which the Aero Clubs of other countries were invited. These air rallies were tremendous fun — all visiting pilots and their passengers were accommodated for free, banquets were held in their honour and tours arranged around the district. There were also some mild flying competitions for which handsome prizes were awarded.

Teddy Davis was a good pilot but inexperienced as a navigator. He was glad to have me fly with him to these various rallies, and we attended two or three every summer. We went to rallies in France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland and Austria, at which we made friends with many of the regular rally-goers and flying enthusiasts of other nationalities.

Teddy's wife Olga, who herself had been a pilot before the war, always came with us and was the perfect back seat passenger — she rolled herself up in a rug and read a book, not uttering a word until we landed. There was one occasion, however, when after taking off from Le Touquet she complained of the heat in the cabin. We told her not to worry — it was a hot day and this was only to be expected. She continued to complain, so we landed at Tours to sort out the problem. On removing the back seat we found that the aircraft battery, which was underneath it, has short-circuited and set fire to the stuffing of the seat cushion, which was smouldering. No wonder Olga felt hot!

By 1958, I had become interested in a Czech-built twin-engined four-seater aircraft of all-metal construction, called the Aero 45. This seemed to me to be the ideal replacement for the ageing Miles Geminis in England, which were of wooden construction and suffering from glue failures. At that time there was a restriction on dollar purchases, so that it was not possible to import American aircraft, and I thought that there should be a good market for the Aero 45 to fill the gap. I negotiated an agency for the aircraft through the Czech Embassy in London, who granted me a permit to visit Prague to complete a contract.

Teddy Davis suggested that we might fly there in his Proctor, but in those days the Iron Curtain was rigidly in force and few, if any, private planes had crossed it. After considerable trouble we managed to get an Air Ministry permit for the trip, but were told not to cross the frontier without preliminary briefing by the American military authorities in Nuremburg. We set off, and at Nuremburg underwent a most complex briefing as to the procedure to follow the 10-km wide corridor across the frontier. We were told to get clearance by radio at three successive check points on the German side of the frontier, using a special frequency and the callsign 'Racecard'. 'Follow these instructions carefully,' they warned, 'or you might get shot down as an intruder.'

As we flew along the corridor, I kept calling 'Racecard' but there was such a babel of voices on that frequency that I could get no reply. So we pressed on regardless. Once over the frontier I called Prague Airport, and received a friendly reply: 'Welcome to Praha.' There were no complications on that side of the frontier except that a Mig fighter came up alongside to identify us, the pilot giving us a cheerful wave as he broke away.

On arrival at Prague Airport we were met by Mr Novak of Omnipol, the Czech Government Export Agency with whom I was to negotiate my contract. He was a most charming and cultured gentleman who spoke perfect English, and was indeed a student of English literature. Novak had arranged for a Super Aero 45 to be available for me at the airport, and I gave it a thorough inspection and had a trial flight in it. I was delighted — it was a pretty little machine and a first class engineering job, and it handled beautifully in flight.

During subsequent negotiations with Omnipol, I was able to obtain the exclusive agency for their aircraft, not only for Britain but for the whole of the British Commonwealth. In return, I agreed to buy a Super Aero 45 as a demonstrator, for which they accepted a special introductory price of only £7,000, and we arranged for the supply of spare parts with operating manuals and advertising literature in the English language. Omnipol were extremely keen to sell their aircraft to the West, as their only foreign sales had been to Russia who had taken about seventy machines. 'Russia does not pay us for the aircraft,' they complained, 'they make some financial adjustment at high level to offset the price of our aircraft against various services they supply to our country, and we do not get the money.'

Novak showed us around the city of Prague, which was beautiful but sadly dilapidated. It had not by then recovered from wartime privations. Few goods were available for sale in the shop windows, and there was a general air of apathy among the people. Moreover, there seemed to be a peculiar feeling of suspicion everywhere. Whilst in the hotel, Novak was noticeably guarded in his speech, though he spoke freely enough outside. He also apologised that he could not invite us to his home. 'It would not be good for my family,' he said, 'to be seen talking to foreigners.'

One evening we were having a drink outside a bar in Wenceslas Strasse, the main thoroughfare of Prague, and I remarked that there was not a single car in sight. Novak told us that under the communist rule, the people could not own cars, or indeed any property or run a business of their own.* Everything belonged to the State. Teddy Davis then pointed to a barrow on the other side of the street at which a man was selling sausages. 'Surely,' he said, 'that is an example of private enterprise.'

'Not so,' replied Novak, 'the People's Committee of this City required that sausages should be available for sale after the shops are shut in the evenings. The barrow was provided by the State, the man is a State employee and the sausages, of course, come from the State sausage factory.'

**These restrictions were eased somewhat at a later date.*

Teddy, a highly successful businessman, was dumbfounded!

In August 1958, my Super Aero 45 was delivered to me at Croydon Airport where I held a Press party to publicise it. The Czech pilot gave a convincing demonstration of the aircraft, carrying out spirited aerobatics including an upward roll with one propeller feathered. As I was promoting the machine as an air taxi, I wondered whether this was quite the type of operation to appeal to likely passengers!

After this demonstration, surveyors of the Air Registration Board arrived to inspect the aircraft with a view to granting it a British Certificate of Airworthiness. During the next few days they pulled the aircraft apart, and left it in bits all around the hangar floor. It appeared that Czechoslovakia was not a member of the International Civil Aviation Organisation, and the ARB had no knowledge of their design and engineering standards. After a month or so, they produced a list of nineteen modifications that they required to be embodied before they would issue their C of A.

These modifications took nearly a year to complete, and cost me far more than I could afford. Eventually, I obtained my C of A and got the aircraft on to the British Register. By then, however, the Board of Trade had lifted the embargo on dollar purchases and American Piper and Cessna aircraft were pouring into the country. I had missed the market. I managed to sell the aircraft to a friend, Jock Maitland, who was starting an air taxi company at Biggin Hill airfield, and he agreed to demonstrate it for me whenever required.

Jock's four pilots had to be checked out in order to get the Super Aero 45 endorsed on to their flying licences. I was the only pilot in England with experience on it, so the Ministry of Civil Aviation appointed me to act as their Examiner to check out the four pilots. We did the daylight checks without trouble, but the night-flying checks were terrifying. I had not flown at night for over six years, and the four pilots were unused to the aircraft. The checks involved single-engined approaches and overshoots and single-engined landings, which were quite scaring. After completing the check-outs, I felt a nervous wreck!

