

The following was written by T-26 Herbert Gordon Treloar about his experiences whilst serving with the Airfield Construction Service from 28th May 1941 to 27th July 1946. Now in his 90's, Gordon has recently come back into communication with changed opinion for allowing his article to be brought to us all March, 2011

APRIL 1993

As an old member of the Works Squadrons but a new member of the A.C.B. Association, I read with interest the information given in the 1991/92 newsletter and was still amazed to learn that these squadrons remained in being right up to 1966 when I was of the belief they were disbanded about 1946 time. I attended the Annual Dinner at the "Cophthorns Hotel" last year, 1992, and while I found no-one there who could talk with me of our wartime exploits, I did find the weekend both interesting and enjoyable and hope to be there again this year.

During my conversations with various members, I found it difficult to relate to the years from 1946 on as I still don't have a clue what the squadrons did or even what part of the world they operated from. Likewise, I feel sure they didn't have a clue what it was like during the war years in Works Squadrons. With this in mind, I have decided to write a somewhat brief account of my time in the Squadron and hope it will shed a little light on the subject, bearing in mind I was just an ordinary bod and in no way special or even interesting most of the time. I do not want this writing published but if it could be used to cross-check other information, all well and good.

Already I am finding dates and names almost impossible to remember and with a war on, things were very secretive and most of the time we were not told where we were going or what we were to do. Remembering the slogans of course "Careless Talk Costs Lives" and "Be like dad, keep mum" and then there was a Censor with his thick blue pencil should our letters contain information of use to the enemy.

I should imagine the personnel from 1946 on would, by and large, be National Service men, all in for two years and for the most part very young. Whereas during the war men were called up from 18 to 50, much older.

I had my medical and accepted for the RAF at Plymouth and at the interviews with officers afterwards they decided that after my initial training I should be sent on a Gunnery Course for ground to ground and ground to air fire, after which I could be sent to Wales on an Air Gunnery Course. I was called to Blackpool, early 1941, kitted out which took a week and then onto Morecambe for my initial training. "Square bashing on the Sea front for a further five weeks and then my first posting to a Gunnery Class at Waterbeach, Cambridge. Looking back, I should imagine this was part of the newly formed RAF Regiment for our gunnery and lectures were by RAF NCOs while our drill and marching everywhere was taken by a Sergeant from a Scots Guards Regiment. Our boots were burnt and then boned and then, with a lot of spit and polish, shone like mirrors, and creases in our trousers good enough to shave with while our cap badges and buttons gleamed with a white hue, front and back.

Some two weeks later, I was ordered to the Flight Office where I was confronted by an officer and senior NCOs and was given a terrible dressing down for daring to re-muster without first informing those people concerned in the office. This, of course, was news to me also as I had not re-mustered at all hardly knew what it meant. Some time later, I received a letter informing me that a Mr. Bevan of the "Bevan Boys in Coalmine fame" had made a directive to the Services stating that "Where possible, men being called up for military service should be used in their civilian trades". I was the ordered to report

at once to the Works and Bricks Flight for trade test at Waterbeach. Next morning, dressed in my razor sharp trousers (which was done by rubbing soap inside the crease) and wearing my boned up shining boots, I was given a boiler suit, a few tools and taken off in a 5cwt. van where I had to build a big, deep manhole complete with steps and corbelled in on the top to take a concrete cover of a certain size. By this time, my boots were very scuffed and dirty. A young Officer came by to check on my progress several times and seemed a nice fellow indeed, much different to my former Officers and NCOs. Of course, I did not like this change at all really but my outlook changed when I was told I was now a LAC Bricklayer and my pay had increased from Group (5) up to Group (2) but the bad news was I had not been in long enough to be made up, so had to wait a while for that.

I was then posted to what is now Exeter Airport where I joined about five other bricklayers building brick foundations for Nissen Huts. This went on for about four weeks when a Sergeant asked for a bricklayer to go to RAF St. Eval in Cornwall. I had to put in for this posting as it was very near to my home town of St. Ives and so I joined 49 Works Flight where I stayed for more than two years.

