

Leroy Schroeder's WWII Story

Before WW2 an occasional aeroplane would fly over the farm, we would watch until it went out of sight. At an air show at Sky Harbor Airport, Goderich, my first time airborne was in the open cockpit of a biplane. This probably cost a dollar. In early 1941 I had to take extra instruction in math and physics to qualify for aircrew in the RCAF. Early in July (Dad said I threw my old straw hat in a fence corner) I was off to Toronto and Manning Pool at the horse and cattle barns on the CNE grounds. Manning Pool was quite the place, rows and rows of iron (2 level) bunk beds and you had one assigned to you. To sleep with maybe 1000 others took some doing. It was always an early start in the morning, rows of wash basins were used to wash and shave. I do not remember the lavatory or eating facilities. Out on parade and roll call started the day and there was no time sitting around taking it easy, Corporals were king. As well as parades for marching and drill we had others - Clothing parade, where you got in a line and were issued a uniform, boots and all other things for your "kit", Inoculation parade, again in a line-up for shots in both shoulders and subsequently some very sore arms. If you were sick you were expected to get up and go on "sick" parade to see the medical officer.

Pay parade was always anticipated, again in a line, in alphabetical order for this. When you got to the pay officer's table you saluted, had your pay handed out, saluted again and moved on. If your name was Anderson you were lucky, if it was Zwicker you had a long time in line. Short-arm parade, again in line, you had your turn in dropping your pants so the medical officer could check your most private part. (I do not believe we saluted). This was a check for VD. As I remember, I enjoyed Manning Pool. From Manning Pool, with others, it was off to the radar school being built south of Clinton. Here we were on guard duty while waiting for a posting to Initial Training School. On guard duty we were expected to march around and do duty on the front gate with 303 rifles. We were not given any ammunition (probably for our own safety). Gerald joined the Air force in early August. Initial Training School (I.T.S.) at Victoriaville, Quebec, was the next step. This was a college that was taken over by the military. Again it was a busy time, more parade and roll call, but also some intense schooling in Air Force regulations, navigation, Morse code, meteorology, air rules and regulations and other subjects with exams at the end. Elementary Flying School (E.F.T.S.) # 20 at Oshawa came next. Here we were housed in "H" Barracks Blocks with the cross bar being washing and toilet area. Either side of this in the sides of the "H" was rows of the typical 2-decker bunks. Heating was by oil burning furnaces. In the morning the caretaker would shout "Wakey Wakey!" and pound on the furnaces with a broom handle. Here 1/2 day was spent in classrooms and the other 1/2 flying. As I remember the pressure was on to succeed at both school and flying. A number of our group did not make it. My first flight was on Nov 10, 1941 with an instructor named Sgt. Schoelles. On three lessons with him we flew for 2-hrs 20-min. We then had a day of bad weather and flying was scrubbed. However I guess Sgt. Schoelles had had enough of students. He took up one of the Tiger Moths and did a good job of "beating up" the airfield. On landing the M.P.s met him and I never saw him again. On Feb. 4/42 my EFTS was completed with a total of 37.25-hrs dual and 31 - first solo. From Oshawa it was off to No. 16 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Hagersville. On March 6, 1942 I had my first ride in an Anson,