The competition of the American machines was too much for me. The Pipers and Cessnas were well-known and popular aircraft with immensely strong sales organisations behind them, and with efficient spares backing. I managed to sell one more Super Aero, and then concentrated upon the Czech Meta-Sokol — a neat little single-engined four-seater. The first one I imported was accepted by the ARB surveyors without any comment — perhaps they were ashamed of the way they had wrecked my chances with the Super Aero!

In all, I sold five Meta-Sokols which I flew over from Prague myself. I had to make these flights without radio, as Czech

regulations prohibited the export of radio. Someone once asked me how on earth I managed to fly right across Europe, with all its airways, control zones and prohibited areas, without radio. I replied that my maps were 1941 RAF wartime ones, and did not have any restricted areas marked upon them. I chose airports for refuelling *en route* — Nuremburg, Mannheim and Luxembourg — which permitted aircraft arrivals without radio, and I just followed lines drawn on my map between these airports, flying peacefully along at 2000 feet and minding my own business.

I completed these delivery flights without incident except during the last one in April 1962, when I took off from Prague *en route* for the corridor across the frontier. The weather forecast indicated snow storms over the mountains, but when I reached the corridor the cloud base was down on the mountain tops and it was snowing hard. I tried to weave my way through valleys without success, and my continual twisting and turning around the valleys caused my compass to spin. After half an hour or so I was completely lost and, being without radio, felt very much alone.

Snow was building up over the windscreen, and a precautionary landing became necessary. All around were snow-covered mountain slopes thickly wooded with pine trees, and while looking for a smooth, clear patch to land upon, I suddenly came across a long concrete runway! With great relief I landed, and taxied up to some disused hangars. The whole place was deserted, and I had no idea whether I was in Czechoslovakia, East Germany or West Germany.

I waited for an hour or so shivering in the snowstorm, when a truck full of soldiers arrived and arrested me. They put a guard on the plane and drove me to their military HQ in a nearby town, which I discovered was Cheb in Czechoslovakia, near the frontier. Here I was questioned for hours but could not understand a word being said to me. Eventually they 'phoned Prague Airport and, thank goodness, the air traffic controller on duty could speak English and he explained to them that I was the agent for the aircraft, and a friend.

This incident had happened soon after the news that an American U2 spy plane had been shot down over Russia. The local observers had seen my aircraft flying up and down the frontier and thought that it was another spy plane, but now that they no longer suspected me they treated me well and put me up in a hotel. I explained to them that I would need more petrol before leaving for Nuremburg, so they arranged for me to fly back the next day some 50 km to Karlsbad airfield. In the morning, a security official drove me back to the runway where we found the aircraft safely guarded by two frozen-looking soldiers with fixed bayonets. The official insisted on flying with me to Karlsbad where he arranged the refuelling and

then, just as I was about to take off for Nuremburg, he tried to get back into the aircraft and come with me. I had to refuse as I didn't want to get involved with his defection, so I left him stranded there at Karlsbad.

Defections from Communist countries to the West are frequent, despite ferocious penalties and the risk of being shot if caught crossing the frontier. These defections are not to be surprised at in view of the rigid control and planning by the State, the repression and lack of incentive, and the continual atmosphere of suspicion and fear of denouncement and arrest. I noticed that defection was described locally by the word 'escape', and the use of such a word can only mean that the inhabitants realise they are living in the confinement of a prison. How anyone in their right mind living in a free country can want to become a Communist surpasses my comprehension.

The Czech aircraft agency was only a sideline in my business, which I enjoyed as it enabled me to keep a demonstration aircraft available for my personal use. After several years, however, I decided the agency was too time consuming and unprofitable, so I sold it to Peter Clifford — a full-time aircraft broker and based at an airfield. He worked hard and enthusiastically on the agency, and certainly made a greater success of it than I had done.

Peter was one of these modern pilots who prefer to navigate by means of radio aids — unlike old timers such as myself who, when flying light aircraft, like to keep in sight of the ground and follow a track on the map. One day when he was flying an Aero 145 back to Prague, he was above cloud and unknowingly headed on a course well to the north of the corridor across the Iron Curtain. Several Mig fighters came up alongside him, raising and lowering their landing gear. Peter, thinking they were the usual friendly Czech Migs coming up to identify his plane, gave them a cheerful wave and carried on. Two of the Migs then broke away, turned and fired bursts of cannon shells across his bow. Peter, startled, then got the message and followed the Migs down to land at an airfield near Leipzig in East Germany. Here he was held for four days without being able to communicate with anyone, not even his wife, until rescued by a Czech military escort.

A year or two later, Peter asked me to go over to Prague with him to collect a couple of Zlinn single-seat aerobatic aircraft that he had managed to sell. Peter was in a tremendous hurry to get back to England the same day, so he decided we should refuel at Frankfurt Airport on our return journey, as this was on the direct route and so would save time. I pointed out that Frankfurt was the busiest international airport in Europe and that they would not accept aircraft without radio, but Peter told me he had a portable VHF radio set with him which he would use in his Zlinn to obtain landing

clearance. I could land my Zlinn without radio in close formation alongside him.

We landed neatly in formation at Frankfurt Airport, but the German air traffic controllers were not amused. Indeed, they were outraged and refused to let us take off again. We had to stay the night and after a long argument the next day, they eventually gave us permission to take off in formation and to clear straight out of their Control Zone. They were probably glad to get rid of us!

Turning to my personal life after returning from the Bahamas and having got my divorce, I naturally resumed the bachelor life once again. In Dolphin Square where I lived there were a dozen or so other bachelors of similar age group, including my old friend Mick of earlier RAF days. Life became very cheerful with continual parties in our various flats, and with many attractive girls around. Mick was still as keen as ever on the girls, and his parties were most amusing — each of his men guests were expected to bring a girl with him that he was prepared to lose. Thus all the men guests were at liberty to cut in on any of the girls present that might take their fancy. It was like gin rummy — put one in and draw one out!

After a few years this bachelor life with all the parties and the continual change of girl friends, began to pall and I was glad to meet a delicious and sweetly pretty Chinese girl with whom I became serious. She was a trainee nurse in a London hospital, who had only recently arrived from Hong Kong and who knew no-one over here. I nicknamed her 'Chopsticks', and we became close friends for nearly five years; my flat became her home whenever she was free from the hospital. She was undemanding and affectionate, and a tremendous help to me in looking after my daughter, Jackie, when home on school holidays. We were a happy little family!

After four years when Chopsticks had completed her training as a nurse, she had an urge to visit Hong Kong to see her family. I managed to get her a free trip there as supernumerary air stewardess with an airline. The managing director happened to be travelling on that flight, and he liked her so much that he gave her a full-time appointment. Now her life changed, and for the next few months she travelled back and forth between London and Hong Kong — four days *en route* out there in a DC-4, then four days stand-off locally, and back to London for four days at Dolphin Square with me. We were now seeing much less of each other and I could sense a change in her feelings towards me.