The Flight was run by a Flight Sergeant and a Corporal who ran the office very efficiently but their knowledge of building was very limited which made life rather difficult for the handful or so men. However, I soon found out that I had worked with the civilian Clerk of Works a year or so before and his influence made life more normal for us. Needless to say, these NCOs were soon removed, we were reinforced with other trades to about 50 men and the new NCOs really did know their stuff and we were in business.

St. Eval was about the biggest Coastal Command Station and a very busy one with, I was told, about 5,000 men and 3,000 WAAF's., so as one could expect, the Station was bombed very badly many times so there was no shortage of work for us. Nevertheless, the living quarters were never rebuilt and just about all personnel lived in big houses or hotels from Newquay to Padstow and taken on and off duty by transport vehicles. Amongst the small number of people living on camp was, of course, the 49 Works Flight. We had to be on camp to deal with whatever emergency arose. We were divided into Red and Blue watch which meant you were on duty standby every other night. Our main task was to keep the aircraft flying so with anything at all wrong with the runway or flying field, we dealt with it in double quick time. It must be remembered we had no JCBs then. We filled bomb craters with big stones, all man handled, topped off with small stones, then blinded with sand, and when we had three bombs on the runway and two on the flying field with aircraft due back in two hours from patrol, it was indeed hectic but we did it somehow. Later on, we did have a D4 Bulldozer to help.

My job in all this would be to make good the brick ducting which took the Flarepath Lights and Cables. The defence of the aerodrome at first was by "PAC", Parachute and Cable, and when they were disbanded, some of the men went with the Regiment and a few came to us. The Royal Marines took over the role of defence with BOFORs automatic 40 mm Ack Ack guns and we of 49 Works Flight built the gun emplacements with concrete blocks. This was indeed a big job for us even with a lot of help from the Marines. While building one of those gun positions, our Sergeant and myself were sent for to report to the Photographic Office where we were taken into a room by an officer and put to watch some film taken by a PRU aircraft, "Photographic Reconnaissance. Unit", of St. Eval taken that night with Infra Red film. The officer could then tell us everything the Works Flight was working on around the airfield. He then reminded us we were informing the enemy of the whole defence system of the camp. From then on

we had to camouflage most everything we did under vehicle nets. A few days later we were informed it was effective.

We built many Nissen Huts in various places for Workshops, etc, and Blister Hangers around the dispersal points for aircraft. We worked on buildings to the waterworks, built bus shelters, all sorts of jobs in the bomb dump, from camouflage to extending the pulley girders for lifting and moving bombs. At one period, a pack of German U boats was sighted in the Biscay and Western Approaches and bombed relentlessly for several days, this meant nobody left their post during this time. I was given a job to assist the bomb armourers in the underground fusing area; my job being to screw the tail fins on to the bomb while the armourer set the fuses. This action was most successful and all personnel on the camp were granted an extra three days leave.

I think the job I did about three miles outside the camp I enjoyed doing most of all, building pigeon lofts. There were three really big lofts, each looked after by two men with a Corporal, and each loft housed what seemed to be hundreds of birds and each loft operational for about three days at a time with two lofts stood down. Each big aircraft on operations had a yellow can with pigeons inside taken on board by the Wireless Operator. When flying, the birds were launched down the Flare Chute with a message attached to the leg, but when the aircraft ditched in the sea, birds were released with the position for the air-sea rescue boat. The yellow can acted as a life float and also stained the sea yellow for observation by search aircraft. This happened while I was there. A Lockheed Hudson ditched over 200 miles away. The crew was rescued and came along to thank the pigeons with some extra grain for saving them.

We built low brick huts outside the end of each runway which housed the homing signal device for aircraft, and when aircraft ran off the perimeter and got stuck in good St. Eval mud, 49 Works Flight helped to get them out.

