



JOURNAL OF THE 458 Squadron Council

Year 60

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** *Have you notified Rob Wilkinson, if you prefer to receive your newsletter by email?
Are there others in your family, or circle of friends, who would like to receive a copy by e-mail ?
Please advise the Editor – see address and e-mail details above.*

*** *Contributions for the next Newsletter are due to the Editor by 27 March*

****MERRY XMAS ****

ON BEHALF OF 458, SQUADRON PRESIDENT, KEITH COUSINS, WISHES ALL OUR MEMBERS, THEIR FAMILIES AND FRIENDS, A VERY HAPPY CHRISTMAS, AND A PEACEFUL NEW YEAR, WITH THE BEST OF HEALTH.

VALE

With sadness, we record the passing of the following members and family of 458.

Rita ALEXANDER	see NSW Flight Report
Snowy ATHERTON	see QLD “
Syd BARTRAM	see SA “
Jack COBB	see WA “
Col CORTEN	see WA “
David DALRYMPLE	see QLD “
Evelyn LEWIS	see QLD “
Les LOCKHART	see WA “
Ray McDOUGALL	see VIC “
Rosa MOY	see UK “
Lucy PALMER	see WA “
Margaret SIMPSON	see WA “
Roy SLATER	see QLD “
Bob SMITH	see NSW “
Reg WINDETT	see UK “

REUNION - 2010

We are now planning to hold a Reunion in **September / October 2010**, six months later than originally planned, and will advise further details in the April Newsletter. Watch this space !!

REMINDER - Do you have any old 458 Newsletters stashed away?

Wendy Whitem-Trunz is collecting all of the 458 Newsletters for archival purposes purposes. The following numbered (& especially early) newsletters are currently missing: #2 - 47, 52-54, 59, 62, 63, 65, 66, 68, 134, and 217. Please contact Wendy if you can assist on 0411-848111 or e-mail wendy@cape3.com

NEWS FROM BARBARA O’RILEY in CRAFERS, SA

Barbara sent a paper cutting from the Milford Haven (Wales) Mercury, where locals held their first Anzac Day Parade back in April. Milford was the site of the crash of a Wellington in 1942, killing one British and five Australian servicemen on board.

NEWS FROM 458’er RON KIRK, in Caernarfon, Ireland

“I visited the RAAF Museum “on line”, and looked up 458 Squadron. I was most surprised to see no mention of us using torpedoes, which we did all the time I was at Shallufa forward landing grounds and Malta, between 25 Nov 1942 and 05 July 1943. We carried two torpedoes in the bomb bays of the Wellington. We used the moon path to outline the enemy shipping or a second aircraft dropped flares to create an artificial moon path. It was most successful. Can you look into this ?”

Does anyone have a response for Ron ? Ed.

Please also turn to Page 9 for a story Ron has written about his time with 458. When discharged from the RAF in 1947, he became commanding officer of 1310 ERYRI Squadron ATC Caernarfon, and remained as such for 30 years, retiring at the upper age limit.

FLIGHT REPORTS

Canada Flight

by Bryan Quinlan

This remembrance day, I thought it time to try and contact as many of our six surviving ex-458 Canadian members as possible and can report as follows:

Sid Winchester, WAG/ASV, Jan-Oct 43, Shallufa, Malta, Blida and Protville.

Sid's son Chris is my contact and he and wife, also Chris, had just returned from a four month trip to Europe. Starting at Hamburg and driving their VW van named "Brunhilda", which they keep at a relative's farm there and use as their vacation camper, they set forth south through Germany, along the Dalmatian coast and via several car ferries to Greece, Crete and Rhodes and ending back at Hamburg, restorage of Brunhilda and back to Canada.

He advised that Sid and wife Joyce are comfortably settled in a care centre on Vancouver Island and well looked after there. Sid unfortunately no longer recognizes family members, except perhaps Joyce, who is in the same building but at a different care level. Chris reports that they are often found sitting together in front of the view window, both asleep and holding hands.

Bert Markland, WAG/ASV, Mar 44-April 45, Malta, Sardinia, Italy, Gibraltar

I was able to reach Bert's wife Gladys, as he is in a care centre at Kamloops, BC and requires special medical care. She advised that last year the doctor gave Bert three months to live, but he has mustered that old Air Force spirit and is doing as well as can be expected, and is able to attend some family functions.

