



RAF W/O Roy Woodcock

Roy was born in Skelmanthorpe, near Huddersfield, in 1923. His father worked as a chauffeur at the Grantley Hall estate, near Ripon, and in 1924 the Woodcock family moved into a house on the estate. Roy attended Ripon Grammar School.

After the war began, we were only doing lessons for three hours in the morning because Leeds Grammar School were evacuated to Ripon and they came to our school in the afternoon. Early in 1940, all the boys were told to pair off with a friend and to go down to the playing fields and dig air raid trenches or slit trenches in preparation for air raids. These trenches were about six foot deep and then we found old shed doors or bits of corrugated iron to cover them and keep the water out. By this time I must admit I had lost interest in schooling because the war was coming closer. RAF Dishforth was just outside Ripon and Whitley bombers used to drone slowly over on the circuits. They came right across the school about a thousand foot up and I thought "That's the job for me, flying those things." The Air Ministry was looking for new recruits and so I left school and applied for a job in The Air Ministry, which I got and settled in Harrogate.



Roy Woodcock.

On 1 April 1940, I was told to report to The Grand Hotel in Harrogate which had been taken over by the RAF and I was sent to an office at Harlow Manor where my job involved dealing with the provisioning of spare parts for Spitfire aircraft. I was a member of The ATC [Air Training Corps] and I joined the Local Defence Volunteers, which later became The Home Guard, where we did quite a lot of marching, rifle drill, throwing live grenades and shooting exercises so when I eventually joined The RAF all that sort of thing had become second nature to me. I didn't have any problems with it whatsoever.

It was well into 1941 before I received my call-up papers. I went to the Recruiting Office in Leeds in early 1942 and I was told to report at RAF Cardington for the aircrew selection. I felt fit and I had already learnt a lot and I passed with flying colours, but it was bitterly cold. The worst weather I have ever lived through!

I was told I had been attested, was given a number and told "right, we will call you when we want you", I knew that meant a wait of six months, so I went back to my job and carried on with ATC and especially The Home Guard training because it kept me interested and kept me fit. In July 1942 I received calling up papers to report to St John's Wood.

I reported to Lords Cricket Ground and we sat in the Members' stand in front of the pavilion, all us lads with our civvy clothes on, and then we were billeted in Avenue Close. I remember being inoculated in both arms, we stood in a long queue and were given our jabs. Some of the lads flaked out and had to get out into the fresh air. After



about ten days, we were sent to Brighton, an Aircrew Dispersal Centre, and after only two or three weeks there, we were sent to the aircrew camp at Ludlow in Shropshire. We slept in bell tents and there we did route marches and more training. One day we were called on parade and a Sergeant asked for volunteers for ITW [Initial Training Wing] at Scarborough, and I was zip, straight to the front! We were numbered off, packed our bags and put on the train to Scarborough. I went into 10ITW based in the town centre. There we had to buckle down to training, navigation, flight, details, principles of flight and that sort of thing. We were very busy and we were always marched in, as a squad, to the classrooms. We also did PT and swimming, and I remember the food was quite good and plentiful. I must have put a lot of weight on and I grew another couple of inches. We had a medical every six months and when I went for my next, the doctor said to me "oh, you have grown! You won't fit into any gun turrets". I thought to myself, "well, good. That's the last job I want!" He said, "we will get your records altered. You are now fit to be a pilot, navigator, bomb aimer or wireless operator."

I was then posted to The Elementary Flying School at Derby and billeted at Repton public school but I didn't do any flying there, I went to a rough farmer's field, just outside Burton-on-Trent, where there were three or four Nissen huts and about a dozen Tiger Moths, and then we started flying training. I had quite a good instructor, I think he was an operations man who had been on Blenheims, having a rest teaching us to fly. I thoroughly enjoyed flying a Tiger Moth. I thought it was a doddle of an aircraft and after eight hours, the instructor said,

"okay, it's all yours, take it up", and I took off, did a circuit, came in, did what I thought was a perfect three point landing and went and picked up the instructor. He said "okay, climb up to 6,000 feet and we will do some more advanced flying". So then I did four more hours and then I went home and then reported to Heaton Park in Manchester, another Aircrew Disposal Centre, and after a month there doing various odd jobs, such as guarding War Weapons Week aircraft, we were posted to Canada.