At this time of my service life, I was fully resigned to the fact that I would be in the RAF for the rest of my life. We were losing the war on all fronts and our losses rather high. It is now known that at least 731 lives were lost at RAF St. Eval, not counting units on attachment, such as 49 Works Flight. We lost one man, a steel erector by trade, called Wright I believe, in a fall. One morning I was ordered along with my mate and opposite number in Blue Watch to go to our satellite aerodrome which is now RAF St. Mawgan and is still operational today, and made contact with an American Works Unit which asked for some help from us. Now these were the first Americans I had ever spoken to. The Officer informed us he had a strict deadline to build and get ready something like 15 Nissen Huts, some double, in a little under four weeks and there was no way of doing it. They had foundations and floors ready for four Huts but found the bits to 15 Nissen Huts dumped on site in one big heap rather daunting and a big puzzle. We then brought some of our chaps along for one day to erect one Nissen hut and told the Americans to copy us, this they did and erected the rest with ease. Us two bricklayers, while being looked after by the Americans, built up all the partitions and end walls forming various rooms, while our joiners sent along the doors and frames all made up. We worked long hours and finally made it on time. On the deadline date, all the equipment arrived for the huts, offices, Orderly Room, Sickbay, Ops. Room, etc and all the officers. It was then we found out that these huts were the American H.Q. to receive all the big aircraft to fly across the Atlantic from America, land and then distributed around to all the other aerodromes and squadrons -Liberators, Flying Fortresses, B17s, etc. On leaving, the Americans gave us as many cartons of Camel and Lucky Strike cigarettes as we could carry and many other goodies which we all appreciated back at camp. Our Officer, who visited us each week, was a Dutchman by

the name of Visseur (?). When next he called round, he gave us a letter to read from the Americans thanking us for helping them so much and was indeed a glowing report all round for the Flight. It was on the strength of this report I was offered my FOT (Foreman of Trades) without taking further trade tests.

We had by now lost our RAF blue uniforms and were now in Army uniforms complete with gaiters and Windcheaters, but we did retain our blue shirts, Forage caps and RAF chevrons.

The Royal Canadian Engineers came to St. Eval and extended the concrete runways and dispersal points and one of the last jobs they did was to concrete a large over site base upon which 49 Works Flight erected a large metal hanger and then built the necessary walls and turned the whole thing into a Cinema for the camp. Alas, we never saw the completed Cinema for the whole of 49 Works Flight was away to Chivenor in North Devon which was extended by Works Squadrons and is still an Operational Station today. Our task for a few short weeks was to help finish off various little jobs before being ordered to hand in all tools and equipment to stores. We were billeted outside of camp in a nice village called Braunton and the billet consisted of wood huts with bunk beds so close you could hardly get between them. The whole camp was so bad my address was officially Hut B2 "STALAG" RAF CHIVENOR. Whoever gave it the name "STALAG" must have known what a German prison of war camp was really like: Awful! The day after handing our tools and equipment back into stores, we paraded as a complete Unit on the end of one of the runways in our various Flights and we of the 49 Works Flight looked rather small standing there in our best walking out uniforms amongst so many other Flights, in fact I didn't know so many Works Flights existed. We were then informed we were going to re-group into new Flights and Squadrons and that we no longer had our old Flight numbers, so that was the end of the 49 Works Flight for us.

The first order given was that all men over 30 years of age had to fall out and were marched away along with men below A medical group. The remainder of us, when our name was called, joined the Flight being formed at the time and at the end of the day, I was in 5012 Squadron 5538 Artisan Flight and that was the first Squadron number I had. From then on, we got bulled up, started route marches, a lot of P.T., learning how to build Field Kitchens, weapon training and in general, took on the roll of soldiers. I am not sure about this, but I believe two Squadrons and a Plant Squadron were formed that day at Chivenor. 5538 Flight was then detached to RAF Portreath back in Cornwall for a short period where we continued training as before with the added displeasures of sleeping rough, living on Field Kitchens and learning how to dig foxholes and slit trenches with trenching tools in the very hard ground to be found in Cornwall. We had eight Bell Tents issued so eight pegs were driven in the ground in a line and even distance apart, this worked out to six men per tent and the exercise being to erect the tents in line, entrances in the same direction, brailings rolled up, guy ropes tight, in two minutes or less. We attempted this many times but eventually we could do it no bother. Orders came to go to Lockerbie in Scotland as advance party where we had to get the billets ready for the rest of the Squadron. This was a Royal Engineers Camp and training was quite intense. We went from square bashing to Explosives and Demolition, to Mines and Booby traps, to Battle Manoeuvres to Route Marches and Compass work, to living rough off the land for a few days and, of course, the Initiation of Fire where we had to run and walk up this hill and over stone walls with chaps firing at us with Bren guns, pretty close too! Of course, each of us was armed with our own weapon and we did practice with them quite a lot on the firing ranges. We became

familiar with lobbing hand grenades too but somehow I could never throw them very far. We were armed with Rifles and Bayonets, Sten guns, Bren guns and a few Piat anti-tank weapons and twin Brownings mounted on a stand against air attack. This training period lasted a few weeks and came to an end with a parade and march past after which we went to Southmead, Bristol for a short time living in tents and Field Kitchens. I was given a secondary trade as driver here and taught to drive vehicles and a dumper truck.

