

Tales of 463 Squadron RAAF



As recalled by W.O. Bob Raebel



Foreword

Shaun, we are a proud family and it is with some pride that I set down my remembrances of your Grandad's tales. These were collected over 50 years. Some repeated often, some just once. Without checking, I have never had reason to fault his stories, those that were inaccurate, I have seen the kernel of truth they were based on and the reason why he did not know all the facts.

This book is designed to be read in conjunction with Brian Fallon's "Press on Regardless". I was most taken with the book from its pure artistic value. In my own way I have tried to follow the example.

We as a family have a long lineage all the way from the Schottelius' and other migrations to Australia in the 1840's. It has not always been happy, Pa, did not have a great relationship with his Dad when he ran away from home but 28 years later, I saw they were reconciled. Pa and I enjoyed a good relationship, though in a way I was always the second son. He could be a hard man, demanding respect and the obeying of commands. On the other hand he respected me and passed the control over to me. I always remember being in a yacht race when I was 18 and he was crewing for me on a heavy day. Coming around a mark he let the mainsheet slip and I yelled at him "Get the e-ffing mainsheet on!" There were no repercussions.

He was a good husband and father. The family was torn as a result of their split because of World War Two. With luck that has passed with your generation. Your Pa would be proud of you as the family's first graduate Scientist and Engineer.

Have a very good life and hold your head high.

Dad
Christmas 2011

Geoffrey W. Rachel

Introduction

I always thought I knew my Dad, Bob Raebel pretty well and that he talked freely of his World War 2 experiences. Today in my sixties, I am beginning to realise how damaged he was. He remembered and shared to good bits, the fun part of War. The bad parts he blocked out and pushed questions aside, when asked directly. His home life was not good and very few stories came out making a chronological analysis hard.

He was the first born son of three brothers, on a potato farm at the end of Swamp Road Benger WA. The boys had horses and one tale told of their riding to the coastal sand dunes south of Mandurah. Camped there, they saw a man coming a long way off. Bob identified him first by the style of his riding. They had guns, Bob had a muzzle loading shotgun to hunt ducks on the swamp. As a kid he got his powder wet. He put it in his mother's fuel stove oven to dry and caused a minor explosion.

He went to Benger School and left at the end of 6th Grade, aged around 11 when the family could not afford to send him to the State High School at Harvey. He had to earn his keep on the farm, ploughing, digging, planting and looking after the animals. By all reports his Dad was a hard taskmaster and really pushed Bob making him slaughter and butcher calves. With the Depression coming and farm returns low, Bob and his father then went out Collie way timber cutting for cash. The local boys could be a bit wild and sometimes the policeman in his "Bull Nose" Morris Cowley would chase them but Bob could usually outrun him on his push bike. Bob was always tinkering with farm machinery and the industrial engines in farmer's sheds.

By age 14 Bob had a four horse plough team and was being sent to other farms to bring in income. On his first night away, he found his horses had got loose and cleared out. Running through the bush back home he stepped on a sleeping goat and frightened himself witless. The horses were back at the farm eating contentedly. He must have been getting pocket money, because at about this time he bought his first motor cycle. It was a single cylinder belt drive Triumph with an exhaust that pointed straight down and a hand pump, oil system. One day he got into trouble riding across a grass paddock when the



Bob with a Dh60 Moth at Maylands Perth

exhaust had started a fire.

Bob left home one night, aged about 16, on his motor bike. Stopping at the end of Swamp Road his young brother Arthur told me he emptied both barrels of his shotgun into the roof of the village hall. In Perth he started an apprenticeship with

local hero flyer Jimmie Woods at Maylands Airfield. His spare time was taken up as a Trooper Gunner with the 10th Light Horse. Being a late entry he was given the worst position, riding postillion on the third horse where the swaying drawbar was liable to smash a lower

leg. To guard against this, he had an iron bar in his right legging.

He was motorcycle racing with his Douglas 500cc horizontal single. To make faster gear changes, instead of a clutch, he had a thumb "blip" switch on the magneto to allow him to crash through the box! Speaking of crashes, about this time he came



Trooper Arthur Raebel 10th Light Horse

off his pushbike at 48 mph while speed trialing against a roller on the back of a motor bike. I don't think it was a happy time.

In 1936, aged about 20 he met Marjorie Haynes at the Church, she was about 17. They courted for about 18 months until one night Marj's mother coerced Bob into driving her and the two girls to Midland Station (the easternmost) to put them on the Trans Australian Railway so that if her husband found she had run out, he wouldn't be able to stop them.