Jack Reynolds, Pilot, Malta, early 43

Jack was only briefly on 458 before being tour-expired after serving with the Wellington S.D. Flight, 69 Squadron, during the formative years of Wellington anti-shipping strikes from Malta, in co-operation with the navy. Jack attended some of the Winnipeg Commonwealth air training scheme reunions with the 458 contingent. He and his wife Joyce live in Vancouver and he advised that they are comfortable in their enjoyment of the quiet lifestyle.

Tom Rowan, WAG/ASV, Feb-Sept 43, Malta, Blida, Protville

I reached Tom the day after Remembrance Day as he was busy at various local observance functions that day. Tom will soon turn 91 but remains active curling, and says he still climbs the ladder to install his Xmas lights. He suffered another loss recently when he had to put down his dog at age fourteen. (98 years equivalent).

Tom Lindsay, Radar Technician, Sept 44 – July 45. Sardinia, Italy, Gibraltar

Tom's daughter lives with him and drives him to our very large local mall, where he exercises using a walker. Tom is heading for a young 93 next March. Tom let me in on a story during his UK service on a radar familiarization station flying in Ansons, where he maintained and adjusted the sets. On a flight one day, the pilot ran into some bad weather and needed the radar for beam location, but the set went u/s. Tom to the rescue and quickly got it operational and a safe return to base, where the officers on board were so appreciative they insisted his skill should be rewarded with a commission. This eventually led to an assessment interview but, as Tom did not want a commission anyway, he preferred to and remained in the ranks.

After three calls to **Dick Sladen's** number and the same wrong number each time, I had to admit defeat, so do not know how he is doing.

I will take this opportunity on behalf of our small gang to wish you all a very merry Christmas, a lively, happy 2010 and the best of health possible, as allowed by the accumulating years.

Queensland Flight by the Editor

*I'm sorry to report that our Qld correspondent, and 458 stalwart **Evelyn Lewis** passed away on 12 November, after suffering a stroke. For many years, following the death of her husband Jack, Evelyn held together "Q Flight", acted as correspondent and attended reunions along with her good friend Clarice Middleton and fellow 458'er Hettie Murray. She will be sadly missed, and our condolences go to Evelyn's nephews and niece. Just days before Evelyn's death, I received a call from her nephew Bob Palmer with her verbal Newsletter report:-*

"I've had a call from Hettie Murray, whose hip replacement was successful, and thanks everyone for their best wishes. Arthur Jones and May have called to say hello and that they will be down to visit shortly. I'm settling in well to my new home at Moreton Shores – a good home and good people. Best wishes to everyone for Xmas."

*Following Evelyn's funeral, I learnt that Eric Kelly was in Greenslopes Hospital after suffering a mild stroke. Also, I had a note from Mavis Slater to say that her husband, **Roy Slater**, passed away on 30 October. Our condolences to Mavis and family.*

*And, another note from Maggie Dalrymple, saying her husband **David Dalrymple** passed away back in April. Blind for the past 10 years, David enjoyed having Maggie read the 458 Journal to him, and he looked forward to hearing about his mates.*

*Bruce Atherton advised me of the death of his Dad, **Alan (Snowy) Atherton** on 3 September. He was a Cpl Fitter with 458 from its beginning, and throughout the Squadron's time in the Middle East. Our condolences go to Bruce, his sister Di, and their families.*

South Australia Flight by Pat Cribb

Several 458 Members were able to attend the funeral service for **Syd Bartram** in August. Syd, and his wife Pat, were loyal supporters of all our functions, and Reunions held in other States of Australia. Our sincere condolences to their family.

People on the move are Freida Creighton, to a Somerton Park retirement village; Joan Woodhead, to her family in Mosman, NSW; and, Buck Pederson to the War Veterans Home at Myrtlebank. Buck is 95, and lost his wife, Ruby, only last year. We trust you all have settled in and are being well looked after, and wish you all the best in your new homes.

Rick and Di Michell missed their planned overseas trip, but we are pleased to know, Di, that you are well again. And, Trish and David Kosh have enjoyed a tour by barge along (and IN – I hear, Trish) a canal in Europe. A wonderful trip, for sure.

Our Christmas lunch at the Kensington Hotel is on Sunday, December 6 at 12 for 12.30, and we look forward to a happy day.

We send Christmas and New Year greetings to all in 458, here in Australia and overseas, with a special wish for peace in all your lives, wherever you are.