Our next move was to Camberley where we slept on the floor of some very big houses and our transport "Matadors" were parked on the road fully loaded with our equipment and gear ready to go. Of course we had to put a 24 hour guard on the vehicles to make sure we didn't lose them.

By this time, the Second Front had started and we were soon on our way in convoy to Waterlooville and then on to the landing craft bound for Arromanches but we were not told much about that beforehand. I remember we stepped aboard the landing craft at 12 noon and immediately moved out and anchored while the rest of the convoy formed up, this went on for some time and all the time we could hear clocks chiming ashore and striking the hours. As the clocks were striking 24.00 hours, midnight, the anchor came up and we were away following a greenish/blue light from the stern of a naval vessel. I realised we were travelling on a zig zag course but wherever the greenish/blue light went, we all followed. Of course our coastline and the French coast were blacked out so exploding shells were very visible. About halfway across, the big Battleships were firing broadsides into France to soften things up a bit and there was a big French Battleship taking part with failed engines being towed up and down by two Tugs forward and two Tugs aft. As we got closer in we saw smaller Naval craft keeping up a bombardment of the foreshore and at daybreak we had smaller Coastal Forces vessels darting around on patrol, these were MTBs and Gunboats.

I feel sure other Works Squadrons landed before we did but I never saw any of them as far as I know. The Bridgehead was well established and secure by this time but I don't know whether Caen had been liberated. Our landing craft went in at its allotted time and we stepped on to the Mulberry Jetty and walked ashore along with tanks from a T.L.C. further out. The amount of boat and troop movements was terrific and very exciting. We walked up clear of the harbour area, past compounds full of German prisoners and camped rough for a day and re-grouped. Next, I believe some of our chaps were put in charge of POWs and put them to work preparing further compounds and various other non military work before shipping them back to the U.K. I remember being told at the time, when organising a workforce of POWs, only allow one SS soldier to ten others to avoid trouble.

We moved further up to a little village called Carbiquet and camped in an orchard which was blown to pieces as was the village itself. It was here we came across a couple of Booby trap bombs disguised as motor oil cans; these were dealt with by one of our Officers I believe. My first big assignment came when about eight of us were sent to Carbiquet Airfield which had recently fallen to us for the third time I believe. Here, our task was to demolish the big metal hangers which were already damaged beyond repair and very dangerous. We fixed Guncotton slabs around the girders every 10 feet or so with the hope of cutting the girders into manageable pieces as well as bringing it to the ground. We had so much explosive material tied up in this hanger we had to get permission from the Navy I believe and given a time when to blow it. A slit trench was dug out in the flying field, an Officer had to ignite the fuse, we then walked back and

jumped into the slit trench and a very big bang took place. It was most successful really, but when Bulldozers tried to pull the girders apart, the corrugated sheet metal being bolted together made it a difficult task indeed. We were kind of prepared for and expecting a lot more bombing and strafing from the air, but thanks to the air cover we got from our chaps, we got away with it lightly. One cannot begin to describe the devastation all around us. The noise of shells exploding, the screech of track vehicles and the countless bodies of both sides lay in ditches and marked by rifles with tin hats or the black German crosses. As we moved further away from the bridgehead, it seemed to be much quieter. With so much destruction around us, we found the water supply non-existent and wells polluted, but our chaps drilling Artesian wells kept everybody supplied with water.

Bayeux and Caen seemed to have been flattened yet the famous Bayeux Tapestry survived and was put on display quite quickly I believe.

Over on our right was the Falaise Gap where the big tank battles took place a bit before I got there, thank goodness.