Nelson, my brother was born in March 1939 with Bob having moved to Melbourne. Here he attended RMIT to further his engineering skills. His lecturer encouraged him to join the RAAF in 1940. He was not popular at home when he announced he had enlisted. He left Australia in 1941 as a member of the new 452 Squadron, at a time

when Menzies was sending men to defend the Motherland. Once in the UK 455 Squadron (Bombers) got first choice of the new arrivals and Bob was swapped out. Quickly he became Flight Sergeant B Flight. Proving himself during the Russian Expedition, he was recommended to Rollo Kingsford Smith who was forming 463



Bob in Russia with his 2iC

Squadron RAAF from the C Flight of 467 Squadron. What follows are snippets of stories that Bob told over the years. There is not a lot of heroism, nor perhaps a lot of the drag of trying to get 24 aircraft repaired and ready for operations each night and run what was a part of a highly efficient Air Station.

Cabbage Balls

When 463 and 467 (RAAF) Squadrons took over RAF Waddington in 1943 it was a permanent brick built station. The runways needed to be lengthened and were cut out of farmland. This immense runway length was to allow overloaded aircraft to get airborne and to receive shot up four-engined bombers.

Earth moving machinery was still due to work in the overshoot areas at each end of the field and a farmer still had a crop of cabbages in the ground. Inevitably one of the new Lancasters went over the edge of the runway to be brought up short by the soft ground in the middle of the cabbage patch.

It was W/O Bob Raebel's first salvage of a Lancaster and he agonised how to get it out without damage. Fuel wagons were called in to drain off most of the fuel while ammunition, guns and radios were also removed to "lighten ship".

Most crew wanted to use a bulldozer to drag the plane out but Bob reasoned they would probably rip the undercarriage off. So he climbed in and started up all four engines then proceeded to "push the throttles through the gate". On emergency full power, with full flap, the Lanc shivered and shook until she began to heave herself forward out of the bog. The propwash from six thousand horses was blowing cabbages down the runway and it didn't stop when the Lanc turned



and taxied slowly over the garden. Once back on the tarmac the plane was undamaged from its ordeal

Mosquito Overshoot

Soon after 463 moved to Waddington, they received a brand new Mosquito.

The Air Transport Auxiliary girl flying it floated down the runway, landing long. She was not worried because Waddington was so long, she knew she could just roll out into the overshoot area. Too late, she realized there was still earth moving machinery preparing the area and she had lost too much speed and had insufficient distance to go-around.

In desperation, she flicked off the magneto switches and pulled up the undercarriage dropping the aircraft onto it's belly. The aircraft was a write off and the ATA girl's ego was a little bruised.

Live Bomb!

It happened in 1944, day after day, men winched great docile iron bombs into the bellies of bombers. Looking back it seems so senseless that men who started this work at 18 should now be 22 or so. They had spent their whole working lives contributing to the reign of terror over Europe. Freedom for Europe was still a year away.

They were good at their jobs, well trained and experienced. The bombs were safe enough, no bomb was armed until it had fallen far enough for a small propeller in the base or nose to unwind and arm the fuse. It was true that the armourers had had some dreadful frights.

At the start of the year one of their Lancasters aborted a mission due to engine trouble. Flying low over The Wash they jettisoned their



load of American 500 pounders "safe" only to have the whole load detonate under them. The aircraft landed safely but never flew again such was the damage from the explosion shockwave. Then more recently a Lancaster at a nearby base had inexplicably blown up while being armed. This had caused serious loss of life and damage. Now in 1944 the armourers connected the two cables to the 1000-pound bomb

and winched it up securing it to the bomb release gear in the aircraft. Instead of moving the trolley under the next shackle point they elected to drag the bomb slightly sideways on the existing cables. The arming propeller assembly was sheared off by a trolley support as the bomb slewed under its own weight on the cables. In that instant the armourers looked at each other, mentally saying “goodbye”, but oblivion did not come.

“Everyone stop!

Be quiet!

Don't move!

We have a live bomb on the hoist”. Yelled the corporal armourer.

The engine fitter changing spark plugs on number four engine stopped. The instrument fitter in the pilot's seat called “Don't move everybody, we are sitting on a live bomb”

“You” the corporal pointed to “Dusty” Miller “Belt off to the Adjutant's office and get the field cleared, don't let any pompous pommie stop you.”

“Right Corp”

“You jokers” he shouted to a group standing dumbly by the rear of the aircraft. “Run around all the dispersals, tell them not to start aircraft engines but to run for the main gate” The group took to their heels, scattering as they went.

“You mechanics” He pointed to engine fitters on high trestles, “Climb down and clear out” The corporal continued “Now you on the engine, climb down carefully and once on the ground run.” Turning his attention “In the aircraft there!” He called to the white faced instrument fitter at the pilots window. “Tell everyone to get out one at a time but don't rock the plane.”



