

RAYMOND VICTOR BASE

(14.8.25 - 2.3.20)

SERVICE IN ROYAL AIR FORCE 1943-1947

I was interested in aircraft recognition at the time of the Liverpool Blitz (1940-41) and became a member of the Air Raid Spotters Club, having obtained all three grades in aircraft recognition. As a result on some nights I would assist the Royal Observer Corps at their post on Seaforth beach.

ATC (Air Training Corps): This was based at my Grammar School and we were taught drill, aircraft recognition, weapon handling, including dismantling the .303 Browning machine-gun. We also had a Rolls Royce Kestrel part-sectioned engine.

Padgate [July 43]: This was the RAF aircrew selection station. There were 3 days of medicals, maths and aptitude tests, after which I was selected as a flight engineer and sworn into the RAF.

Joining up [Nov. 43]: I went to London with my father and stayed overnight in foggy London. The following morning I went to Lords Cricket Ground where I was issued with uniform, kit and kitbag. This was followed by a brief medical and three inoculations. Our group was then transferred to Regents Park where we were billeted in a block of flats in two-tier bunks. The mess was in the basement. We were taught basic drill and PT in the park.

ITW (Initial Training Wing) [Dec. 43]: We travelled by overnight train to Bridlington, to be met by a Corporal named Hatch. We were billeted in houses on the hill. As it was winter it was dark at 7a.m., and when marching to breakfast the rear member of the group carried a red paraffin lamp – usually me! The paraffin was very useful to help lighting the fire in the house. Once again there was drill, and PT runs along the beach to Flamborough Head. Training included Morse Code in a bombed-out hotel; clay pigeon shooting on the Promenade; lying in the snow firing rifles and machine-guns including 38 Webley pistols. Aircraft recognition was usually after lunch in what had been an amusement arcade. On Christmas Eve in a violent storm we helped rescue some soldiers in a boat as one of our team swam out with a line. The Promenade was so icy that we were unable to have our passing-out parade.

St. Athan [Feb. 44]: This was an 18-month course, half of which was Basic and the rest was Aircraft Type Training for which I was selected for Lancasters. Basic included airframes, engines, electrics, instruments, hydraulics, pneumatics and propellers. In Airframes we had to rig a Tiger Moth; in Engines we had to strip, rebuild and run a DH Gypsy Major. The type training was similar but related to the Lancaster. Engine runs were done on Blackburn Bothas and all marks of Miles Masters. In between there were aircraft recognition and handling

military equipment including hand-grenades. After passing tests in all of the above we were awarded the Flight Engineer brevet and made up to Sergeant.

Stradishall [July 44]: After a week's leave I went by train from Liverpool to Cambridge, then on a branch line which seemed to wander over the countryside to a little station where RAF lorries were waiting to take us to the camp. In a hangar the Flight Engineers were selected by Captains to join their crew. These crews of 6 members had completed operational training on Wellingtons. I joined the crew of Captain Martin, a South African, who was selecting a heavy bomber crew. This was made up of:

Captain (later Major) – Ronnie Martin, SAAF
 Sgt. Charlie Searle – Navigator (2 ops)
 P.O. Phil Purdy – Navigator (remaining 28 ops)
 P.O. Johnny Bowls – Bomb Aimer
 Sgt. Derek Cook – Wireless Operator
 Sgt. Andy Andrews – Mid Upper Gunner
 Sgt. Les Parsons – Tail Gunner
 Sgt. Ray Base – Flight Engineer



Crew of IL-D (L to R): Derek Cook, Les Parsons, Ray Base, Capt. Martin, Phil Purdy, Andy Andrews, Johnny Bowls

As the runways at Stradishall were being repaired, we were transferred to RAF Chedburgh.

Chedburgh [July 44]: This was No.1653 HCU (Heavy Conversion Unit) coded A3, with clapped-out Short Stirling IIIs being used for conversion onto 4-engined aircraft. Having been trained for Lancasters we had to do a week's crash course on Stirlings: day and night circuits & bumps, followed by high-level bombing runs, also night and day flying. We never got a Stirling

above 14,000ft before the engines started to fail. On circuits & bumps, taxiing round the perimeter track the brakes got so hot that an airman had to spray them with water. Also the air compressor was so weak that I had to top up the system with a portable air bottle. Next stop LFS (Lancaster Finishing School).

Feltwell [Aug. 44]: This was No.3 LFS coded A2. Feltwell was a grass airfield with dual control Lancasters. Here we did the usual circuits & bumps, bombing and fighter affiliation with Hawker Hurricanes. We were then posted to an operational squadron.