We went by train to Gourock, down the Clyde, and as we got there we saw this great big liner in the middle of the bay, *The Queen Mary*. We boarded and stayed there for two days whilst they cleaned out all the garbage and waste from the 12,000 American soldiers that it had just brought across. I remember seeing ferries coming down bringing more passengers, a lot of chaps in fancy uniforms. They were Italian Prisoners of War and they were being taken to America and Canada to work on farms. There must have been about a thousand of them, I should think.

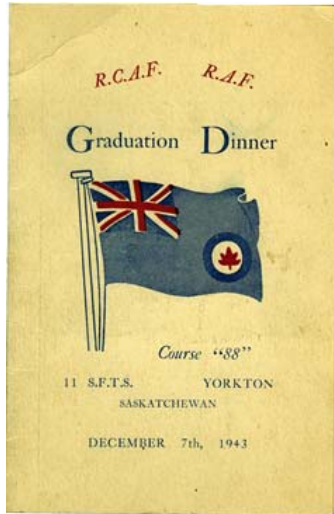
We sailed to New York and I remember thinking, "me, a country boy, in America of all places!" I saw The Statue of Liberty and all the rest of it, we weren't supposed to



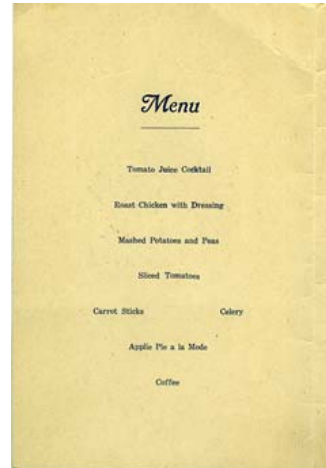
No 4 Flight, No 1 Squadron, No 10 ITW.
October 1942.



get off as we were bound for Canada, but we did manage to talk the American crew into letting us have an evening in New York.



The Menu card for the RCAF graduation dinner enjoyed by Roy and his fellow Yorkton graduates....



... roast chicken with all the trimmings!

The next day we went up to Monkton in New Brunswick, Canada. We were told not to unpack and after a few days we got on a troop train and travelled across Canada and I got off at Moose Jaw where there was a training school. We were flying Cornels monoplanes - single engined of course. They were a bit heavier than the Tiger Moth and although I preferred the Tiger Moth, I soon got used to the Cornell and after eighty or ninety hours, I passed out from there and was told I was going to be a multi-engined man. I didn't particularly want to be a fighter pilot, I had no great yen to be one of the glamour boys, so I didn't mind at all. I was sent to a Canadian station at Yorkton, north of Moose Jaw. There I was flying another American aircraft, the Cessna Crane, it was twin-engined, very light, fairly fast and pretty easy to fly. Occasionally we did some blind flying on Avro Ansons, they were heavier and frankly, I thought they were a nicer aircraft to fly - more comfortable - I did quite a few hours on them. I passed all the tests and was awarded my wings at Yorkton and after my passing out parade, I was given a week to get back to Monkton because although I had been asked if I wanted to stay in Canada, I needed to get back to my family. My Father had been cycling to work in the blackout, had been knocked off his bike and was seriously injured and although he eventually recovered, he was never the same man again. He didn't really know where he was and could be a bit difficult to handle so I was really keen to get home to help my Mother who was busy looking after some young girl evacuee from London. I also wanted to get back to the war. I felt I wasn't doing my bit to help and I wanted to get back into it, oddly enough.



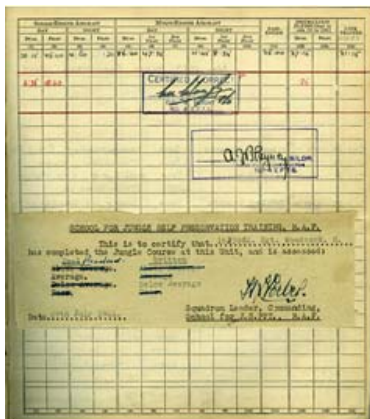
The Second World War Experience Centre
Reproduction of an article from the Centre's website
<http://www.war-experience.org/collections/air/alliedbrit/woodcock/default.asp>

So I set off back to the UK from Halifax on *The Louis Pasteur*, a French-built boat, which brought us over to Liverpool.

When I got back from Canada I was sent to Personnel Receiving Centre in Harrogate and I had just got back home when we got the dreaded telegram saying that my brother had been killed fighting in Italy.