a twin engine trainer. My instructor was P/O Truemner, who was one of the best. I found out recently that he was an instructor through the war and was awarded the Air Force Cross. The Anson only looked "big" and was not a hard plane to fly. The undercarriage was wound up by hand so the only time we raised the undercarriage was for long trips. Again half of the day was in school and the other half of the day flying. We lost some more of our group at this time. The most interesting part of flight training here was night flying, low level flying, formation flying and cross-country trips. My first cross-country was on May 5/42 and was to Kettle Point and back. I diverted to a schoolhouse in Shipka and to the farm for a low-level pass. This could have had dire consequences had I been reported. My cousin Mane's best friend was a young lady by the name of Hollis Smith who lived at No. 60 King Street E., Hagersville. After 97 flights in the Anson I had a Wings Test with F/LT Carscadden on June 20 and passed. Following this there was another 57 trips with the last flight on July 16/42. Total hours 56.35 dual and 93.30 solo. July 17 was "Wings Parade" and I got the coveted wings and was notified that I had been commissioned as a Pilot Officer. Grandma Anderson was there and we managed to have her bang her head getting her into an Anson. On the way home we stopped at Orr's Men's Clothing in London and ordered an officers uniform. Back at Hagersville it was quite a feeling to be able to use the Officers Mess and be saluted. Then it was off to Central Flying School at Trenton for training as a flight instructor. My first flight there was on Aug.21/42. Here we were instructed on learning the "patter" (procedures) for teaching student trainees. The aircraft used were Fleet, Cessna, and Cornells. Last flight there was Oct. 1/42 after 68 flights. Earl joined the Air Force in Nov.42. No.9 Service Flying Training School (SFTS) at Centralia came next. I was checked out for flying by P/O Southam on Oct. 6/42. Here we had two students in the morning and two others in the afternoon. It was easy to see what was happening at the farm, when the wind was from the N/E, take-off was right over the house. This was a busy time. The only break came with bad weather. In October I flew 25 days out of 31. When a course graduated with a "wings" parade it was replaced by a new group of rookies. Night flying was very enjoyable, as the night wore on lights from homes and traffic would become less and less. On trying to teach a student named Coyle on how to land by the flare path at night, I leveled out too high and hit the runway with a great thud. Coyle then took over and did much better on his circuit. Sept. 14/43 was my last flight at Centralia having flown 746 hours instructing 11 students. While at Centralia I bought an old Hudson car and drove down to Hagersville to see Smitty (Hollis) when I could.

Orville joined the Air Force September 1943. This left help on the farm rather low Jim was 17 and Reg was 15. One day, after Orville joined the R.C.A.F., I found Mom in the kitchen shedding tears so the stress on her and Dad must have been tremendous with four of their 'boys' in aircrew as pilots and a trainee aiming for a pilot's wings. P/O Wayne (Wacky) Adams and I then went to No. 1 G.R.S. (navigation) School at Summerside, P.E.I. Here it was ground school and then flying to apply what had been covered in the classroom. These exercises were all over water in the Gulf of St. Lawrence. Each flight took 2 students who shared in the navigation. The Mark 1 Ansons had many hours flying behind them with some window glass having been replaced with plywood. From Oct. 1/43 to Nov 20/43 "Wacky" and I shared 13 navigation flying

exercises. For this we were allowed to show the time in our logbook as "passenger" hours. For a total of 39 hours 40 minutes on training flights, Oct. 6th and 8th, Gerald was our pilot as at that time he was a staff pilot there. One of the pleasures of being at Summerside was dances with Don Messer and the Islanders providing the music. Next stop for Wacky and I was No. 111 O.T.U (operational training unit) in the Bahamas. Christmas day 1943 we spent on a train going through Georgia on the way to Miami, Florida. A small cargo vessel took us over to Nassau. The ocean was rough and I spent most of my time in my bunk on the edge of being seasick. Accommodations at Nassau were in wooden barracks buildings and we were introduced to the practice of "afternoon tea" at 4 o'clock. Oakes Airfield was on the outskirts of Nassau. On Jan.25/43 we commenced training on the B25 Mitchell. The B25 was a fine A/C to fly, visibility from the pilot's seat was excellent. However the Wright Cyclone Radial engines were very noisy. The Duke or Windsor was Governor and we heard that when night flying was in progress he complained of the noise. The B25 Mitchell was used for most of our flying, as it was more economical than the 4 engine B24 Liberator. Circuits and bumps, night flying and flights over the islands of the Bahamas were what kept us busy. As in Summerside all of our flight training trips were over the ocean. At this time we were "crewed up", that is we got together and crews were made up. Our crew ended up with P/O Lilenthal as 2nd pilot, Ian Edmiston as navigator, Sgt. Bill Everest, Sgt. Jack Sharman, Sgt. Bill Stubbs as wireless operator, air gunners, and Sgt. Jim Osborn as radar operator. Edmiston, Lilenthal, Stubbs and Sharman were Australian, Jim Osborn was English and Bill Everest was Canadian.