“Ok Corp” came a not too confident reply.

Bodies began to tumble from the aircraft, confused, wondering why they were still alive.

“If you value your hides, run for he main gate” called the Corporal malevolently.

“Now exactly what is going on here?” The corporal spun on his heel to stare straight into the face of the Warrant Officer who calmly asked again “What's the problem”

The corporal was suddenly nervous and gulped “You shouldn't be here sir. The arming vane was sheared off a 1000 pounder. It's armed and the whole load could go at any moment”.

“Mmmnn” came the unconcerned reply “Everyone clear?”

“Yes sir”

“Well, let's stroll up to the Adjutant's office and see if he has called bomb disposal yet.”

So they walked away calmly like gentlemen. The corporal knew he had to hold himself together to get the men clear. Now all of his wound up nerves told him to run. He also knew the story would go down in legend when they were seen to be walking calmly away from 10,000 pounds of Tri-nitro-toluene sitting under 5 tons of 150 octane aviation spirit.

“You did very well corporal” The W/O said conversationally. “I'll be recommending you for a gong” The corporal straightened up walking proud. “Thank you sir.”

The corporal and the W/O are fictional reconstructs in a true story of 463 (RAAF) Squadron.

The 9mm Very Pistol



It may not seem strange that guns and ammunition were freely available during WW2 as was the time to use them.

Pa was a country boy and well used to guns and training men in their use. He

had managed to get a .38 Smith & Wesson and with enough practice was eventually able to keep a condensed milk tin in the air for all six shots. Later when I was a tot Dad brought down a wedge tailed eagle “on the wing” with his .38.

At one point during the war he got the barrel of a Sten gun and machined down the mandrel so that it fitted inside the barrel of a 1” Very pistol where it was sweated in.

The Sten gun bullets had a hotter load than normal pistol bullets and Dad used these in his pistol. It was accurate out to 150 yards and able to hit a kerosene tin with every shot. Unfortunately the Very pistol

action was not very strong nor was it intended for a lot of use. The 9mm ammo shook the action around so much that in the end it would fly open after firing and eject the case over the firer's shoulder.

Grouse Shooting

Shotgun shells were hard to get in wartime England and Pa used to reload his own cases. I can't say where he got the primers from nor was powder available. Instead of powder he used cordite in the shells, taken from .303 bullets. The cordite was in the form of a bundle of orange sticks thinner than a pencil lead. Pa played around until he figured out how many sticks to use. Cordite burns much faster than powder and is much more violent.

One day while Pa was on leave one of his mates pinched a handful of shells to go shooting. When Pa returned "What in hell did you put in those shells. The gun kicked like a mule and I thought it would blow up!"

Gremlins

There is a photo in Pa's wartime albums. The fitters at a "humpy" out on dispersals had got bored and made a metre high paper "Gremlin", one of the "little people". It was popularly believed that the aircraft workers built such Gremlins into new bombers. This accounted for the many defects in brand new aeroplanes that needed much reworking and testing before being sent on operations. The Gremlins continued to account for the navigator's lost sextant, turrets that failed to turn and engines that caught fire.

Wimpy with Crosses

One day at Waddington they had a Wellington bomber on a straight in approach to the airfield. It appeared to be battle-damaged and was not using radio. As he got closer the controllers flashed a green shaded Aldis lamp



flashed a green shaded Aldis lamp

"Clear to Land" signal to him.

The Wimpy staggered in not flying too well, the emergency vehicles were alerted. Then over the end of the field his engines suddenly went to full power and his flying became more purposeful. The under carriage came up and the bomb doors opened, the air raid sirens went off and a load of bombs were dumped down the main runway. As he went past dull crosses could be seen painted over the roundels.

A few guns fired as he tore off at low level. Fighters caught him before he could cross the Channel.

Air Vice Marshal the Hon R.A.Cochrane

It was a particularly bitter night in the winter of 1944 as the Warrant Officer made a last check of the dispersals of his Flight at 463 Squadron, Waddington. Snow swirled around him as he trudged from bay to bay, it was not a night to be out. Under the wing of a Lancaster something moved, instantly alert the W/O cautiously approached a man. To put the other off-guard he bellowed at him “Who the bloody hell are you?”