One Sunday evening, she arrived back home from Hong Kong, sat down on the sofa and said: 'Edward. You will not like what I have to tell you, But I am getting married next Saturday in Singapore.'

I was dumbfounded! She explained that during her stopovers in

Hong Kong she had met, and fallen in love with, a local airline captain. Apparently, he was younger and better looking than me and more considerate — ‘He shaves every night before he goes to bed,’ she said. There was nothing I could do about it. Jackie and I saw her off very sadly from Gatwick Airport on her flight to Singapore, and that was the last we ever heard of her.

One day I heard to my sorrow that my old friend the poet, Henry Savage, who was in hospital suffering from lung cancer, was not expected to live for more than three weeks. I hastened round to see the old boy, lying quietly there in his bed. Henry was too old to be operated upon, so they gave his affected lung the deep ray treatment. Then, as the hospital bed was needed, they sent him back to his little room in Chelsea to die. His landlady, a devout Roman Catholic, brought in a priest to do the last rites as he lay there in a coma. Henry opened his eyes and became aware of the priest standing there mumbling some sort of mumbo jumbo. He was appalled — so he struggled out of bed, pulled on his shirt and trousers, and tottered over to the Pier Tavern across the road, where he got drunk. After that he felt better. He made a good recovery and lived on for a further fifteen years.

During all this time, I worked hard single-handedly running my company, which prospered. In addition to my agencies in Kuwait and Czechoslovakia, I established other agencies in various African and Arab countries, as well as in the USA. The business involved much overseas travel which I found interesting, and I enjoyed meeting my various clients who were all aviation enthusiasts.

On one occasion in Brazzaville, capital of the old French Congo, where I had been invited to advise upon their airline re-equipment, I wanted to see something of the country. So I borrowed a car from the airport manager, who warned me that there was a state of tension between his country and the Belgian Congo (now Zaire) on the other side of the Congo river. He advised me that if I were to be stopped by armed patrols, just to say: ‘OMS.’ Thinking that ‘OMS’ was something like our OHMS indicating government service, I set off down a road alongside the Congo river. Within a few miles, I was stopped by a group of soldiers with Tommy guns pointed at me. ‘OMS,’ I shouted. ‘Oui, Patron,’ their leader answered. ‘Passez vous.’ He then saluted and waved me on.

Some years later, I related this story to a friend who was a director of the World Health Organisation in Geneva. He roared with laughter. Apparently ‘OMS’ stood for Organisation Mondiale de la Sanitaire — they had a branch in Brazzaville studying tropical diseases. I had been posing as a doctor!

The Air Congo agency led to an embarrassing incident for me. They wanted their DC-4 aircraft overhauled, and I arranged with a well-known British contractor to do the work. This contractor

collected the DC-4 from Brazzaville and flew it back to their base in England, where they stripped it down. Inspection revealed that the whole airframe was so riddled with corrosion it was beyond repair, so they scrapped it. Soon afterwards, I had a visit in my office from the President of Air Congo who was almost crying with rage. 'They have stolen my aircraft and smashed it all up,' he wailed, 'and now they have sent me a bill for £7000 for doing it!'

On another occasion I was invited to Uganda to advise their army on paratrooping equipment. They explained that they expected an attack from Tanzania to the south, by means of a waterborne invasion over Lake Victoria. They wanted to be able to drop paratroops and equipment near the shore of the Lake to intercept any landing. They also wanted two gunboats with radar equipment to patrol the lake.

I knew of five Noratlas paratroop aircraft that were available for sale from Germany, together with a complete spares holding and all necessary equipment, and they agreed that these would be ideal for their purpose. At that time, the Israelis were running the Ugandan Air Force, and Israel began to negotiate with Germany over the purchase of the Noratlas machines. Meanwhile, General Amin visited Libya as the guest of Colonel Ghadaffi, as the result of which he became a strict Moslem and on his return to Uganda, he threw the Israelis out of his country. Thus the Noratlas deal fell through. I tried to interest various British shipbuilders in the requirement for the two gunboats, but none of them could see how boats of suitable size could be transported several hundred miles from the nearest seaport to Lake Victoria.

For some years I had an agency for an air charter company in Nigeria, which operated several DC-3 Dakota aircraft on internal passenger and freight flights. One winter they bought another Dakota from a Dutch firm together with a large holding of spare parts. Their senior Captain came over to collect the aircraft, and he offered me a flight back to Lagos in it as co-pilot. I accepted willingly as this would provide an interesting trip around the hump of West Africa, and we planned to spend a couple of days *en route* relaxing in the sun at Agadir in Morocco.

I went over to Amsterdam to join up with him, and we spent most of the night at Schiphol Airport loading the spares into the aircraft. I was astounded by the amount of stuff he intended to carry — crate after crate of heavy parts, together with a tailplane, elevators, rudders, ailerons, engine mountings and propellers. All these we somehow shoved into the fuselage and when I queried as to whether we were not over-loading the aircraft, he replied: 'I have had long experience flying Dakotas during the war, and I know that so long as you can stow the stuff into the aircraft and shut the door, it will fly alright.'

We prepared to leave next day. To reach the cockpit, we had to crawl over all that freight with only about three feet to spare under the cabin roof. How we could have got out in an emergency, I could not imagine! After a very long run we took off successfully, and had to circle three times around the airport at full take-off power until we had enough height to fly off on course. Eventually we reached Marseilles where we planned to stay the night.

Next morning, it was a cold grey day, drizzling with low cloud, and a weather forecast of icing conditions from 2000 to 12,000 feet. Knowing that this over-loaded Dakota had no hope of flying on one engine should the other one ice up, I rebelled. 'Sorry, chum,' I said to the Captain, 'I'm packing it in, and returning to London'. He carried on without me and somehow reached Lagos successfully. This episode confirmed to me how fully justified was the Dakota's reputation as a wonderful old workhorse.

One of my most interesting trips was to Australia, where I stayed with my old friend, Bob Gibson, and his family who had settled back there after leaving Beirut. Bob had set up an organisation called the New Citizens Council of Australia, with the object of assisting immigrants and their families to obtain cheap air travel between Britain and Australia. We discussed ways and means of arranging this cheap travel, and in fact on my return to England I was able to despatch a number of immigrants' relatives to Sydney at about half the scheduled airline fares.