Following training on the B25 we moved to Windsor Field, some miles away from Nassau, and carried on training with the B24 Liberator A/C. After 27 flights the last one was to fly out to the vicinity of Bermuda and find a certain ship. At this time I received a promotion to F/O. From the Bahamas we had the usual rough ride on a small coaster (ship) back to Miami and then a train to Montreal. The Ford Hotel was our accommodation while there. We were now attached to R.A.F Transport Command. At Dorval the total flying time was four trips on the radio range and the usual circuits and bumps with the B24. One of our group at Montreal was F/O Frank Riffle. He and his crew were waiting to go. He was an American and his wife came to visit while we were there. More on F/O Riffle later. On May 26/44 we signed for a brand new B24 Liberator No. EW257 and in the early morning left for Gander, Newfoundland with destination Karachi, India. As well as our crew we had P/O Woolverton to help navigate, Flight Engineer Snider and Sgt. Fitch. The trip to Gander was, course 70°, miles 900 and it took 5 hours flying time. After the remaining hours of the afternoon, and refueling, it was lift off just as darkness fell. On climbing away the control tower called to say that flames were coming from #2 engine. This proved to be flame from the turbo-supercharger when at take-off power. On reducing power there was no problem. Our destination was Lagens Air Port in the Azores, course 120°, miles 1500. On landing at an emergency field on St. Anna Island in the Azores flight time was 9 hours, 5 minutes. On this flight we flew at 9000 feet mainly through cloud. On the E.T.A. (estimated time of arrival) for Lagens we were still in cloud and could hear on the radio other A/C down below trying to find the airstrip. Because a mountain is beside the airstrip we dare not let down in cloud so it was necessary to divert to St. Anna some miles to the S/E. Here the short,

grass airstrip had village at one end and a swamp at the other. We got down O.K. but tore up some of the sod while braking hard to stay out of the swamp. "Wacky" Adams and his crew plus a couple of other A/C also landed at St. Anna. Facilities there were one R.A.F Officer and one building for housing. For breakfast I had some fat bacon. In the afternoon we headed back to Lagens in low cloud and rain. Found the airstrip and with bad visibility got lined up and landed on the third try. The airstrip had a steel mat runway and with the stiff crosswind "Wacky's" A/C slid off the runway and on getting back on damaged the tires. Next morning we left them behind. Never saw "Wacky" again, I heard that he was hospitalized in Cairo, his crew came on to India.