463-P JO-P “Piratical Pete”

The man pulled back one shoulder of his greatcoat to reveal his shoulder flashes “Cochrane, AVM.” The W/O snapped to attention while doing a double-take and simultaneously threw up a salute “Sir” It was the Commanding Officer of 5 Group Bomber Command. “Who are you”

Cochrane asked and the W/O identified himself then Cochrane continued “I was just visiting your CO and decided to take a tour on the way out. Bloody driver bogged the Hillman over there” he pointed into the night. “He went off to find the Guardhouse a half hour ago to rouse the Officer of the Day” The W/O took it all in as Cochrane continued “Is there any shelter about?”

“Come this way sir” he beckoned “The Erks have a humpy, it's only a couple of minutes”

The W/O pushed open the door of the shelter made of canvas and scrap timber surprising the fitters inside and called “Ten shnn” The Australians smirked until they saw the officer behind the W/O and they jumped to their feet. “Gentlemen, Air Vice Marshal Cochrane” the W/O introduced.

“As you were” said Cochrane. The men open mouthed, thought, they

rarely see Rollo except when on Squadron Parade where on earth did their Group Commander drop from.

Relaxing one of the men offered Cochrane a box to sit on while another plied him with a hot cup of tea in an old chipped tin mug from the iron stove.

When he had almost finished, the door burst open, again letting in a shower of snow. A Pilot Officer stuck his head in “Right you lot, on the double outside, we have an officer lost nearby!”

Nobody moved, the Pilot Officer began to puff up in the face of the usual insubordination where popular pilots were known by their nicknames, then his eyes landed on Cochrane. He snapped to attention crashing his head into the door lintel before he could salute. A fitter caught him and put him on a box beside Cochrane. Other startled members of the search party crowded into the humpy saluting Cochrane as they came in.

“Well Pilot Officer” Cochrane started “I’ll bet you’re glad you found me. Now have you got any transport, I should be getting back to Group Headquarters”

“Sir, yes we can lend your driver a car and swap them tomorrow” the Pilot Officer replied

Cochrane looked around the crowded humpy “Excellent, thank you gentlemen for your hospitality on a cold night, it has been most instructive. Pilot Officer, my compliments to your Wing Commander Kingsford-Smith and I must be on my way.”

The Erks sat in awe as they watched the humpy empty, a brush with fame.

Head On



RAF Waddington had a few Mosquito's, mostly bombers for the Pathfinders and a Photographic Reconnaissance Unit model to fly back over the previous night's target at 40,000 feet to get a daylight picture to assess what damage had been done.

The Mosquitos were unarmed and losses were rare given their speed and height and single engine performance. It was odd one day, when their PRU Mozzie did not come back. The next day the replacement PRU Mozzie came back on one engine, smoking and badly shot up.

At de-briefing the pilot described being attacked head-on by a single Focke Wulf FW190 fighter. Heads were put together as to how a Focke Wulf could get to 40,000 feet. The summary was that the fighter must have been stripped of all armour, cannons and anything heavy leaving a single 12.7mm machine gun, which was why the head-on attack was chosen.

Fighter Command were called in to provide a fighter Mozzie with four 20mm cannon in the nose. That night the camouflage was tweaked to look like a PRU Mozzie and the aircraft despatched in daylight.

Five and a half hours later it returned, very badly damaged.

Over the target, a Focke Wulf had dived at them head on spitting out 12.7mm rounds. The Mosquito replied with a full cannon barrage and the Focke Wulf exploded leaving the Mozzie to fly through the wreckage.

They had no more trouble from high flying Focke Wulfs.

Overheating



**Warrant Officers,
Bob Raebel (463) &
Tom Smith (467)**

On a maximum effort night, 467 and 463 Squadrons would put up about 32 aircraft from RAF Waddington. It required a lot of organisation to get the aircraft started up in their scattered dispersals and moved around the taxiways to the take off point ready for the controller to release.

It was hard on the Merlin engines idling on the ground without good airflow over the radiators.

The ground crews were generally on hand to wave off their charges. Bob Raebel generally went to the upwind boundary fence in a jeep to watch the aircraft get away. It was not uncommon to see one go out, streaming glycol coolant where a valve had blown off due to overheating while taxiing on the ground.

Bob would radio the controller to recall the failing aeroplane.

At that time the Lancaster would be over maximum landing weight due to the full load of petrol and bombs. So they would divert to a

drop zone in The Wash where they could jettison their bombs before returning for landing.

Dumped Safe?

On night Bob Raebel in his jeep had watched the Lancasters of 463 and 467 Squadrons mill about on the taxiways waiting for their turn to takeoff. Bob watching one of the tail enders fly overhead streaming glycol coolant from his starboard inner engine. He called up the tower to get them to recall that aircraft on the W/T.

For the crew it was a two-edged sword, relief that they would be spared a night of Flak and weather over Germany. On the other hand, it meant they would have to make up another trip to complete their thirty operation tour of duty.