Lancaster aircrew & engineers: Ray is second from right

Witchford [Sept. 44]: This was No.115 Squadron with the codes KO and IL, with Lancasters I and III. Witchford was based a few miles from Ely with the Cathedral a useful landmark. The squadron was divided into 3 flights – A, B and C. A and B were coded KO and C coded IL, each nominally 12 aircraft. We were attached to C flight with our South African captain in command; A flight was commanded by an Australian and B flight by a Canadian. We were billeted in Nissen huts with a stove in the centre and two rows of beds for us NCOs, with a long walk to the Mess.

I completed 30 ops, mostly with the same crew. The first was a night op to Stuttgart, where we were attacked by a Me163 rocket fighter but he missed. The second was a daylight op to bomb the gun positions on Flushing Island. We were hit by flak and the navigator was hit in the leg but continued to work; he was hospitalised and later awarded the DFM (Distinguished Flying Medal). The majority of ops were daylight. When leading the squadron to Hattingen we were hit in the starboard engine and dropped down to 14,000ft but pressed on to the target on 3

engines. Our skipper, now a Major, was awarded the DFC (Distinguished Flying Cross). We later converted to GH precision bombing and did the bombing of Wesel before Monty crossed the Rhine. In all: five times to Cologne, many times to the Ruhr, the longest was to Dresden arriving back with empty fuel tanks. Final op was to Potsdam, a district of Berlin. We also did the experimental dropping of food supplies for Holland, demonstrated before 3 Group at Lacey Green with sacks containing 1,245 lb of food. About halfway through I was made Flight Sergeant. I also did several hours of simulated flying in the Link Trainer.

Catterick [May-June 45]: Posted here for reclassification. While here VE Day was declared and we were given 48 hours leave (our Rear Gunner took me to his home in Newcastle for the celebration). I was allocated to Maintenance Unit (MU) drawing offices.

Sealand [Aug. 45]: No.30 MU. This had been an Aircraft Maintenance Unit with an Elementary Flying School and was being converted to a Motor Transport Unit. My job with three others was to check out all the building electrics, gas, water and any other features, and make scale drawings. We could wander about for hours, only appearing for meals. With Steve Laird I acquired a Ruge Whitworth motorbike with a seized engine which we got going. Sealand was a pre-war station so accommodation was in brick buildings. Chester was the nearest city and the VJ Victory Parade in September was held there. Also Liverpool was not far away so I got home most weekends. About this time I bought my first motorcar – a Morris 8 Tourer.

St. Athan [July 46]: I was posted to the drawing office at No.32 MU – Aircraft Maintenance, which was very active. The area covered many miles of all sorts of aircraft. I was first billeted in the main block, later in disused married quarters. At this time all the aircrew NCOs were reduced to Sergeants but we kept our previous pay. Main work was organising and accounting the vast quantity of spares. At Christmastime in the Drawing Office we drew and made model wooden toys for charity. The winter of 1946-47 was one of the worst with heavy snowfalls, with only emergency electricity at certain times from the station generators. We were completely cut off by snowbound roads for a week and supplies were flown in on the only runway that was kept open.

Squiresgate [May 47]: Here I was demobbed (demobilised) and issued with a suit, hat and shoes. Thus ended my RAF service, on 1 July 1947.





**ROYAL AIR FORCE
PERSONNEL MANAGEMENT AGENCY
ROYAL AIR FORCE INNSWORTH
GLOUCESTER GL3 1EZ**

Telephone: (Direct) 01452 712612 Ext 7689
(RAFTN) 95471 Ext 7689
(Fax) 01452510877

Your Reference:

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Our Reference: PMA/132104/19/B/76529/IM1b

Date: November 2004

CERTIFIED TRUE STATEMENT OF SERVICE

EX -AC1 RAYMOND VICTOR BASE (3010920).

Enlisted into the Royal Air Force: 6 JULY 1943.

Released Class A: 1 JULY 1947.

Trade on Release: DRAUGHTSMAN.

Highest Rank: FLIGHT SERGEANT.

Overall Conduct: VERY GOOD.

P STAFFORD(MR)
E1
PMA IM1B2A1





I received the 3 standard WW2 service medals:
 1939-1945 Star with Bomber Command clasp;
 the France & Germany Star;
 and the War Medal 1939-1945

In May 2012 my wife Roxy and I visited RAF Coningsby, Lincolnshire, to see the Battle of Britain Memorial Flight aircraft. When I mentioned my WW2 experience in the Lancaster, I was pleased to receive an invitation to go on board. Reaching the Flight Engineer's position was more difficult than I remembered – I used to clamber over the main wingspar quite easily despite the encumbrance of parachute and toolbox.



RVB/11.11.17