NSW flight by Eric Munkman

My apologies for not reporting the death of **Rita Alexander** in the last issue of the Squadron news. Rita passed away at Quakers Hill Nursing Home in April. Rita will always be remembered as that lovely English lady who came out to spend some time with her sister Barbara Campbell, married to Peter one of our boys on the Squadron, and so there she met Peter and it started a long and loving relationship, marrying and having three lovely daughters, Julie, Deborah and Melonie. They say "behind every great man there is a great woman" and this was the case with Peter and Rita. She was a wonderful support to Peter and we had the pleasure of her company and help at most Squadron functions. To her daughters, sister and families we offer our deepest sympathy. Dorothy and I attended her funeral on behalf of 458.

Once again I have the sad duty of reporting another passing of one of our boys. **Bob Smith** departed this world on 1/8/09. He was a dedicated member of 458, both in wartime and peacetime. He was a member of P/O Bob Drinnan's crew as a WAG and he was a member of the N.S.W. Committee for many years occupying many offices, and was always willing to assist when called upon. He was a bloody good bloke, and will be sadly missed. Our sympathy to his wife Dot, sons and wives Richard and Gail, Ken and Robyn and the grandchildren.

The N.S.W. Flight A.G.M. was conducted at our last meeting and the following officers were elected. Pres. Eric Munkman; V/P Keith Cousins; Sec. David Longhurst; Treas. John Gibbins; Committee Bev Bitmead, Peter Bitmead, Rob Wilkinson, Ron Munkman. Congrats Ron, and to Dorothy Munkman who resigned, our thanks for her past services.

Another delightful luncheon was held at the Ryde TAFE recently, and all who attended thoroughly enjoyed the three course menu plus drinks. If any member or friend wishes to be placed on the invitation list for future lunches, please contact me (99720641). Also adding to the pleasure of the day, Rob brought along films of the dedication of the Squadron plaque ceremony at St Clement Dane's Church in London received from the U.K. flight, plus slides of the Bowral Reunion and other air force films. Thank you Rob for a great show.

In the August UK edition of Squadron News, Reg Fletcher mentioned Sgt. Maloney - I think he was relating to Sgt. Frank Mahony, in charge of the Orderly Room. On return to Australia, Frank was contacted, but wished to have no further association with the Squadron.

Regarding "Pop" Hanlon I think you are referring to "Jeep" Hanlon, how he got this nickname I don't know. We have not heard from him since the war.

Victoria Flight by Roland Orchard

With sadness I report the passing of **Ray McDougall** on 18 September. Our condolences go to Bruce, Douglas and Ann and their families for the loss of Ray.

Vic. Flight members enjoyed a day out at the B24 Liberator Restoration at Werribee on Sunday the 15th November. The members and families who attended were:

Doff Pollock (Widow of 458er Bob) & Bill Pollock; Beth Alexander, daughter Michelle and grand-daughter Mackenzie; Brian Paroissien; Fred Ayers; Jane and Eric Foster; Adrian Cecelia and Kim Temple; Colin Dean; Bronwyn Millington; Beryl Orchard (Widow of 458er Gordon); Jeremy, Chris, Jonathan, Roland, Janet, Rebecca and Emily Orchard; Arthur Filippis

Apologies were received from Mrs Beryl Giles; Bruce McDougall (his father Ray passed away on 18th Sept); Ken Fleming; Harry Ashworth; Stan Cartledge and son Ian; Howard and Sally Bertram; Christine Sindt; Roy and Barbara Pearce; and Dave Prideaux

We enjoyed a tour of the hangar, a great lunch and were all taken aback by the awe inspiring work that John Temby (President of the B24 Restoration) and his team have achieved so far. There is still a big job ahead of them with the ultimate aim of moving the old war bird to its final static location in a bigger World War 2 hangar, a couple of hundred meters up the road. Please visit the web site on <http://b24australia.org.au/home.html> for more information. If you haven't visited the Restoration in Victoria, please do, next time you are in good old Vic. as it is a fitting tribute to those who crewed and worked on this aircraft (Many of whom, might I add, from 458 Squadron.) Look up the index in the Squadron History to find the references to the B24 Liberator.