I decided to return from Australia to England by the South Pacific route, via Tahiti and Los Angeles. Ever since a lad, I had romantic notions of Tahiti, having read all the stories of the early navigators, and I longed to see the island. Before the construction of an airport, Tahiti was visited only by occasional ships, and probably managed to retain its charm. Now, however, the big jets were flying in from America loaded with tourists, hotels were built and the whole place was being rapidly spoilt. Although the island with its mountainous scenery and lush tropical vegetation was beautiful, I was surprised to find that the beaches were mostly of unattractive black sand.

Disappointed, I took the ferry boat over to Moorea, a sister island about fifteen miles away which really was beautiful and quite unspoilt, with glorious beaches of white sand by an incredibly blue lagoon fringed by a coral reef. Here, I spent a couple of weeks at the Club Méditerranée in their primitive but comfortable accommodation of thatched huts set in a coconut plantation by the beach. The food was good with unlimited wine supplied free in carafes at mealtimes, and all forms of water sports, fishing, water skiing and sub-aqua diving were provided free of charge. Sub-aqua diving has always been my favourite sport and this was a marvellous opportunity for me to practise it under perfect conditions.

While I was at the Club the famous film star, Marlon Brando, arrived for a stay together with three small boys and a pretty Tahitian nurse. Brando had become fond of Tahiti since the making of his film 'Mutiny on the Bounty', and he regularly visited the islands. I was the only Englishman at the Club, and to my surprise he asked me to join his table for meals. He was very friendly, and although his conversation was mostly about the poor, downtrodden American Indians, he did tell me all about his plans for an island nearby which he had bought, and where he intended to build a guesthouse for his friends. Just before he left, while saying goodbye, he explained that he had asked me to join his table as his next film part was to be that of an English gentleman, and he had been studying my accent and mannerisms!



It was now some twenty years since I had returned to London from the Bahamas, and I was still living at Dolphin Square but the old group of cheerful bachelors had dispersed — most of them having married and settled down elsewhere. The wild parties were now just dreams of the past. My old friend Mick, now in his sixties, was still there and had remained a bachelor, but he had lost all interest in the girls. He now played bridge in a circle of elderly folk, and instead of being the old man among the young girls, he was now regarded as a young man by the old girls. As someone said of him: 'Mick has adjusted himself very successfully to old age. The trouble is that he has done it ten years too early!'

My daughter, Jackie, had finished her schooling and was now studying at a secretarial college in London. She lived with me, but naturally spent her time with a circle of young friends, and I began to sense the loneliness that comes with age. Then fortune smiled at me — I met Elisabeth, a charming, delightful and talented young woman who, though only half my age, seemed to enjoy my company and we got along together perfectly.

In due course, Jackie became engaged to a nice young fellow and married him. For twenty years, ever since she was a baby, I had carried the responsibility and faced the problems of bringing her up, but now she was off my hands and I was free to plan my future life. I proposed to Elisabeth and to my joy, she accepted me. We have now been happily married for more than ten years, and our life together has been a period of peaceful and harmonious companionship.

Elisabeth (or Liz, as she likes to be called) became a director of my company as well as running her own studio, and she has given me tremendous support and encouragement. People often ask me why I don't retire from business now that I am in my late seventies, but I

enjoy the work which keeps me in touch with my many friends in the world of aviation.

So — God willing — I shall carry on!

Epilogue

After some fifty years of active flying, during which as a pilot I have flown 148 different types of aircraft from gliders and light aeroplanes right through the range to jet fighters and four-engined transports, and after many varied experiences and adventures in the air, I felt that time had come to give it up. Reluctantly, I allowed my flying licence to lapse and, so to speak, hung up my helmet and goggles.

Like many ex-airmen, my hobby now is a boat. Boats can give you to some extent the sense of freedom and exhilaration that you experience in the air, but without the care and responsibility entailed in handling an aircraft in flight — especially under bad weather conditions.

Looking back sadly at my many friends who have been killed while flying, some on active service during the war but so many others in aircraft accidents that could have been avoided, I can only feel with due humility that my flying career was successful. I did survive!

When I first started to fly, the air was free. There were no restricted or prohibited flying areas, and no controlled airways. You could fly where you liked, when you liked and how you liked — provided you did not get caught flying low over populous areas. Even in the 1930s, the golden age of private flying, you could land a light aircraft without radio at London Airport (then at Croydon) by circling around and awaiting a green light from the Control Tower. Now, air congestion has become so great that there are endless regulations and restrictions to be observed. Probably these are necessary for the safety of air traffic but, sadly, the old magical freedom of the air has gone.

Despite all this, the sport of flying still flourishes. The Popular Flying Association is thriving and its annual rallies are the largest in the world outside America, attracting more than 1000 visiting light aircraft from all over Britain and abroad. In the sport of gliding, the British remain among the world's leaders. We excel in aerobatic competitions and in parachuting, and the rapid increase in popularity of hang-gliding, microlights and hot air ballooning shows that the sport of flying is still very much alive. I only wish I could start life again and be able to take an active part in it.

Private flying transcends international boundaries, and leads to

close friendship and understanding between pilots of all countries. For this reason at least, the sport deserves every encouragement. My final words to all flying enthusiasts: Take care. Treat your aircraft with great respect, and —

HAPPY LANDINGS to you all!

Appendix I

Gliders at War

My connection with military gliders, as described in Chapter 16, was confined to their technical development. However, during that time I was able to maintain a close liaison with the British Airborne Forces and was privileged to meet many of the glider pilots and their commanders, though they probably regarded me very much as a 'back-room boy'. Although not able to take part in their military activities, I naturally took a keen interest in their operations especially to study how our gliders performed in action.

As a tribute to the many thousands of brave men who went into battle by glider, I would like to record here a brief account of the various operations carried out by military gliders during the war, and trust this may be of interest to my readers. In compiling these notes, I am to a large extent indebted to a well-informed book *The Glider War* by James E. Mrazek, and to an excellent book *The Wooden Sword* by Lawrence Wright, who was very much involved with some of the operations described.

Fort Eben Emael

Gliders were first used operationally in war by the Germans on 10 May 1940, when ten DFS230 gliders carrying 78 soldiers armed with machine guns and explosives, landed right on the roof of the 'impregnable' Fort Eben Emael in Belgium. Although this Fort was manned by ten times as many Belgian soldiers, because of surprise and the resulting confusion it was quickly captured. This was a brilliantly successful operation which greatly impressed British military thinking, and resulted in the hasty beginning of our glider development programme.