Our next town was Rouen and it was about this time we were given a stretch of road of something like 5 miles long which had to be made as wide as possible with sharp corners removed even if it meant destroying houses or anything else in the way. To the side of the road in the fields, an earth road for track vehicles was formed by removing hedges, barns, etc. This, we were told, was for the American Army in its race for Paris. I did not see the Americans charge up this road but history tells us a General Patton and his army did just that. It was at this time we noticed that many of the German black crosses beside the roads had a circle much like a halo around the four arms of the cross denoting that the young man below it was a boy of the Hitler Youth.

With Paris likely to be liberated by the allied troops at any time, French villagers and farmers were by the side of the roads with bottles of Cognac and little glasses giving everybody a drink to toast the re-capture of Paris and singing their National Anthem. We, of course, joined in and were merry for days (I've liked Cognac ever since).

We moved on to Amiens and Cambrai where we met an Englishman and his son, he went back after the First World War and married a local girl. We helped them out with a few fags, chocolate and best of all soap and razor blades. At one stage, a few of us were taken a few miles away and given the job of servicing a Summerfield Track runway (ALG) which I suppose was put down by my own Squadron. Our task was to walk the entire length in line abreast for several days and make good the clips and ground spikes. We were armed with Sten guns and a big double handed hammer and must have looked awesome.

Off we went again to what I believe was the airfield at Lilie but a short stay this time. Our next stop was Coxyde about three miles south of Ostende and from here we could see the V2 rockets taking off for England. We stayed here quite some time rebuilding the aerodrome and I have photographs showing big wooden trusses being hoisted in position by two cranes with RAF Roundels on the sides. When the first few aircraft landed, the Germans, who were holding out at Dunkerque about five miles away (and by-passed), shelled the planes at dispersal and did slight damage to them, they were small shells really like anti-aircraft guns. I was standing a bit too close and was hit with small stones or gravel. Fortunately, I was not hurt much at all but had blood dripping from various little cuts which looked bad at the time. It was here that one of our men

was blown up by a mine and killed. He was buried in a proper Cemetery, a mile or so away, and I was chosen to be in the Firing Party. (Can't remember his name).

We came across a piece of German equipment which we put to good use. As a quick description, it was similar to Stevenson's Rocket. It had four wheels on which was a big round cylinder with a smoke stack at one end and drawn by a horse, the lower half was a firebox while the top bit held water which came to the boil quite quickly. This was adapted to fit behind a vehicle and was used for hot tea on site during the cold winter and much appreciated. We fixed up a room with three bungalow baths we scrounged from somewhere and were able to bath every week or so with hot water supplied by this contraption. Of course we were visited by a delicing van on two occasions and had to put our clothes into a cubic le and fumigated while we could wash ourselves down.

By this time, the Front Line had moved along way away from us and we became more relaxed. Christmas was almost upon us and the snow came and reached two to three feet in depth. The plant equipment, bulldozers, graders, worked to clear the roads for military vehicles. Parcels arrived for each of us called Home Comforts containing gloves, scarves, balaclavas, knitted of course by the ladies back home, they came at a much needed time and were much appreciated believe me. My Christmas was shattered when the Germans started the Battle of the Bulge and broke through our lines with armour and aircraft at the Ardens. I was ordered to man a gun position along with another fellow on the aerodrome. The gun positions consisted of a circle of sandbags five feet high, twin Browning machine guns mounted on a stand, each capable of 1,150 rounds per minute, a bell tent with an oil stove inside and some rations. (We had three such positions). Being Christmas Day, we were told to put in a six hour guard so that as many men as possible could enjoy the Day. With so much snow about it was very cold and we had to free the moving parts of the guns frequently. Anyway, a patrol was sent out to us with hot drinks and a nice drop of "Nelsons Blood" Rum. Our orders that day were to keep an eye open for cigar shaped enemy aircraft, this being the first of the German jet aircraft brought into service.

When it was time to leave, we went via Antwerpen to Tilburg and Breda in Holland but did not stay long. It was about this time that all our vehicles had to be covered with wire netting "Chicken Wire". This was to prevent the enemy from lobbing grenades into the vehicles from bridges, etc, with the hope of knocking the grenades off the wire.