On May 28/44 we left Lagens for Rabat, in Africa. Course 85°, distance 1100 miles, flying time 6 hours 40 minutes. Armed soldiers patrolled the airstrip at Rabat so we realized that this was a war zone. After a day to rest up it was time to head for Castel Benito Airfield near Tripoli. Course 90°, distance 1200 miles, flying time 6 hours 15 minutes. While crossing the desert area we saw many burnt out and wrecked vehicles and tanks from the fighting that had gone on there. The facilities at Castel Benito consisted of many tents for sleeping and eating. The whole area was desert. May 31st, on to Cairo, course 100°, distance 1000 miles, flying time 5 hours 50 minutes. Stayed at Cairo for a day and got a chance to get into the city going past the pyramids. The facilities at Cairo Airstrip were again in tents. June 2nd, as night fell we were off for Karachi, India, course 100°, distance 2200 miles, flying time 12 hours, 10 minutes. In darkness we did not see any of the country we passed over. Arrived at Karachi before noon with a dust storm just beginning. Karachi was hot and dry with blowing sand on many days. The poverty and living conditions were very noticeable to us at first sight. For fuel "chips" (dried cow manure) was used and piled like we pile stove wood. We did not see much of Karachi. June 8th we delivered a B24 to Kolar in southern India. On June 13th we delivered another B24 to Pharpamau Airfield near Allahabad in central India. We got a bit lost on that trip but Edmiston took a sun shot with the sextant to help out and we arrived OK. It was very hot there. We got a ride back to Karachi in a Sunderland Flying Boat. June 18th we were off to Kolar with another B24. From there we took a U.S. Dakota A/C to Ratmalana Airfield at Columbo, Ceylon. From there it was by train to a stop near Sigarya Airstrip where a truck picked us up and next stop was 160 Squadron. Here the single airstrip was surrounded by jungle. Flew a B24 for an air test on July 1st. Then ended up in a military hospital at Kandy for surgery on a hernia. From there had some time in a rehabilitation camp in tea country in the hills. At this time I received a promotion to Flight Lieutenant. Back to flying again on Oct. 10th, this at (KKS.) Kankesenturia Airstrip on the northern tip of Ceylon. The next problem for me was a case of yellow Jaundice and some time in the mobile field hospital nearby. Here, at times, we had smoke from burning Ghats (crematoria) drifting through the camp. A ship recognition course in Columbo took a week or so next.

From July 1st to Dec.4th had very little flying time due to the hernia and jaundice. Fortunately #160 Squadron was not busy. Our first operational flight was on Dec. 29th looking for submarines off the southwest coast of India. No luck. In January 1945 the squadron moved to an airstrip near Minneriya farther south in Ceylon. Had two operations in Jan., one looking for submarines again and one mine laying at the harbour

in Medan, Sumatra. Mining has to be done on moonlight nights so as to see the harbour and the approaches to place the mines as desired. The mines had parachutes to ease them into the water and were dropped from 250 feet. Operational time for Jan. was 35 hours and 5 minutes. In February we had two more mine laying trips, one to Penang and one to Pankalan Soesoe. Total flying time 54 hours. In early February, the squadron adjutant notified me that Gerald and his crew were missing in southern Burma. For March we had four mine laying trips to Soesoe, Klang and Jumphorn. Flying time 69 hours 10 minutes. F/O Doug Turner and crew in A/C P ditched in the ocean about 50 miles off Ceylon on running out of fuel. They ditched near a freighter and were picked up. Two of the crew were injured. "P" was our favorite A/C and we were sorry to see it not return. In April we had six trips as follows - Port Swettenham, Jumphorn, Soesoe. Singapore, Singora and Singapore again. Total airborne time 121 hours 35 minutes. The longest trip we had was to Singapore. We lifted off at 1:35 P.M. and arrived back the next day at noon (22hr. 25min.). F/L Joy and his crew ran out of fuel and ditched on Apr. 30, 100 miles east of Ceylon. F/L Joy, F/O Robertson and W/O Arscott RAAF died in the landing. The remainder of the crew clung to a small dinghy for 6 hours before being picked up by a Corvette. They had injuries and horrible sunburns. In May we had only one trip to Singapore (20hr 50min.) In June we had four trips dropping supplies and personnel to guerilla forces in the mountainous areas of Malaysia. Total flying time 57 hours 30 minutes. We lost a complete crew plus others (total of 19) when one of our A/C, being sent to Cocos Islands (half the way to Australia) for photographic duties, crashed in the jungle shortly after take-off. It was probably engine failure. Also, F/O Riffle, that I mentioned when we were in Montreal, and his crew with Squadron 354, did not return from operations. After a short search they were presumed lost. In July we had three trips on supply dropping missions for a total of 57 hours and 10 minutes.