Harrogate was just a receiving centre so from there I was sent to the flying school at Brough in East Yorkshire, flying Tiger Moths again and I did twenty hours there. The idea was to get us back from the ideal flying conditions of Canada to the UK winter weather conditions. Then I was sent to Blackpool, and given an overseas posting. We were issued with khaki drill and a topi, a hat we had to wear but never did, and then I got the boat once again at Glasgow, *The Alcantara*, and that took us to India via the Mediterranean, to Bombay and a RAF depot called Warley, down the coast from Bombay but we weren't there long.

I was posted to RAF Pooona. When we got there, we found the aircraft weren't fit to fly, they were unserviceable so we were taken up to a Jungle Training School outside Pooona at a place called Marbalashwar (ph) up in the hills. We were there for a fortnight and it rained every minute of the time we were there, it just never stopped, just steady rain all the time. It was very, very warm and the humidity was one hundred per cent. Every morning we got up and there was mould everywhere, on our boots, on everything. Everything was damp.



A page from Roy's logbook, preserved at the Centre, showing his completed 'jungle self-preservation' training.

Year	Aircraft Type	Hours	Remarks
FEB 20	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 21	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 22	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 23	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 24	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 25	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 26	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 27	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 28	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 29	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER
FEB 30	SP. BULLOCK	10	OPERATIONS AS GUNNER

A later page from Roy's logbook. The Special Duties are marked in red.

We were doing jungle preservation training. We were reported on, and I got an average for practical work and below average for written though I never wrote anything! You couldn't write because the paper was always wet and damp. This was the only below average I got throughout my time in the RAF and I was upset about it. Then I was posted to RAF Kolar, to the Liberator Conversion Unit, and I was attached



with a crew including Ray Bullen, a New Zealander, Captain of the crew. Smithy the navigator, and a gunner and a wireless operator called Tunnel. I was the second pilot or co pilot. I was amazed at the size of the Liberators and when I saw all the instruments I thought I would never remember them all. Then we started training in southern India near Bangalore. We were about 4,000 foot up. The climate was very good - really excellent although a lot of people soon became sick with jaundice. We lived in tents at first and then we moved into bashers, built of bamboo. After only ten or twelve hours on the Liberator, I was told to go out with a crew I didn't know, as a second pilot. We were to fly up and down this area looking for some Thunderbolts which had gone missing. We had to cover about a hundred miles of countryside. We set off in the morning and we didn't see anything so we landed and had lunch at RAF Yelahanka, and continued the search in the afternoon. We were only about a thousand feet up when the only accident I was involved in happened. The two engines on one side of the Liberator cut out for unknown reasons and the pilot couldn't keep it in the air. He said, "Lookout we will have to ditch this", we didn't have long to find anywhere to land, and I remember he said, "I am going in there". It was what we called a tank, a sort of pond or dam built by local farmers to catch the fallen rain during the monsoon season to keep for watering the crop fields in the dry season. So we ploughed into this tank, into two or three feet of water with mud underneath. The Liberator had a high wing with the fairly heavy aircraft underneath, so the bomb bay, the cabin and the nose plane had crumpled a bit and unfortunately two of the crew who were sat behind us in the cockpit were trapped.

My memory is a bit vague because there was bodies and equipment being thrown about in the cockpit. I don't remember getting a clout on the head, but I have still got a bump from something that hit me. I can't remember getting out of the aircraft, but when I came to, I was in this tank. We soon realised that two of the crew were trapped and we had a job getting them out. One was alright but the other died of his injuries.

We never found out what happened to the aircraft. I expect the aircraft was never recovered, just dismantled on the spot. There was an enquiry but I am not quite sure what the outcome was. Anyway we were flown back to Kolar and I got on with the training with the crew I had been posted to and after a bit, we were told we would be personnel for a new bombing squadron called 358 that was being formed

We practised formation flying and dropping practice bombs, and after another week or two at this squadron, we flew in formation up to RAF Digri, a few miles outside Calcutta but joined 159 Squadron, a squadron bombing Japanese targets in Burma and Siam. The CO told us we were changing roles to special duties and we forgot about bombing and started training flights, learning to drop bods and containers for SOE





people behind the lines. We had to be at 300 feet and no more to drop containers and a thousand feet was the ideal height for dropping bodies. We joined 357 Squadron at Jessore, a few miles away in Bengal doing these special duties and when we got there, about seven aircraft went out on these special duties and I think I am right in saying that of the seven, three didn't come back. Nobody knows what happened to them and they have never been found since.