463 - N JO - N Nick the Nazi Neutralizer JO - N

The Lancaster, with fuel and fourteen 1000 lb bombs was over its maximum landing weight. They were directed to fly over the Wash to dump their bombs "safe" in the shallow water, where they could be recovered at low tide.

These were a new type of American tail fused bombs

and when jettisoned, the whole load exploded at once sending up an enormous shock wave.

That shock wave hit the aircraft with such violence that it ripped



Tail fused bombs being prepared at a Stirling squadron

rivets and overstressed the whole structure. The badly shaken crew landed safely but the aircraft was condemned and never flew again.

Caffeine

"Maximum efforts" were frequent whereby each squadron was expected to get as many serviceable into the air as possible. It was the Squadron's honour at stake to try to achieve the most. These maximum efforts also took their toll on groundcrew too, especially when there were consecutive nights of them.



Each aircraft had to be carefully examined for flak damage, wear and tear before it could be released to fly. As damage accumulated, the ground staff were forced to make compromises. Where they might pull an aircraft out of the line-of-battle for

a couple of days to repair flak holes, now they had to make quick repairs.

Instead of neatly doubled and riveted patches, the torn edges were dressed flat and tacked to thin pieces of wood. To seal it, some fabric would be doped over the area. The compromises never affected safety but got machines back in the air quickly until there was time or spares for proper repairs.

Often the groundcrews had to work in excess of 24 hours to keep enough aircraft operational for the next attack. Wakey-wakey (Benzadrine-Amphetamine) tablets and caffeine were de-rigueur to keep the fitters going.



J Bomb

Bomber Command developed a method of area bombing designed to destroy all factories and buildings in an area. The first wave dropped High Explosive iron bombs to block movement and breakup water and gas

pipes. This generally added fuel to fires and prevented fire fighting. Next came the lightly cased high capacity blast bombs to blow off roofs and smash windows and doors opening the buildings to fire. Lastly or mixed with the high capacity "Cookies" came the 30lb and 4lb incendiaries to start and intensify the fires.

The incendiaries were magnesium bombs which could only be smothered with sand. The Brits had a special big incendiary bomb, the J Bomb. This was filled with sodium which spontaneously burns on contact with air. The aircrews didn't like flying with a load of

these for fear of shrapnel puncturing the case. Pa took a group out to the rifle range and set one up as a target to see what would happen if a bullet went through one. The results were spectacular from one .303 bullet hole, it burned hot and fierce.

On her Back

One night a 463 Lancaster was on its bombing run to target when a flak shell burst nearby under the starboard wing causing the plane to roll inverted with more than 10,000 pounds of bombs on board. The pilot had to pull back on the controls to complete the loop and at the bottom, their speed was getting on for 400 knots as they gently recovered at 6000 feet. As their speed decayed they jettisoned their bombs and headed for home.

Lines of rivets in the wing skins had torn open like an open zipper. The aircraft was a write-off.



Fitters on film

The fitters at Waddington worked pretty normal, set hours. They came out in the mornings after 7am to begin checking over the kite that their team looked after. Normally if nothing abnormal was found, they would begin engine and hydraulic tests after lunch.

Then mid afternoon they would begin to hand the aircraft over to the aircrew for air-tests or just checking all was okay. After that they would be bombed and fuelled according to the requirements of the mission. It was a pretty set routine.

Bob Raebel, was surprised to hear an aircraft start up one morning and begin taxiing That was odd. He came out of his office and was astounded to see an official film crew set up near the taxiway and the aircraft's groundcrew in flying kit, taxiing past for the camera's, waving like veterans straight from the Battle for Berlin!

Fido

Fog was a major problem for Bomber Command and on some nights

they lost as many aircraft returning to their airfields as they had to enemy action.

A chemical engineer came up with the idea of digging a shallow trench on each side of the runway as some airfields like Waddington. Along each side in the trench was a steel petrol line with burners.



When the burners were set alight with petrol and anything cheaper, they consumed 275,000 litres per hour and burned off the fog in a vaulted arch visible as a glow to approaching aircraft.

The big worry of course was ground looping into the ditches.

Wing Sweeper Casualties

At Waddington in the winter of 1944 the aircraft became covered in snow which had to be cleared before takeoff. Ground crew were mustered with brooms to sweep the wings and stabilisers. Inevitably there were many falls and given the height of the wings and the frozen ground, a lot of broken bones.



Petrol Tankers

When ice and snow covered the dispersals, the ground crews found the aircraft tugs could not get traction to tow the Lancasters around. To move the aircraft they used the petrol tankers with their loaded weight as substitute tugs.

