

# FROM PEARL HARBOR TO BASSINGBOURN

Written by Norm Stuckey, Co-Pilot of Jack the Ripper

In the beginning I was an aircraft mechanic at Hickam Field, Hawaii. After witnessing and participating in the Battle of Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, I came back to California to enter the cadet pilot program. The preflight at Santa Anna was intense, physically and mentally, resulting in some cadet wash outs. The national enthusiasm to contribute to the war effort resulted in some contacts with Hollywood people wanting to entertain us.

The Primary school at Fort Stockton, Texas put us in the air in the open cockpit, a biplane made by Stearman. Like most cadets I never felt very proficient, but I made it to Basic at Pyote, Texas, but many classmates washed out. At Basic the BT-13 was enclosed but had some dangerous characteristics which caused the four student officers in my class to quit after a cadet spun in on the final turn to land.

Advanced at Stockton, California introduced me to multi engines, an AVRO Ansen fabric covered rattlettrap made in Canada. It was near graduation what we were informed for the first time that some of the cadets would not be second lieutenants but Flight Officers. Not to be commissioned on graduation was quite a jolt. I was hoping on graduation to be assigned to P-38s but my orders took me to Ephrata, Washington as a second lieutenant on a B-17.

Our crew formed up and flew around Washington. We then went to Kearney, Nebraska for the first formal concentrated B-17 training. On weekends several of us would catch a train to Omaha--175 miles east. There were many passenger trains, and when they were full we were permitted to ride in the dining car. It didn't seem like a long ride as the trains traveled fast. In Omaha we headed for the very famous watering hole, "The Cave under the Hill" in the Hill Hotel. It was a great two day excursion. After acquiring our B-17 smarts we went to Camp Kilmer, New Jersey for shipment to England. Since there was a boarding date several days away several of us went to New York City and had a great time with everyone wanting to do for us.

Our Queen Mary trip to Scotland was uneventful. My stateroom was elegant even with the jammed in bank beds. The Queen slipped into the Firth of Clyde and little did we see of Scotland as we boarded the train for Bassingborne October 1943. Bassingbourn was the premier American Base as the Air Corp took over this permanent RAF Base in 1942. I had a very nice room in the Officers Club Building. We were assigned a B-17F soon and named it the Baltimore Oriole, but it was never painted on the nose of our plane. We had some ground school and training missions before crossing the channel. Being the most noteworthy Base, the high ranking officers came from London, The movie notables came, and the King and Queen were our visitors with the cameras rolling. Shoo Shoo Shoo Baby had been there but Robert Morgan had finished his 25 missions so his crew went home.

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