Our next move was via Eindhoven crossing the Rhine at Wesel on a pontoon bridge, I believe. Here, the devastation was indescribable, everything just mounds of rubble. Finally, we reached Osnabruck and were billeted on a German heavy Ack Ack site with the guns pointing upwards. I don't remember doing much but a lot did happen. A Sergeant Jones was killed with the propeller of an aircraft.

With Berlin ready to fall at any time, our war was almost over and we felt good about it. There was a lot of ordinance just lying around virtually redundant now. A few fellows were given the job of destroying a lot of German anti-tank "Teller" mines, about 10 lbs of explosives in each. This they did by loading so many at a time onto the back of a lorry, driving to a quarry and destroying them by means of a controlled explosion, this in itself seemed quite a harmless occupation but I don't know, or anybody else for that matter, what went wrong but the lorry and the men just blew up, killing everybody, about eight or so men which I still believe were from our Squadron.

With the war almost over and our demob numbers firmly embedded in our minds, this was worked out on age and length of service, my number was 39, quite low really, our thoughts were turned to the fact " It won't be long now", Roll on Civvy Street. We organised a sports day and a few inter-flight football matches to pass the time until demob. About three weeks after VE Day, we were paraded as a full Squadron forming a hollow square on three sides with the Officers filling in the remaining side. I remember trying to count heads and came to the conclusion there were about 500 men there. The CO said we were to get everything packed as we were to break camp and return home first thing in the morning. We were to carry our full kit and kitbags and on reaching Blighty proceed home on disembarkation leave. After about two weeks leave, my orders were to return to Oxford where I joined the Squadron. Our spirits were dashed very badly when on the first parade, men 30 years old , and men with low demob numbers, had to fall o u t and marched away. We were then reinforced with fresh men and some from the Royal Navy, and then we were told we were going to the Far East to Okinawa for the main assault landings on Japan. We then had another intense course on Japanese mines and booby traps with Bamboo Canes, etc, which was not at all what we had expected. We then proceeded to West Kirby, Liverpool, and were kitted out with tropical Khaki Drill, long and short pants complete with tunic and red chevrons and Australian Bush Hat. We were told we were to be attached to Combined Operations (SEAC) South East Asia Command under Lord Louis Mountbatten. We sailed from Liverpool on the trooper Duchess o f Richmond of the Canadian Pacific Line and next day we experienced bad weather in the Bay of Biscay resulting in the fact that a lot of chaps were very sick and lying in the scuppers wishing they could die.

With the war now over in Europe, Italy and North Africa, we sailed along at a good rate of knots, through the Med. and Suez Canal in ablaze of lights whereas a few weeks earlier, it would have been a strict blackout. Going through the Canal, the various troops we passed on shore had posters up and were shouting at us to "Join Up" "Get some service in" "Get your knees brown" which we did not take kindly to and our replies back to them are unprintable. We pulled into Aden for fuel for a few hours and then off again, this time with a blackout in force.

The Indian Ocean was wonderful all the way across. By this time we knew the war was over and that VJ Day had come and gone and that our destination was Singapore. We also knew that the Japanese Commander there refused to surrender and hung on to his command for a further two or three weeks I believe. We reached Singapore in 21 days and landed behind a Div fro m India and the Ghurkha Regiment. We had very little equipment, that was in the convoy that went west about via the Panama Canal. We went through to the aerodromes and my destination was RAF Seletar. I was put with electricians and our job was to get all the electrical equipment working again and the big electric fans. It seems the Japanese did not use our billets but instead built their own Basha Huts to live in so the fans, etc, were out of use for along time and grown in with vegetation like vines.