Queen Marys

The worst category of battle damaged aircraft was "Category E". The aircraft was dismantled and taken back to remanufacturing facilities. There, components were recovered and

resurrected into a new aircraft. To move the parts of a Lancaster, the contractors had large Bedford articulated trucks commonly known as Queen Marys.



Twenty Minutes to clear the airfield

Waddington had the reputation in Bomber Command of getting its aircraft into the air and landing them quicker than any other airfield. Aircraft returning were stacked in Circuit 500 feet above each other and as the first landed so the next would descend to the next 500' step. Aircraft with wounded, battle damaged or short of fuel were given priority.

Bob Raebel, on the ground was on orders, that if any aircraft crashed and blocked the runway, he had to clear it within 20 minutes by any means. Of course, the aircraft were still precious and there was of course the effort to try to minimise further damage as well as manage the risks of fire and explosion.



**Flt Sgt I Boulton Flight
Engineer 467 Sqdn**

When he was replaced by an RAF commissioned officer who made a pest of himself, the troops were none too careful about warning him to step clear as a towline tightened. With a broken leg he was away for a long time letting troops get on with their work.

Working on the Railroad

The Lancaster bomb-aimers had a bomb release switch called a "Mickey Mouse". It was a combination selector and drop switch and incorporated a clockwork mechanism with primitive programming. After D Day, when Allied bombers could fly around France with comparative impunity, they were put to work trying to

block the Wehrmacht moving their troops and equipment reinforcements around. The railways were a prime target and Typhoons blew up the steam locomotives while the bombers took out the railway track.

Flying directly along the empty railway line at 1000 feet with a full load of 500 lb bombs the bomb-aimer selected a 1 second delay for each bomb. For the German and French engineers, it was a real pest, having the track blown apart each 500 yards for miles.



Wimpy Prang

My old man, Bob Raebel was an engineer with 463 at Waddington. He was called out to assist at a Wimpey crash. There were no crew,

not much damage from a wheels up landing but all the fabric was burned off the aft fuselage.

It later turned out that the crew were all Kreigies in France after abandoning the burning aircraft. On autopilot it continued home, the fire went out and it came gently down in a field. (Gently might be over-egging the story a tad!)

Rollo's Oxford

Wing Commander Rollo Kingsford-Smith, nephew of Chilla, was the first Commander of 463 Squadron and as such was assigned an



Flt Sgt J. L. Henderson clear panel removed for vision

Airspeed Oxford as a communications aircraft. In this he generally flew to other Stations for meetings on strategies.

Bob Raebel saw to the maintenance of the Oxford and made sure, that it was well air-tested after all work. He once estimated that he had about 1000 hours accrued mostly on Hampdens and Oxfords.

The Rattled Armourer

Harmonisation of aircraft guns was when they were adjusted so that all guns were aimed to the one target point at say 200 yards. To do this a target was set up at the required distance and held in the gunsight.

Then with a mirror in the breech, the

gun was sighted down the bore at the target until each gun was aligned, this was in turn, done for each barrel.

One day on 463, as was usual practice for the rear turret, the armourer

sent his mate out to steady the two lower barrels by pulling them down onto his shoulders. Meanwhile the armourer climbed into the turret and noticing someone had left the guns cocked, pressed the firing button!

Not many rounds were fired, but it was quite sufficient to rattle the man holding the gun barrels!

The Arm

In 1991, I brought Dad to Sydney for 455 Squadron's last parade. As a side trip, I took him to the war memorial at Canberra, the first time he had ever been there. He spent a long time, standing, looking quietly at "G George". Eventually he said "It's funny, we got a Lanc back one night and next morning we found an arm hooked by the elbow around the fin. It had no uniform or watch and we never knew who it had come from". There was a great sadness on his face.

The LNER Railway Detective

The winter of 1944 was as hard as any other of the three years most of



463 - Y JO - Y "Youngers"

the Australians at Waddington had experienced. Here on the east coast of England there was moist deep snow and it was wet and cold. The Lancaster bombers were dispersed around the field to localise damage from an accident or air raid. In each of these dispersals

was a group of fitters who were responsible for each aircraft. These fitters built what we Australians call "humpies"; A non - permanent shelter with a warming fire where they could get out of the weather and brew up a cup of tea.

So it was that Warrant Officer in charge of maintenance engineering was called into the Station Commander's office. "Bob, I'd like you to meet Detective Bryant of the LNER Railway". As they shook hands Rollo Kingsford-Smith continued. "He's investigating the theft of

railway tarpaulins and timber. Take him around the dispersals and see what you can find.”