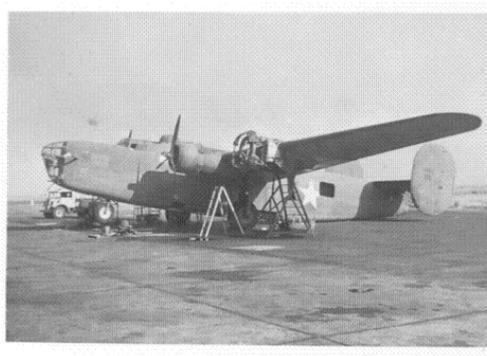
You may be surprised. In my welcome speech I made reference to the links between 458 Squadron and the B24. I found it fitting with the presence of Mrs. Doff Pollock to add in one excerpt from the Squadron History:

“Lydda June 1942: Bob Pollock and many other electricians and fitters from 458 Squadron worked on B24s from No. 12 Bomber Group of the US Army Air Force. These aircraft were to partake in the first bombing of the Ploesti oilfields in Romania.”

(see photos below courtesy of Bill Pollock)



BOB POLLOCK kicking an Aussie Rules Footy circa 1942



B24 PRESUMABLY AT LYDDA CIRCA 1942

We all enjoyed a delicious catered lunch, followed by an interesting slide presentation of the B24 Restoration story to date. Cecilia Temple brought a lot of her father's (Cecil Percy) memorabilia for display, as did Doff Pollock, who brought some photographs of her husband, Bob. Thanks to both of them, as having these types of treasures on display adds to the emotion and fascination on the day. Cecilia has kindly offered to hand to the Victoria Flight Committee the framed copy of the map of the Mediterranean and 458 Squadron's movements between 1941 – 1945, as prepared by Jock McGowen and drawn by Tom Moore *(see photos below)*.

On behalf of Victoria flight many thanks go to Mr. John Temby, Restoration President, Mrs. Judith Gilbert Restoration Secretary, all of the volunteer staff who gave us great insights into the B24 during the tours and the catering staff.

Personally I would like to thank Jeremy Orchard (Vic. Flight Secretary) for organizing the activity, and Brian Paroissien for suggesting the location and all those who attended from near and far. For all those Victorians (and all 458ers for that matter) who missed out, we are getting our heads together for our next outing. Any suggestions would be greatly received. (Maybe Point Cook RAAF Base??). Contact Roland 0397270106 or Jeremy 0398013891 Orchard.

(Some photos of the visit to the B24 Liberator Restoration will be in the next edition...Ed.)



CEC PERCY AND HIS MEDALS



THANKS CECILIA

MELBOURNE ANZAC DAY MARCH 2010 ANNOUNCEMENT

Following a meeting of the Kindred Organisation & Unit Associations Committee, at ANZAC HOUSE Melbourne on Monday 12th October, 2009, it has been advised that all WW2 Veterans will now be provided with vehicles in which to enjoy a more comfortable ride along the March route in Melbourne. Transport from car parks to the official Assembly point (Flinders Street – at Federation Square) can also be arranged. All descendants will march immediately behind the vehicle, banners in front of the vehicle, of course. I have to provide ANZAC HOUSE with exact numbers of Veterans from 458 Squadron who wish to participate in the ANZAC Day March in 2010. Please contact me ASAP (Roland Orchard) on 03 9727 0106 for those who wish to take advantage of this. From all of the descendants who marched last year, we would dearly love to see all of the 458 Veterans take part.

Regards to all from me, the “Old Horse’s” son, and all of the Victorian members.

West Australia Flight by Ted Jewell

I missed the last Newsletter, due to health reasons, but am now back on deck again and feeling much better. Sadly, I report the death of the five members of WA Flight – **Jack Cobb, Col Corten, Les Lockhart, Lucy Palmer and Margaret Simpson.** My condolences go to their families.

At the present time, as far as I know, there are only four original members left here in WA Flight – Jim Palmer, Ted Jewell, Nobby Nobbs and Bill Kelliher – plus wives of past members – Joan Clues, Vera Etherton and Margaret Gannaway.

In past years, we used to go every Xmas to Miss Mauds Restaurant in Perth, but, since there are so few left this year, we are having our get-together on Sunday 6 December with Xmas lunch at Bob and Dot Bresland's home. Bob and Dot are Associate members, who have been with us for many years. Each person will bring a plate of goodies, so we should have a great day, with about twelve or so people present.

I had a phone call from Jim Palmer to tell me of the passing of Lucy. Jim is in a nursing home in Kojunup Town. I talked to Nobby Nobbs on the phone, recently, and like us all, he is getting older, with a few health problems.