Crete

By April 1941, the British had been driven out of Greece and had concentrated on the island of Crete. On 19th May, the Germans carried out a surprise airborne assault on Crete, using paratroops and 72 gliders, with a total force of 14,000 men. Again, the surprise of the attack and the resulting confusion caused the 42,500 British and Anzac troops to evacuate the island. Although the operation was successful in its objective, the excessive losses suffered by the Germans caused them to shelve any further airborne operations on

such a large scale. They subsequently used gliders only for highly specialised assault and supply missions.

Norway (Operation Freshman)

In November 1942, the British Horsa glider was first tried out in action by a planned attack on a heavy-water plant in Norway, believed to be connected with German research on the atomic bomb. Two Halifax bombers, each towing a Horsa, took off at dusk from a base in Scotland for a flight of some 400 miles over the North Sea. Each glider carried 15 Royal Engineers, all volunteers, together with arms and explosives. They met appalling weather conditions. My old friend, Group Captain Tom Cooper, was navigator in one of the Halifaxes and decided to fly high through cloud, but somewhere near the objective the aircraft and glider began to ice up, and the tow rope broke. The glider crash-landed in darkness on top of a snow-covered mountain, killing or severely injuring all its occupants. Cooper succeeded in bringing his Halifax back to base with its fuel nearly exhausted.

The other Halifax flew low over the sea keeping below cloud, but unfortunately crashed into a mountain upon reaching Norway. As it crashed, the glider pilot managed to release his tow rope and made a heavy landing nearby, killing himself and several of his passengers. The survivors were soon captured and were later shot as saboteurs by the German Gestapo.

Although this brave mission ended in failure, it did disclose a number of weaknesses and difficulties in glider operating techniques, the lessons from which proved of value in subsequent operations.

Sicily (Operations Ladbrooke and Fustian)

The Allied invasion of Sicily provided a valuable opportunity to try out the newly formed American and British Airborne Forces in action, and to obtain practical experience in the operation of military gliders. Thirty-one Horsa gliders were towed by Halifax bombers all the way from England, twenty-two of which finally arrived safely at the Tunis base. Some five hundred of the smaller American Waco CG-4A gliders were delivered by sea and hastily assembled on arrival in Africa. Most of these were to be towed by American Dakota aircraft, but some by the thirty-one Albemarle bombers of our 38 Wing.

Against the advice of Group Captain Cooper, who in the previous Norwegian operation had personal experience of the difficulty of towing gliders by night, the Army Commanders insisted that the airborne operations should be made at night even though few of the glider pilots had any experience of night flying.

On 9 June 1943, the first assault consisting of 135 Wacos and 8 Horsas, carrying 1200 troops with their guns and military

equipment, took off at dusk from bases in Tunis to fly 300 miles over the sea, around Malta and thence to Sicily. Several of the gliders broke loose from their tows *en route*, and came down in the sea. Those that managed to reach Sicily met heavy anti-aircraft fire from our Allied ships, which also shot down 23 unarmed Dakotas full of American paratroops. The glider pilots had difficulty in identifying the coastline in the dark, and altogether 79 of the gliders came down in the sea, most of their occupants being drowned. Of those which crossed the coastline, many were unable to identify their appointed landing zones and crash-landed miles away. Only four of the 143 gliders actually landed where they were supposed to have done, but their occupants fought magnificently and successfully captured the vital Ponte Grande bridge, which was the main objective of the airborne assault.

Three days later the second airborne assault took place, which included eight Wacos and eleven Horsas carrying 77 soldiers with six-pounder guns and jeeps. When nearing Sicily these were again attacked by our Allied naval guns and by the time the formation reached the shore, one-third of them had been lost, together with 10 more Dakotas full of American paratroops. However, the occupants of the few gliders that managed to reach their destination were, with the paratroops, successful in capturing the vital Primasole bridge — their main objective.

Through bad planning and faulty communication, these two assaults caused disastrous losses of men and material of the Airborne Forces. Yet they must be considered as successful since they resulted in the capture of the two bridges that were the main objectives of the whole operation, and essential to the subsequent invasion of Sicily by our main seaborne army.

Burma

General Orde Wingate's policy in Burma was to penetrate deeply behind the Japanese lines so as to cut their communications and supply routes. During March 1944, he employed gliders with imagination and brilliant success. His technique was for the gliders (American Waco CG-4A's) to be despatched ahead of the army, and to be landed at suitably clear patches in the jungle. These gliders carried bulldozers and other equipment for clearing an airstrip, and also mules for haulage purposes. As soon as an airstrip had been prepared, the troops and their military equipment would be flown in by Dakotas, so enabling the army to operate as required behind the Japanese lines.

The gliders were towed by Dakotas, sometimes in pairs, and were frequently overloaded. Despite the fact that they had to be flown over difficult mountainous country, often at night, the operations were remarkably successful. General Wingate was killed in an air

crash on 25 March 1944, but the glider operations were continued until the following May. Altogether, a total of 96 sorties were carried out with the loss of 54 gliders, but over a thousand men with their weapons and heavy equipment were delivered safely to their objectives.

Normandy (Operation Neptune)

The D Day invasion of Europe took place on 6 June 1944, and began before dawn with a huge airborne assault by paratroops and gliders on the coast of Normandy. The American glider force consisted of 222 Horsas and 295 Wacos, and it effectively delivered 89 per cent of its men and military equipment to their objectives.

The British glider operation started with two classic missions by three Horsas each, with the objective of capturing and holding two bridges vital to the advance of our invasion forces. At midnight, these gliders landed accurately right by the bridges which were both successfully taken. Just before dawn, 46 Horsas and four Hamilcars were landed in the zone bringing much-needed heavy weapons, including 10 seventeen-pounder anti-tank guns. The main British airborne force of about 7000 men with their weapons followed that evening, carried by 228 Horsas and 30 Hamilcars, 95 per cent of which landed successfully.

The D Day airborne assault was highly successful because of the most careful planning, and of enemy surprise at the magnitude of the operation. It enabled the main seaborne invasion to be landed with the minimum of enemy interference.

Southern France (Operation Dragoon)

At dawn on 15 August 1944, a major Anglo-American airborne assault by paratroops and gliders was carried out to assist with the invasion of southern France. The aim was to land troops behind the coastal defences and so cut off German reinforcements from the north. The glider force included 36 Horsas and 372 Wacos, which were towed for four hours over the sea from airfields in Italy, past Corsica, and thence to landing zones about ten miles behind the French coast. Over 90 per cent were landed successfully at their appointed zones, and brought in 2611 troops, 213 guns, 221 vehicles and 500 tons of equipment. This operation was a major success due also to careful planning and surprise.