Outside Kingsford-Smith's office the Warrant Officer elected not to get a vehicle but trudge through the snow out to the dispersals. The two turned up the collars of their great coats and spoke little, it was bitterly cold. Bryant was grateful when shown into the comparative warmth of the humpy. It was a wood frame with a front wall and door, an LNER tarpaulin formed the roof and three walls, enamel mugs of tea were passed around by the ground staff sheltering in the humpy.

It was Bryant's first real contact with Australians. While they complained about the English weather he also listened to their stories of home. It didn't seem possible that a country could be so good or warm. It marvelled him that these men could have come so far to fight in defence of a mythical “Mother Country”. They were rough diamonds but true.

“Well”, he said getting up “thanks for the chat” and to the Warrant Officer “I think I've seen enough, if you would be so good as to see



me to the gatehouse”. “Oh” he said to the Warrant Officer as he was partway out the door “Can you get the chaps to paint that out”. The Warrant

**463 - P JO - P The Australian
Armourer has a lambskin vest send
by an Comforts Fund from Home**



**Radio operators position
in a Lancaster**

**Flt Sgt J. L.
Henderson 463
Sqn KIA
21
November 1944**



Officer followed his finger to the letters LNER stencilled on the canvas back wall facing them.

“Right”, he grinned.

The big bang at War’s End

Near the end of the War, Pa was detailed to take out a party of armourers and dispose of 30,000 pounds of time expired and redundant bombs and other explosives.

The usual process at the range was to explode the items piece by piece. However there was a party on at the Mess that night, so Pa had the whole lot grouped and wired together for a single explosion. It was perhaps the biggest explosion in the UK to that time and rocked the glasses on their shelves at Waddington fifteen miles away.



RAF fitters pushing a Lancaster into position for hangar maintenance the Lanc used a pneumatic bag brake system

**Flt Sgt L J Manning,
463 Squadron -
Bruce Buckham’s Bombaimer on
the Tirpitz and other trips**



Ground Organisation on RAF/RAAF Squadrons

Sent by John Fletcher of 101 Squadron in response to a question

Your question, that you would like to know 'what your father did' has nudged me to outline what I knew of the role of the chaps I judged to be, or close to, his counterparts on 101 Squadron. No two squadrons appear to have had identical organisational structures so there is no guarantee that of 463 and 101 were identical. The great shame is that the crucial role of Ground Crew has never been covered even briefly, in the myriad of books concentrating on air crew.

101 had an Engineering Officer, a senior officer of Squadron Leader rank. The Flight Engineers answered to him just as the Wireless Operators answered to the Signals Officer. (The pilots answered to the Flight Commander in the Flight Office in our case A Flight and we other crew members never had occasion, except when we arrived, to go there). That involved the Skipper checking in with the Flight Commander, usually a Squadron Leader. Each day, after checking the equipment for which the F/E was responsible in the crew's allocated aircraft, he reported to the Engineering Officer.

Sometimes there would be a talk on any new developments in the air-war or say the flight engineering function. In our crew, because our F/E rarely handed in his log, and advanced schoolboy howlers as to why he did not, like "It blew out the window he had opened" or "He lost his pencil and the Nav would not give him a replacement", he would be given a bawling out and some penalty.

The Engineering Officer was also responsible for and was answered to by the ground crew responsible for aircraft engineering/mechanical maintenance. I am not aware of any chap with Warrant Officer rank on 101 between the Engineering Officer and the various 'Chiefys', each of whom was responsible for 3 or 4 aircraft.

Our Chiefy, Wally Stoney, was a Sergeant who was promoted to Flight Sergeant before our time, hence the referral to him as 'Chiefy'. Wally was responsible for the maintenance of four aircraft, SR - A,B,C,D of A Flight. These four were grouped in adjacent pans with one roughly constructed hut (Humpy) located nearby. This hut was the rest spot, especially at night while the aircraft were out on a raid,

tea making location between visits by the mobile NAAFI canteen (tea and wad for a penny) and catered for all the ground crew who serviced those four aircraft. In some categories they serviced other aircraft. The hut was also a port of call for the aircrew when they made time during visits to their aircraft, in our case SR C. These ground crew chaps included the fitters, mechanics, armourers, electricians, wireless mechanics, most of whom also answered to an officer responsible squadron wide for their trade under the Eng. Off. But the Chiefy was the man responsible for all aspects of their day to day activities including determining priorities of which aircraft they would work on, when and what they did. A good Chiefy was 'mother and father' to his group. 101 usually had between 28 and 30 aircraft on strength so there were seven or eight Chiefys.