Merry Xmas to All.

NZ Flight by Kevin George

On 25 March, 1984, it was our pleasure to host 2 busloads of 458 Squadron Assn. members for morning tea and drinks. This second International Reunion took the form of a tour of New Zealand.

We are still here, on our 4 acre property, fronting onto the main street of Kaikohe. There have been changes. The 1 acre lake is now more attractive. We overcame the problem, caused by exotic weeds, in 1992 by introducing Chinese Grass Carp. Our lake is now of an emerald green colour, year long. Our home has been improved by painting the stained cedar weatherboards, plus the addition of decks and terraces. Internally, we have made changes and improvements. We have a high rainfall, and by the end of September, had received our annual average rainfall of 60 inches. As our rain is well distributed, throughout the year, there is more to come. Our high rainfall and generally warm temperatures promote rampant growth, so keeping everything under control keeps us busy.

We extend a warm welcome to all members who decide to visit New Zealand. Despite the world recession, our tourism figures are holding up well, having reduced only 3.9% in the past year to March. Kind regards to all from Kevin and Dawn.

UK flight by Keith Wilkinson

We've had another successful UK Flight annual reunion. This time we got together at the very place where it all started for 458 in England – Holme-on-Spalding Moor, Yorkshire.

On a misty, drizzly Autumnal morning, we gathered at the tree, planted at the old airfield as a memorial to those who lost their lives in the squadron. Under its branches, a wreath bore the words: "From a grateful community".

Among those of us who attended were former pilots Leon Armstrong (now almost 90 and present at the original tree planting) and Jack Christianson, and his wife Audrey. Don Stocks was there with his family, even though poor health on the day was making it hard for him to walk. His former crew mate, Ron Moy, had hoped to be with him, but, sadly, at the last moment, he was unable to take part for health reasons. Ron recently lost his beloved wife **Rosa**, and our thoughts are very much with him at this time. He is a very much loved and respected member of the UK Flight and has attended all recent reunions.

We were pleased to welcome 83-year-old Betty Hughes, widow of 458 WOP/AG Guy Johnston who flew in F/O Simpson's crew for three years. Mr Johnston and Betty regularly took part in reunions at Holme until he passed away in 1980.

She came along with her son David Johnston, and John Hughes, her husband for the past 17 years. Mr Hughes, who is 91 years old, served in the British Army from 1940 in World War Two. However, he did have a poignant connection to those around him who flew in Wellingtons. His brother Arthur was killed whilst flying a Wellington, aged 20, soon after getting his wings. His aircraft crashed as he tried to land on a foggy night.

After paying our respects at the memorial, we were kindly invited into the nearby showrooms of J. Rotherhams – stonemasons. Here, there are many archive photographs on display on the walls of a long corridor. These are a record of Holme-on-Spalding Moor aerodrome and many pictures are of 458 interest. We then took a drive around the industrial estate created on the old airfield. Many original RAF buildings are still there, some still in quite good condition.

Then we had lunch at the Cross Keys pub at Holme. The pub used to have a display of framed 458 pictures on its walls, but these were taken down after a change of management and refurbishment of the premises. The landlady has, however, kept these in storage and kindly put them all out on display across a snooker table. They brought back memories for the veterans – who could see pictures of themselves and their crews from the squadron years. There were even photos of Leon Armstrong back in his pilot training days in the USA.

After lunch, we visited the museum at the old RAF Elvington airfield. We only had a couple of hours there. There's so much to see, an entire day would not do it justice. Many wartime scenes have been recreated at the airfield – for example, the Control Tower, just as it was back in the 1940s. And there are rear turrets and even an air gunnery simulator. Several wartime planes are on show in a hangar. The scramble bell for Battle of Britain pilots at Tangmere is there too. What an incredible part that one small item played in the war!

We based ourselves at the olde worlde (and reputedly haunted) Feathers Hotel in Pocklington, where we stayed in adjoining bungalows. Here we had the reunion dinner, when toasts were given for the Queen, the Squadron and absent friends.

There was a discussion about where we might hold the 2010 reunion. The plan is to definitely have a reunion of some sort. Jack Christianson, in particular, has hopes that this might even be in Corsica, where he went on detachment. But the feeling was, because of people's declining health, we should look closer to home – possibly back to Yorkshire, of maybe to the old favourite of Stratford upon Avon. We'll try to let members know in the New Year.