Arnhem (Operation Market Garden)

On 17 September 1944, an Anglo-American airborne assault of unprecedented magnitude began. The aim was to capture and hold vital bridges and roads to enable Montgomery's army to cross the Rhine, turn the German Siegfried Line and press on to Berlin. The American force was to capture bridges and roads along the route from Eindhoven to Nijmegen; the British First Airborne Division

was to seize the bridge over the Rhine at Arnhem. This huge operation was carried out in daylight in view of difficulties experienced with previous airborne operations by night.

The American glider force was delivered in three lifts over the first few days, and totalled 1899 gliders of which 1618 arrived effectively at their appointed zones. These brought in 10,374 troops, 710 jeeps with 465 trailers, and 2856 tons of military equipment. The Americans successfully captured and held their objectives until reinforcements arrived.

The British glider force was also delivered in three lifts over the first three days, and totalled 644 Horsas, 38 Hamilcars and 10 Wacos. Of these, 621 gliders were landed effectively at Arnhem, delivering 4215 troops, 1026 vehicles and 1431 tons of military equipment. The airborne troops were successful in seizing the Arnhem bridge which they held for three days against German attack by much stronger forces, while awaiting the expected reinforcements. These, however, failed to arrive as the British Army was unable to get through in time to relieve them. After a heroic resistance against impossible odds, the British Airborne Division was disastrously wiped out. Their resolute stand at Arnhem was not altogether in vain as it forced the enemy to devote large resources, including two Panzer Divisions, to attack them — which resources might otherwise have been thrown against the American positions further south.

Rhine Crossing (Operation Varsity)

The final major airborne operation of the war took place on 24 March 1945, with the aim of supporting the British Army in their plan to set up bridgeheads needed for crossing the Rhine. The gliders and paratroops were to be landed several miles beyond the Rhine to protect the Army's bridgeheads against German counter-attack. The British glider force, consisting of 381 Horsas and 48 Hamilcars, took off at early dawn from airfields in England and were timed to converge with the American force of 906 Wacos in double tow, taking off from airfields around Paris. This gigantic fleet was escorted by a thousand fighters for protection against air attack.

Unfortunately by now the Germans were expecting an airborne attack and had greatly increased their anti-aircraft fire power in the Rhine area. The British glider fleet flew in at about 2500 feet and were heavily attacked by flak, about half the gliders being hit. Despite this, most of them landed in or near their zones and delivered 3383 troops, 271 jeeps and trailers, 66 guns and a huge quantity of military equipment.

The American glider fleet was also raked by intense ground fire, half of their tow planes and gliders being hit. However, the glider

pilots pressed on bravely and a high percentage of the gliders managed to land on target. They delivered 3492 troops, 202 jeeps with 94 trailers, and a large quantity of guns and ammunition.

The whole operation was successful in achieving its objectives, but proved to have been extremely costly in lives and material since the element of surprise was now lacking.

Conclusions

Reflecting on these military glider operations, I have come to the following conclusions:

1. For an airborne assault, gliders had the advantage over paratroops since they could deliver a compact force of troops with their weapons and equipment right on target and ready for immediate action. A stick of paratroops upon landing was spread out over a considerable distance, and they were vulnerable to enemy attack until able to collect themselves together as a fighting unit.
2. Gliders, however, are expensive and most of them were damaged or wrecked during their crash landings in enemy territory. Few could be retrieved, although the Americans were successful in 'snatching back' a number of their Wacos from the ground by means of an ingenious airborne winch device. On the whole, gliders must be considered as expendable in warfare.
3. Gliders are highly vulnerable to attack both from the air and from the ground. They are large, slow flying and defenceless. For their protection, our earlier operations were carried out by night, but these were disastrous as night flying and night landings required a much higher standard of training than the glider pilots could receive. Subsequent daylight operations were highly successful so long as the element of surprise was maintained.
4. The towing of gliders, both during the long period of training and during actual assault operations, tied up a large number of bombers and transport aircraft which could have been usefully employed in other spheres of the war effort.
5. The most promising use of gliders would seem to be for specialised military assaults to capture forts, bridges, etc., and for reinforcement or supply missions to assist and relieve forward troops. These roles have since been successfully taken over by helicopters, which the Americans used in large numbers in Vietnam. Helicopters, though very expensive, have the advantage of being able to fly back to base after delivering their loads, and so can be kept in continuous operation. For this reason, I feel that the day of large-scale military glider operations must now be considered as over.

Appendix II

The Birth of the Popular Flying Association

I had been keen on the sport of flying ever since I owned my first aircraft, a Parnall Pixie (34 hp Bristol Cherub engine), which I bought second-hand in 1930 for fifty-two pounds and ten shillings. Throughout the Golden Age of Flying in the 1930s I took part in numerous air rallies and races with various light aircraft, but in September 1939 all private and sporting flying had to cease upon the outbreak of World War II.

After the war, the sport of flying was slow to revive owing to the lack of light aircraft. I was very keen to get the sport started again and got together with three other enthusiasts, Ron Clegg and the brothers Maurice and Ian Imray. On 26 October 1946, we founded the Ultra Light Aircraft Association with the aim of encouraging the construction and operation of small, low cost aircraft and so bring the sport of flying within the reach of young men of moderate means. Ron Clegg became the first Chairman of the Association, and was responsible for its organisation. Maurice Imray undertook the task of Hon. Secretary, which burden he carried nobly for about ten years, and I took over the technical side of our activities. About a year later, Ron Clegg had to leave for an appointment abroad, and I took over as Chairman.

We quickly gained members, a number of whom, living in or near London, voluntarily gave up an evening a week to serve on the Committee. They were enormously enthusiastic, and with their help we produced a monthly News Bulletin and encouraged the formation of groups of members to build and operate their own aircraft. Prominent among these new Committee Members was Captain Edward Davis, who took over as Hon. Treasurer and was still serving on the Committee thirty years later during the Association's Royal Silver Jubilee celebration. It was thanks to him that our somewhat shaky finances were put in order, so that the Association was able to thrive on a sound financial footing. Also prominent was Rosemary Lindsay-Neale whose husband, a well-known test pilot, had been sadly killed whilst testing the Boulton Paul 'Balliol' trainer. Rosemary joined us a few months after her

bereavement and threw herself heart and soul into the work of the Committee. She was of enormous help to us all.

We were fortunate in getting active support from many aviation notabilities, and were delighted when Peter (now Sir Peter) Masfield consented to become our President. We also had valuable support from the late Colonel 'Mossie' Preston, then Secretary General of the Royal Aero Club, who gave us free use of a conference room for holding our weekly Committee meetings, and provided facilities for publishing our News Bulletins.