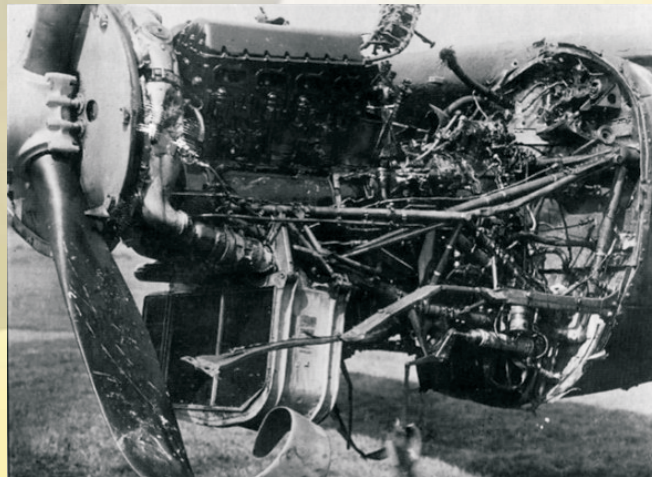
Wally, our Chiefy, technically a combination of fitter and mechanic, was responsible for ensuring SR-C Charlie was ready for us for every operation. There was a formal take over when we were dropped off at the aircraft for a raid when the Skipper signed the F 700 form which had all the necessary boxes ticked. Wally was charged with the responsibility of declaring the kite OK and, if not, with action to make it so. His word was law in that regard. He stood by as we taxied out to the perimeter track as did many of the other ground crew and was generally there when we returned, irrespective of the hour of the day or night.

Next day, he would be at the dispersals, bright eyed and bushy tailed, controlling maintenance operations. Quite often, if a fault had developed, as one blown fuse in our Charlie did on several successive trips, the electrician (Artie Mark 1- would go to work there and then Artie Mark 2 was our armourer).

John Fletcher



**463 - Z JO - Z Landed safely in Sweden by
Flying Officer A Cox after D Day (yellow
outlines on lettering set the date as after
6/6/1944)**



**The result of a Flak - burst on No4 engine brought home for the
fitters to fix**

467 SQUADRON

Sqr Aicken		F/Sqr Long	Missing
Sqr Baker		P/O Locke	finished tour
Sqr Binnie	Missing	S/L Lewis	Missing
Sqr Ball	finished tour	F/Sqr McEgan	PF
F/Sqr Buchanan	Missing	Sqr McIver	Missing Presumed down
Sqr Byers	PF	Sqr Mahoney	Missing
Sqr Carrington	Missing	S/L McKenzie	Missing
F/Sqr Cummings	PF	P/L Nichol	Missing
P/O Carmichael	Missing	P/O Park	Missing
W/O Crown		Sqr Parks	Missing
Sqr Chapman	Killed	P/O Mansford	finished tour
Sqr Curney		(G/C McKeenre)	
Sqr Clayton	finished tour	F/Sqr McClelland	finished tour
P/L Craigie	Missing	P/O Mitchell	Missing
P/O Desmond	Missing	P/O Martin	Missing (463)
F/Sqr Dixon	Missing	F/Sqr Messenger	Missing
P/O Durston	Missing	Sqr Nicoll	
F/Sqr Dunn	Missing	P/O Marshall	
F/Sqr Finch		S/L Raper	Missing Killed.
P/O Forbes	finished tour	F/Sqr Parsons	Missing
F/Sqr Fayle	Missing	F/Sqr Bond	PF
F/Sqr Farmer		F/Sqr Park	Missing
F/Sqr Fisher	finished tour	P/O Ashton	Missing
P/O Gidday	Missing	S/L Raphael	Missing
Sqr Godwin	Missing	F/Sqr Riley	Missing
Sqr Good	finished	P/O Sullivan	Missing Killed.
S/L Green	finished 2nd	P/L Sinclair	finished tour
Killed: W/C Gritti ac sqdn	Missing	F/Sqr Stewart	Missing
needed by W/C BARNER	Missing	P/O Smith	PF
Sqr Gares	Missing	Sqr Stuart	Missing
P/L Gibbs	Missing	F/Sqr Sullivan	finished tour
P/O Good	Missing	P/O Symonds	finished tour
Sqr Howe		P/L Thiele	finished tour
Sqr Hooper	finished tour	F/Sqr Tilleyson	finished tour
Sqr Hooper		F/Sqr Turner	Missing
F/Sqr Harrison	finished tour	Sqr Vine	Missing
Sqr Harter	Missing	F/Sqr Vincent	Missing
Sqr Jones	finished tour		
P/Sqr Mill	transferred to		

467 Squadron flying roster at Bottesford 1943 before moving to Waddington