We are sad to report the death of 458 Wop/AG **Reg Windett** at the age of 88. He passed away on September 28th. He had attended several reunions until he had to give up, due to blindness and mobility problems. Although he served in the squadron as a WOP/AG, he originally underwent pilot training in Canada and the USA. He survived a bout of pneumonia in Shallufa, and a number of airborne scrapes with the squadron, including three emergency landings: one when a piece of shrapnel hit, and knocked out, the landing gear.

His favourite story was of when he had a truly remarkable escape. He was exchanging positions from his wireless set to the rear turret. Unknown to him, the hatch at the bottom of the aircraft fuselage had blown open and he fell through it. His feet were whipped up by the slipstream of the aircraft and he held on by his elbows as he fought to get himself back into the plane. He got away with a few bruised ribs and a check-up in hospital in Carthage.

Reg's son, Michael, wrote to me: "He went on to become one of the inventors and pioneers of what became universally known as Aerads, firstly for the MoD and latterly developing the approach and en route charts for International Air Radio who implemented the nav beacons and printed all the charts. As you will know, they are still today the primary source of paper based navigational reference in airlines throughout the world."

SGT. RONALD KIRK 1258470 WOP/AG/ASV OPERATOR – WRITES ABOUT HIS TIME WITH 458 SQUADRON

I completed my operational training at No. 21 O.T.U. Moreton in Marsh 09 Oct. 1941, and was sent on leave to wait my posting to an operational Squadron. In due course, I was posted to 458 Squadron at Holme on Spalding Moore which, at that time, was in bomber command.

Imagine my surprise when I arrived and found that it was an Australian Squadron, with mainly Australian personnel, but also quite a few Canadians, New Zealanders and English. My first flight with the Squadron was on 22 Oct 1941 and my first operational flight was on 28 Jan 1942, with P.O. Mackeller as Captain in aircraft 1183, and it was to bomb Boulogne and it was a successful mission. W. Cmdr Mulholland was Commanding Officer at this time, and I can truly say you could not have wished for a better C.O.

In February 1942, the whole Squadron was posted to the Middle East and transferred to Coastal command. Three crews flew to Stanton Harcourt, the first leg of our journey to the Middle East, W/Cmdr Mulholland, another crew with Sgt. Thick WOP/AG and ourselves, with P.O. Mackeller as Pilot, in aircraft DV502. On the 15 February 1942, the three of us took off for Malta and we were routed to fly over France. This proved to be a big mistake, as we lost both W/Cmdr Mulholland and Sgt. Thick's aircraft on the way. We were hit by friendly gun fire over England and our Identification Friend or Foe equipment was rendered U/S. Nevertheless, our Captain decided to carry on to Malta. When we were about 100 miles from Malta, I had to break radio silence to inform them about the I.F.F. equipment. They replied to tell us to fly at 50 feet over the Grand Harbour, on a certain heading, or we would be fired at. We approached Malta with some apprehension, but we landed safely 9 hours 30min from take off, only to be told they were taking our aircraft from us and we were sent to the local YMCA for the night. The galling part was that during the night, there was an air raid and our aircraft was destroyed. So, now we were stranded on Malta, and we were housed in what was the local Poor House.

There was an air raid every night, and the following morning we all had to give a hand to fill in the craters on the runway. It was on 13 March 1942 that a Wellington was flown from Cairo to get us from Malta. We took off in the middle of an air raid at 2am, with some civilians on board as well, and landed at 108 M.U. Cairo.

On the 16 March we were flown on our first leg to England to pick up another aircraft by P.A. Airways in a Douglas D.C. 3 and landed at Apapa (Lagos). We were billeted at The Grand Hotel, to await a ship to take us to England. There were quite a few of us waiting by now. Whilst I was there I was reading the Bible, that my mother had given me when I volunteered for the R.A.F., and I realized I had not been baptized, even though I had been a regular church goer since a very early age. Sgt. Lovelace, a Canadian, advised me to get in touch with the Bishop of Lagos. This I did, and was invited to the Bishop's residence for dinner that evening and had a really good time.

It was June 1942 before we arrived back in England, having boarded a French merchant ship which had a severe list to one side and only got us as far as Free Town before being declared unsafe. We were transferred to an aircraft carrier, which developed engine trouble, and we were then transferred to an armed merchant cruiser and joined a 4 knot convoy to England.