After a series of meetings with the Air Registration Board and the Ministry of Civil Aviation, I managed to get their agreement that ultra light aircraft, like gliders, could be operated without the considerable expense and complication of an official Certificate of Airworthiness, but subject to a Permit-to-Fly to be issued by the Ministry on the recommendation of the Association. For this purpose, ultra light aircraft were then defined as single-seat aircraft not exceeding 1000 lbs all-up weight, with engines not exceeding 40 hp and landing speed not greater than 40 mph. At a later date these limits were extended to cover light two-seaters.

I also obtained from the Ministry their agreement that ultra light aircraft could be home built by our members from designs to be approved by the Association, subject to supervision during construction and a final inspection by our voluntary team of licensed aircraft engineers. This started the formation of about twenty amateur construction groups, some restoring derelict pre-war aircraft and others building new aircraft from pre-war designs such as the Luton Minor, the drawings for which were prepared and issued by our indefatigable member, Arthur Ord-Hume.

To power the first batch of ultra light aircraft, thanks to a loan from the Kemsley Trust arranged for us by Mossie Preston, we were able to buy a pre-war stock of twenty four 36 hp J.A.P. engines together with spares. These were two-cylinder engines of 1860 cc capacity, rather rough in operation but robust and reliable. During the next year or two, several enthusiasts designed and built their own ultra light aircraft around the J.A.P. engine and among these was the Britten-Norman BN-1, an interesting project which was unfortunately crashed by Desmond Norman on an early test flight. There were also the Hants and Sussex 'Herald' designed by Mr A. E. Hawes, which came out over-weight, and the Slingsby 'Motor Tutor' — an experimental version of the Tutor glider powered by a J.A.P. engine, which was fun to fly but was really neither an aeroplane nor a glider.

The most hopeful of these new ultra light aircraft was the Dart Kitten designed by Freddie Weyl, who built and tested the first aircraft himself. Freddie had been a pre-war refugee from the Nazis, and was a friend of Robert Kronfeld the famous glider pilot. He was

one of our most enthusiastic members, and took on the Association's responsibility for design approval. His subsequent death under distressing circumstances was deeply regretted by us all.

About that time the Committee had been greatly strengthened by the enrolment of Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett, of wartime Pathfinder fame, who took over the Dart Kitten project and somehow managed to bulldoze the design through the Air Registration Board, obtaining a full C. of A. for it. After the completion of two aircraft, however, production had to cease through lack of suitable engines.

Our amateur construction groups showed great ingenuity, and the standard of their workmanship was extremely high — the aircraft being built with loving care by such keen enthusiasts. There were occasional snags as, for instance, when one group completed their home-constructed aircraft in a bedroom of one of their houses, they proudly slid the fuselage out of the window and lowered it successfully to the ground. Then they found that the wings would not go through the window, and major reconstruction work became necessary on the outside of the house! Another member decided to make a pulse jet engine on similar lines to those used on the German V-1 flying bomb. This would have been a cheap and simple engine with no rotating parts, constructed largely from sheet steel material. He built the engine in his garage and got it running alright, but the whole neighbourhood complained of the shattering noise and occasional explosions. In the end, after a major explosion his garage caught fire and was burnt down.

During May 1948, I was stationed in the RAF at Farnborough, where I noticed a fascinating little ultra light aircraft among various German aircraft that had been sequestered as war booty and brought over to England for evaluation. This was the Zaunkoenig, a single-seat, parasol-winged monoplane with full-span slotted wing, and powered by a 40 hp Zundapp inverted four-cylinder engine. It had been designed during the war by Professor Winter, designer of the Fiesler Storch, and built by students of the Brunswick Technical College, with a view to exploring the safety of low speed flying.

The Zaunkoenig could be flown at extraordinarily low speeds at which it remained fully under control. Its landing gear had long-travel shock absorbers, which made it possible for the aircraft to be landed heavily from the fully stalled flight condition. The Farnborough test pilots were having great fun with it, each trying to see who could land the Zaunkoenig with the shortest possible run. They were dropping it fully stalled from about ten feet high and slamming on the brakes, with landing runs of only twenty yards resulting.

I was horrified at their treatment of this unique little aircraft, and

was able to save it from destruction by making a bid of £40 for it, and so purchased it on behalf of the Association. I also managed to scrounge two spare Zundapp engines from a little Gotha transport which I found in the Farnborough 'graveyard' of scrapped aircraft. We placed the Zaunkoenig in the good hands of our Experimental Group at Elstree Aerodrome, who treated it with due respect and demonstrated it at various air rallies. John Fricker, editor of our News Bulletin and also our official test pilot, used to give startling demonstrations of the Zaunkoenig's slow flying characteristics — after a short take-off run he would make a zoom climb to about fifty feet, where he would seem to hang apparently motionless in the air.

Another interesting ultra light aircraft appeared about this time, the Topsy Junior — designed and built by my old friend Mr E. O. Tips, manager of Avions Fairey in Belgium, who had designed the pre-war Topsy two-seater which I used to fly before the war. He became an enthusiastic member of our Association and supported us by designing the Junior specifically for extreme ease of construction by our home builders. It was a neat and workmanlike little single-seat low wing monoplane, suitable for operation with the 36 hp J.A.P. engine.

Tips brought the Junior over here, registered OO-ULA as a compliment to the Ultra Light Aircraft Association, for a demonstration organised for him by his parent company, Fairey Aviation, at their base at White Waltham aerodrome. Our Committee were invited to attend this demonstration and I flew the little aircraft, which was typical of Tips design and handled beautifully. The Fairey directors were so impressed with the aircraft that they decided to take it over, and re-christened it the Fairey Junior. I asked them if the Association could have the drawings for use by our construction groups, but they replied: 'What! Have a Fairey aircraft built by a lot of amateurs. Certainly not!' They did not go into production with the Junior in view of the lack of suitable engines, and this promising project died a natural death.

Some years later when the Volkswagen engine became available, Mr Tips designed and built another ultra light single-seater called the Nipper, this time of tubular metal construction and fabric covered. The aircraft was extremely strong and fully aerobatic, and it became very popular. It was intended for commercial production but, sadly, this project ceased with the untimely death of Mr Tips, although several Nippers which have been built in the UK are still being flown by PFA members today.

One of the greatest of our early enthusiasts was my old wartime colleague, John Sproule. He got hold of a pre-war Aeronca, an American ultra light side-by-side two-seater powered by the 36 hp J.A.P. engine, which he completely stripped and rebuilt as new, making a wonderful job of it. I flew with him in it and was astonished

at its performance two-up, powered by such a small engine. Sproule went on to rebuild several more pre-war ultra light aircraft, including a Chilton — the most delightful sports single-seater of its era.