The first two special duties ops I did were fourteen and sixteen hours. We were given a map reference for a DZ [dropping zone], it wasn't marked, we just flew to the area, our navigator was very good and picked up an identifiable point on the ground, the bend of a river or a bridge over a river, and then we flew from there on a DR [direct reading] to the DZ. Everybody was looking out for the DZ, and all of a sudden we would see probably a green light from the ground and we knew we had got it. The pilot said, "Dive lads!", and we had to drop a bit of height, down to 300 feet before we dropped our containers.

These were mostly night operations. The only time we had a daylight operation, which was a bit scary, was a long haul across to north French Indo-China and the mountains of the south China area. We dropped down and saw these French guys. They had apparently fallen out with the Japanese in French Indo-China and there had been some fighting so the French pulled out and were driven up towards China for some reason. We saw them marching up the road and a couple of white sheets had been placed on the ground so we dropped the containers on to there and then we then came back. That was a long haul - fourteen or fifteen hours - and we came back to base.

There nothing to debrief really, or very little. If we dropped the containers then the people on the ground would wireless back saying that the containers had been received and thanks, or that the containers had been received spread all over the place or dropped on the wrong side of the hill, so there was no real need for any debriefing. We either dropped the containers or we didn't and the guys back home at headquarters already knew that.

There was only one occasion when we couldn't find the DZ and had to bring the containers back. Apart from that we dropped all the containers where they should have been dropped, and that included a twenty hour flight down into Malaya not far from Singapore, which took us right across the Indian Ocean and back, the best part of 3,000 miles. The aircraft we flew were very good. Some were not so new, but they were pretty reliable on the whole.

Early in 1945, the Army was pushing down through Burma and were getting a lot of help from the locals, plus the SOE people fighting in the jungle with them. It was all go, and we kept a check on the map as the Army was gradually getting lower and lower and by the time our tour was over, the Army was just about to take Rangoon.

We finished flying in Jessore and I went on a month's leave with some of the crew. We went to Darjeeling and we just sat around, ate, drank and played bridge most of the time. We found a Chinese restaurant there called The American Kitchen, I



remember it very well, the food and the staff were good and we used to go there in the morning and have breakfast and stayed over lunch playing bridge. Then in the afternoon we would go back and sleep off the effects of having too much to eat.

After my holiday, I was posted to Headquarters RAF Burma in Calcutta and after two or three weeks, shipped to Rangoon. Headquarters RAF Burma was to be stationed in the law courts building, I thought it was quite a fine building, the rooms inside were all panelled with different wood. We stayed there a week or two but there was nothing for us to in Rangoon. There were no shops or anything and a lot of the war damage hadn't been cleared.

I remember looking at the maps with the lads one day and discussing how far we had to go, over a thousand miles to Singapore which was obviously the next target we were aiming for. Within a few days we heard on the radio that the Americans had dropped an atomic bomb on Hiroshima and then two or three days later Nagasaki got one. We thought there was no way the Japanese could carry on with two towns destroyed and a quarter of a million people killed and sure enough they surrendered. So all of a sudden, we were left with nothing to do. The war was over, let's get back home! Well, the first people to go home were the injured and sick and I remember some POW were brought to Rangoon and put on hospital ships to be taken home.



Graduation souvenir, Course 84, 33 EFTS.

I was happy to go back to India so I was posted to RAF Peshwar on the North West Frontier, where I was given a job in the navigation section training Indian pilots to fly Spitfires. I waited there until my number came up, which was well into 1946. Then I went back to Bombay for a week or two, then went home on *The Georgic*. It took two or three weeks to get back to Liverpool where, of course, it was raining. We went down to RAF Kirkham, for demobilisation, and handed in all our kit. I was given civilian clothes and a rail warrant back to Harrogate, and a long leave with pay and I went home.

Back home, I felt I had to help my Mother, so I went back to The Air Ministry and I was taken on again as a temporary clerk. I took the Civil Service exam and became a clerical officer and I stayed in The Air Ministry for some years.

The war years made me grow up very early I think. I was a rather timid youth because I had been a small boy and didn't carry a lot of weight, and when I was trying to play rugby at school I was knocked about a bit and I didn't like it. The RAF gave me confidence, when I was flying, I had to grow up quickly because I was in charge of an aircraft and - oh yes, it made a real man of me I think.