When we arrived back in England, we were given a medical and they discovered that I had a very bad rupture, and was grounded and sent to a R.A.F. hospital for operations, which took 4 weeks, and then 3 weeks leave. I tried to get back to 458 Squadron but by now, the whole Squadron had left England. I was determined to get back to the Squadron, so I went to Moreton in Marsh to find S.Ldr. Lesley, who used to be on 458, but was now commanding 1446 Ferry Flight, and asked him if he could help me to get to 458. He was most helpful. He put me in a crew, that was flying to Cairo in a Wellington, as their wireless operator.

We took off and got as far as Jeswang, via Gibraltar, but as we approached Jeswang, there was a very severe storm, the heavy static blocked our radio communication, the visibility was almost nil, we were short of fuel and was contemplating landing on the beach, which we could just make out flying at very low level. I broadcast a message telling them of our plight, but could not receive a reply. They sent up flares, which we just managed to see, and made for the air field. Due to the poor visibility, we landed badly and not on the runway, and the aircraft was badly damaged and could not be repaired at Jeswang. So, I was stranded again. The pilots and navigators fell ill with malaria, and it was not until the 22 Sept 1942 that I managed to get away with a crew that arrived with an ill wireless operator, and I took his place.

We managed to get as far as Idea (Lagos) where the pilot went ill. On the 5 Oct 1942, I managed to take off again with a Sgt. Clark that had flown down from Cairo and on the 20th finally arrived at L.G. 224 Cairo. I was now only about 80 miles from Shallufa, where 458 Squadron were by now. This was not the end of my problems, as they decided any wireless operator that came from England had to go to train on the new transmitter and receiver T1154/R1155 and although I had flown on operations with this equipment, they still made me go to somewhere near Tel-Aviv which was a long train journey from L.G.224.

On arrival, I put in a request to see the Commanding Officer. I showed him my flying log book, to prove that I had flown with the new equipment, and he agreed it was a waste of time me being there. He said the best thing for me to do was to hitch a ride on the many army lorries going to Cairo, and make my way to Shallufa from there. I did this, and eventually arrived at Shallufa and presented myself to W. Cmdr. Johnston who was now the Commanding Officer of 458 Squadron. He was shocked to see me, and gave me a great welcome and I became his wireless operator and a spare for any other crew. I was really delighted to be back on my Squadron.

We started training to use torpedoes with 221 Squadron R.A.F., and this entailed low flying, at not more than 50 feet, and dropping the torpedo 1,000 yards from the target. My first shipping strike was 25 November 1942, and was successful. We used to go out in pairs because when there was no moon for a moon path to outline the target, the other aircraft would drop flares to create an artificial moon path.

When we were on Malta, W. Cmdr. Johnston wanted me to apply for a commission. I said I would rather not, because it would mean me leaving the Squadron and my pals. He could see my point and said we will leave it for now, which I was happy to do. My last operational flight was on 5 July 1943 with F. Lt. Thomson in A.C. HZ370 and it was a shipping strike. Then I was officially on operational rest.

Lt. Col. McKenzie was now the Commanding Officer, and he decided I would be his unofficial Adjutant until I was posted from the Squadron. Also, he insisted that I fill in an application form for a Commission. I was soon sent to be interviewed by the Commissioning Board, but before the results were through, I was on my way back to England and arrived 21 Aug 1943. There was also a Sgt. Hoosier from 458 who was also recommended for a Commission, and we made our way to London and went to Air Ministry to see if our Commission had come through. It had, and we were given all our papers, clothing coupons etc. and off we went to the Officers Shop to get our uniforms. We were staying at the YMCA but were told now we were Officers we would have to leave. So, we stayed at a hotel that night and I took Hoosier to my home in Tonbridge, Kent on leave.

This is a list of the pilots I flew with on 458 Squadron:

Sgt. Hare; P.O. Mackellar; P.O. Wharton; Sgt. Barras; P.O. Furrey; Sgt. Lava; Sgt. Cameron; Sgt. Fordyce; S.Ldr. Saville; W. Cmdr. Mulholland; W. Cmdr. Johnston; F.O. Taylor; F.O. Fraser; Sgt. Clarke; Sgt. Knox; Flt. Sgt. Buchanan D.F.C.; Flt. Lt. Lewthwaite; S. Ldr. Pilcher; F.O. Thompson; F. Lt. Prior; Lt. Col. McKenzie.

I can't help wondering how many of these are still alive. I was 89 in July this year, 2009.