Another of the early enthusiasts was Peter Gooch, who also rebuilt an aged Aeronca. He entered this little machine in the 1949 Spanish Air Tour, and flew the mountainous course successfully with a passenger. I was astonished to see the two of them crammed into the tiny cabin, with the passenger sitting on a petrol can from which he transferred fuel into the main tank by means of a bicycle pump, to increase the range. Peter told me afterwards that he had to use glider slope-soaring techniques to gain enough height to clear some of the mountain ranges.

Our Committee unanimously awarded Peter Gooch the gold medal of the year for this outstanding flight in an ultra light aircraft. Unfortunately, at that time our finances were in such a bad shape that we could not afford to buy the gold medal and Peter never received it. I can only hope he accepted our apologies on the score that it was the thought that counts, rather than the deed!

Throughout our early years, I made continuous efforts to get a new type of ultra light aircraft designed and into commercial production. I visited the heads of various aircraft firms including Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, who had designed the pretty little DH-53 'Humming Bird' powered by the 698 cc Blackburn 'Tom Tit' engine, which had flown successfully in the 1923 Lympne trials. They were all sympathetic to my proposal, but wanted to know what engine would be available in production around which they could design an aircraft. There were no suitable engines in Britain, and dollars were not then available to purchase engines from America.

I then went around the aero engine firms, but was told that it would cost at least £100,000 to develop a suitable engine and to tool up for production, which they were not prepared to do without an assured aircraft production programme. Mr J. J. Parkes, Chairman of Alvis Ltd. was interested and had one of our spare 40 ph Zundapp engines stripped down for inspection and costing with a view to its production. He then informed me that Alvis could manufacture the engines at £965 each but they would require a preliminary order for 1000 engines, which we could not of course guarantee.

We considered the possibility of using motorcycle engines, which would have the advantage of being readily available in production. I investigated the suitability of the Ariel Square Four, the Vincent H.R.D. and the Triumph Tiger, but each of these engines developed their power at far too high a rotational speed for use with a propeller. The manufacturers were unwilling to accept the expense of designing and installing the necessary reduction gear in the absence of an assured market. Then, early in 1953, I came across

an air-cooled flat four-cylinder industrial engine that was already in quantity production, and which with minor modifications would be suitable for aircraft use. This was the Neptune manufactured by the Coventry Victor Motor Company, which developed about 40 hp.

I met the Chairman of this firm, Major W. A. Weaver, who became a great enthusiast for our cause. He had designed and built his own aircraft before World War I, but unfortunately his first and only flight in it ended up on the roof of the golf club bar, which cost him plenty! Major Weaver authorised us to go ahead at his personal expense and fit one of his engines into an aircraft to test its suitability for flying. With the help of our Airworthiness Committee member, Harold Best-Devereux, we installed the Neptune engine into a Piper Cub two-seater and Harold and I carried out fifty hours' flying with it. The engine proved to be excellent — easy to start, smooth running and reliable. Its only fault was excessive weight — it had been designed robustly for heavy marine and industrial use, where weight was no penalty.

Major Weaver was keen to undertake modifications to lighten the engine and at the same time increase its power output to some 65 hp, which would have made it ideal for our purposes. Unfortunately, the cost of these modifications and subsequent type testing to satisfy the airworthiness authorities was estimated at well over £10,000, and the Coventry Victor Board of Directors would not approve this expenditure without an assured market which we could not guarantee. So this promising project had to be dropped.

We seemed to have reached an impasse. The aircraft manufacturers would not go ahead in the absence of a suitable engine, and the engine manufacturers would not go ahead without an aircraft production programme. This impasse was eventually solved by Harold Best-Devereux who obtained the production rights of the French designed Druine 'Turbulent', and in April 1955 he flew one of these over from France for demonstration here. The Turbulent was an attractive little single-seat monoplane, powered by a Volkswagen car engine, which had been specially designed for ease of construction by amateurs, or for assembly from kits of parts to be obtained from the manufacturers. Construction groups were soon formed by our members and a number of Turbulents were built and happily flown around by their proud owners.

The aircraft and engine supply problem was now solved and the Rollason Aircraft and Engine Company, then at Croydon Aerodrome, bought the production rights of the Turbulent which they produced commercially. This firm also modified the Volkswagen engine to make it fully acceptable to the airworthiness authorities. Many Turbulents are still flying on the British Register today, as well as other types of ultra light aircraft designed around the Volkswagen engine.

During our early years, we sponsored the formation of co-ownership flying groups and persuaded the authorities to allow such groups to operate their aircraft as joint private owners. Unlike the proprietary flying clubs, whose operations were classed as 'for hire and reward' and whose aircraft maintenance had to be on the public transport basis, our co-ownership groups could function in the private flying category at consequently much lower cost. One of the leading lights who started this co-ownership scheme was Lewis Benjamin, who formed a group to operate a Miles Magister at Shoreham aerodrome. 'Benjie' is still a most active flying enthusiast, and is now Chairman of the Tiger Club.

These groups became more and more important to our organisation. Many of them began to form all over the country, but they nearly all operated Tiger Moths or Magisters bought cheaply ex-RAF surplus, which were well outside the ultra light class as defined. Consequently in October 1950, upon Air Vice-Marshal Don Bennett's proposal, we changed our title from Ultra Light Aircraft Association to Popular Flying Association, and so covered these co-ownership flying groups in addition to the construction and operation of ultra light aircraft. Thus was the PFA born.

Early in 1951, having retired from the RAF, I took up an appointment abroad and had to resign as Chairman of the Association. Although I returned to England a couple of years later and rejoined the Committee, I became deeply involved in setting up my aviation business and found it impossible to give up so much time to the Association. Regretfully, in 1956 I had to resign but by then the Association was on a firm footing and progressing steadily.

I have ever since maintained a close interest in PFA activities and it always gives me great pleasure to attend their annual Rallies, which have proved so successful and now attract more than 1000 visiting light aircraft from all over the country and abroad. Through sponsorship by the PFA and under the expert guidance and supervision of John Walker, their Chief Engineer, and his approved design and inspection team of some two hundred and fifty voluntary engineers, the magnificent total of over 400 ultra light aircraft, mostly home built, are now on the British Register. A further 200 are at present under construction and being completed at the rate of one every five weeks.

The greatest credit and my congratulations are due to their present Chairman, David Faulkner-Bryant, and to his band of hard-working enthusiasts through whose time and efforts, freely given, the PFA has achieved such an outstanding success.

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