My 5538 Flight was sent on detachment to Tanglin Barracks and at first, life was difficult with rations in short supply. However, after about two or three weeks, the Australian supplies reached us and it was wonderful. We had every thing, things we had not seen back home for years. We took control of a lot of Japanese prisoners and put them to build their own Basha Huts. At first they were kept on tarmac areas where we could see them. We put them to work repairing a wooden jetty for Seaplanes "Sunderlands" to tie up to and load and discharge cargoes. We put them to cut down

the flying field which they left to grow up with tall grass and trees. (I have a photograph showing this). And, of course, they erected our square tents when they finally arrived. For some reason, our Flight Office Clerk left us and I was given the job as Clerk which suited me fine at the time. I even had a local man who could speak English to help me. If I remember, we gave all the civilians who worked for us so many measures of rice each week as payment. With all hostilities now at an end, our only thoughts were to go home. However, a few of us were ordered onto a search and rescue patrol. This meant being armed and in battle order. It was our task to escort medical personnel and the Padre and party in a convoy across the Straits to the mainland and then west to the jungle region in search of a missing aircraft with our own POWs aboard having been released from the notorious Japanese prison camps in Singapore and on their way home. We reached a point where we left the vehicles and went on foot towards the high hills in the distance. It is difficult now to remember just how long we were hacking our way through but after a while we were called back when it was learned that local people had found the crashed plane with no survivors.

On two occasions I was put on riot patrol in the native quarter of Singapore where they rioted over some grievance or other to do with food. We paraded with pick axe handles and marched up and down, ducking the various objects which came our way. We never got close enough to anybody to actually hit them. So it ended up a good laugh and something different to talk about.

At Tanglin Barracks, we adopted two monkeys as mascots, they had unprintable names given to them. One was a small greenish monkey while the other was brown and quite a bit bigger. We put leather straps around their slender waists and attached them to a very long line between the trees so they had a lot of freedom. They entertained us enormously. Sadly, the small monkey came to an untimely end when he decided to jump on the fan belt of a lorry being serviced.

Christmas came and it was wonderful. The Australian food was really good with an endless supply of Nelsons Blood Rum. Needless to say, everybody became drunk and disorderly and so a good time was had by all, and still remembered. My office job was a good number and we all became very relaxed, just waiting for demob. We played football daily and organised a bit of swimming. Then came the message into the office by DR from Seletar. All personnel with a civilian trade in the building industry were instructed to lower their demob number by 3 to enable the rebuilding programme of England to start as soon as possible. That was us! I was now 36 instead of 39 which meant just about all the trades qualified in our Flight. Our monkey friend was released in the Botanical Gardens, Singapore, amongst his own kind and I hope life was kind to him and that he lived happily ever after.

Within days, we were climbing aboard the SS Manilla bound for home.

So many men left the Squadron, I felt sure this was the end of all Works Squadrons. It took us eight weeks to get home and I enjoyed the trip very much. We were sunbathing on deck until we reached Gibraltar, then, as we turned north for home, it became colder every day until we stayed below deck all the time. Going up the Clyde, we saw a white world outside through the portholes. At Greenock, where we docked, the snow was over two feet deep and we were not allowed off until we had an issue of Greatcoats. The train pulled up alongside the boat and the Salvation Army supplied us with all sorts of goodies including, of course, the War Cry and Young Soldier. (I must say the Army did a great job for us throughout the war with their Hot Tea and Handouts). The

train took us back to West Kirby where we had medicals and re-kitted out in RAF blue . Then home on leave.

I was recalled to a camp called Poddington near Chelmsford and we spent our time looking at DROs (Daily Routine Orders) to see if our names were on the sheet for demob. Afternoons were spent out with the other men walking or in town going t o the pictures.

When the day finally came, I h a n d e d in the necessary kit and kept the uniform I stood up in as I was still classed as being on the Reserve List GI. Off I went to Wembley Stadium where I chose my demob suit and the rest of the clobber all neatly packed in a square cardboard box. On leaving, an Officer shook hands, thanked me for my service and wished me well and all the best in Civvy Street. A wonderful feeling came over me as I walked off to catch a train home and 72 days demob leave to look forward to. Finally, on the very last day o f my leave, the 27th July 1946, I got married and we are still together. I was then almost 25 years old.

In recent years, I have been an active member of the Royal British Legion serving as Trustee , Chairman of Finance, to name but two. I am also a member of the RAF Association and Burma Star Association but do not qualify for the Burma Star. I would really like to know when my Squadron was disbanded, and again , I am amazed to learn , within the last two years , there were so many of us right up to 1966. In my association with ex-service organisations, n o t once have I met anyone who said I was in a Works Squadron until I saw an advert to join the ACBA Of course, to be known as Airfield Construction Branch is a bit up-market from my day, and quite right too. We deserve it.