



Yat

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From the Memoirs of Stacey Simkins, RAF

We were only at Bridgenorth Initial Training Wing for about four weeks before we got posted to Yatesbury, which was the wireless school. There we learnt about Morse code, what wireless sets were made of, and so on and so forth, and we did a bit of training by air experience - sending and receiving messages whilst flying. Our particular course had a civilian instructor, a fellow called Johnny Hoskins; before the war he'd been the manager of the West Ham speedway team! So that was quite something.



Yatesbury, 1943 - I am in the back row, second from the left. The chap on the right hand side in the back row was Horace Medlock. He was shot down and killed on his first operation. Next to him is Fred Ming, who survived the war. I met him on de-mob day.

We never got leave during this period of training, but we got fairly frequent "Friday Whiles", i.e. 48 hour passes from Saturday to Monday. You had to make your own way to/from wherever you spent this time. The common practice was to get to the main road and hitch a lift. On this occasion there were about a dozen of us all waiting when a flatbed lorry pulled up. "Anyone for London?" the driver called out. All of us raised our hands and he told us we could ride on the back, but he'd just delivered a load of cement and it was a bit dusty. We all, except one, climbed aboard.

'A bit dusty' was the understatement of the year. By the time we were dropped off at a tube station, we all looked like ghosts. However, we managed to get cleaned up by the time we returned on Sunday night.

When we saw the 'odd man out' we asked how he had fared. "Not bad" he answered, and told us that a Rolls Royce had stopped, and the chauffeur had told him to get in the back. When he got in, he saw this austere elderly lady sitting there. It was Queen Mary, the Queen Mother.

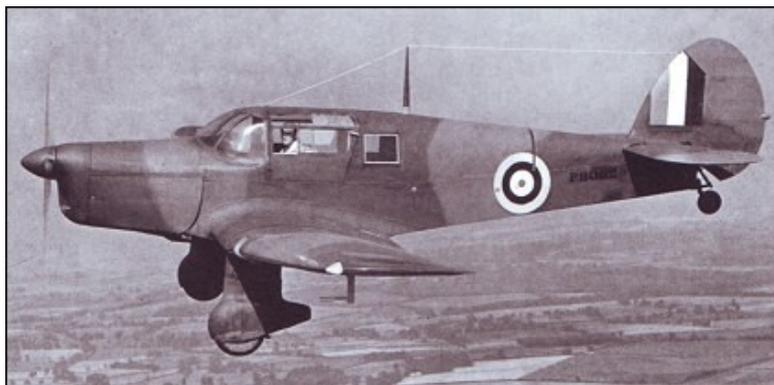
We also did our first bit of flying, in an ancient twin-engined cabin bi-plane called a D H Dragon Rapide - the sort of thing they used to trundle passengers from Croydon over to Paris before the war. We used to go up about 12 people at a time to start with, just to fly around and come down again, without doing anything else. The plane was equipped with a bucket, and when you landed the person

who'd used it last had to go round behind the hangars and empty it on the tomatoes that were growing there - it produced some beautiful specimens! I discovered that I wasn't subject to air sickness, so I never had to empty the bucket at all.



D H Dragon Rapide

Airborne wireless training was in Percival Proctors, single engine monoplanes, just the pilot and pupil. The pilots were all mad Poles. To use the radio, you had to wind out a trailing aerial. One day my pilot flew into a thundercloud (Cu Nim - Cumulo Nimbus). Proctors were not built for this treatment and we were tossed every which way, during which the trailing aerial wrapped itself round the aircraft. We were lucky to get down in one piece, with the weight on the end of the aerial bouncing on the ground behind us as we came in to land!



Percival Proctor

In September 1943 it was decided they were going to have a big parade in London to celebrate what they called Battle of Britain day. This was the nearest Sunday possible to the 15th, which was the day when they thought they'd shot down 185 German aircraft (although it wasn't quite that many, but they didn't know that at the time and nor did we). Yatesbury was selected to pick a squad to go, and my mate Vic Jordan and I managed to get onto the squad by nipping back up to the other end of the line after we'd been rejected several times. After extra drill practice, we were taken up to London by train

and billeted again at St John's Wood, but like most other Londoners we skedaddled off back home for a while.

We got back the following morning for the parade which included marching past the Victoria and Albert memorial outside Buckingham Palace, while King George took the salute. We all had a good feed and returned to Yatesbury by train, and eventually passed out of the course. I was lucky enough to finish in the top half-dozen so I was quite pleased with myself.

At the Passing Out Parade all those who had passed lined up, and the Commanding Officer came round to shake our hands and say "well done". He handed out a set of sparks to have sewn on your sleeve, your sergeant stripes, and you were supposed to get an 'S' brevet for Signaller.

Unfortunately, they hadn't had any made yet, so instead we got a Bomb-Aimer's brevet 'B', and we were instructed afterwards by the Sergeant in charge of the parade to go back to our billets and "make them B's into S's and get 'em on quick!" The best we could do was change the B into a 5 which looked a bit peculiar to start with. One or two of us had this brilliant idea that if anybody outside asked "What's that 5 for?" we'd say "Ah well, that mean's we've passed out as Pilots, Navigators, Bomb Aimers, Wireless Ops and Gunners you see, all 5!" - and some of them actually believed us!



Yatesbury, Summer 1943. I am in the back row, the 7th one in counting from the right.

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