Our last trip in the B24 Liberator was July 12, 1945. Ian Edmiston, our navigator, was exceptional, flying out to Ceylon from Canada and many long flights in both day and night over water. We always got back OK. The B24 had a Minneapolis-Honeywell Automatic Pilot. On setting course at the height and direction required we would switch it on, sit back, and enjoy the ride. We never saw an enemy A/C and only had some light anti-aircraft fire. Our greatest hazard was running out of fuel. The average length of our operational trips was 18 hours and the total number was 23. Training, air testing trips etc. totaled 45. I always experienced a "high" on lining up a fully loaded B24 on the end of the runway, putting on the brakes, opening the throttles fully, cutting in the superchargers (the four 1200 H.P Pratt and Whitneys would be screaming), releasing the brakes, using the entire runway and climbing away To this day taking off in a commercial aircraft is a thrill. I had completed a "tour" of operations so now it was time to head for home. We took the train from Ceylon to Madras, India and then on to Bombay At an overnight stop part way across India we heard that an atom bomb had been dropped on Japan. From Aug. 16/45 to Oct. 3/45 we were housed in barracks at the B.R.D. (British Rehabilitation Depot) in Bombay. The beds had wooden frames with woven rope for mattresses, not very comfortable. A mosquito net kept out insects and the occasional mouse. To spend time we visited downtown Bombay, went to the movies etc. One day we were lucky enough to visit an aircraft carrier in the harbour. On Oct

3/45 we went aboard, with many others, H.M.T Georgic in Bombay harbour, headed for Liverpool, England. The Georgic had been bombed and burnt out in the harbour at Alexandra early in the war and rebuilt as a troop ship. Numerous bunks in each cabin and quite comfortable. As we headed west across the Arabian Sea the water was so calm that we could see the ship's wake for miles astern. It was very enjoyable. Our route was through the Gulf of Aden and then into the Red Sea. Because of the heat many slept on deck while in the Red Sea. We met or passed many other ships. From the Red Sea it was through the Gulf of Suez. We stopped at Port Said for a time. Next was the Mediterranean Sea and west past Malta and Sicily. As we stopped at Gibraltar for mail the ship had quite a list to one side, as everyone wanted to see the "rock" On arrival off Liverpool in the Irish Sea it was too rough to enter the harbour so overnight the Georgic cruised back and forth, on turning we were told to hang on as the ship rolled. On Oct. 26/45 a train took us to #3 P.R.S. at Bournemouth to wait with thousands of others for passage home.

Dances, the ballet and movies were enjoyed while we were housed in hotels that had been set up (stripped) to handle the military The Royal Bath Hotel was the centrepiece. We got a pass to go to London and on arriving at a hotel there found F/O Riffle sitting by a fireplace. Needless to say we were dumbfounded. He and his crew while on a trip to the Andaman Islands flew over a harbour to get a look. Anti-aircraft fire damaged their B24 and they ditched off shore. Some men were lost in the crash but a number made it to shore even though there were injuries. The Japanese ignored them and they lived on the beach as best as they could eating snakes, seaweed or whatever they could find. When the Japanese realized the war was lost they were picked up and put in hospital. F/O Riffle took over and radioed a message to Ceylon and they were picked up. I believe he said that his weight was down to 95 lbs. His wife had given birth to a son while he was away. On Dec. 12/45 I boarded the Queen Elizabeth at Southampton (with probably 10,000 others) for a trip to New York. The Queen Elizabeth was also set up as a military transport with many bunks in each stateroom. Your bed was one of about 4 high. It was a good trip across the Atlantic. Five days later we went past the Statue of Liberty to a berth at the docks. In New York a train was waiting to take us to Montreal and Dorval. After getting a "pass" and saying farewell to companions again it was on to another train through Toronto, to Hamilton and London. At Hamilton I stayed for a day. Hollis got a day off from the Bank of Commerce to come up for a get-together. My she looked good. While I was overseas I had received letters from her every few days so that I knew what was going on with her and Hagersville. London was next to be met by Mom, Dad, Earl, Aunt Ethel and Uncle Russel. Then home again! This was after being in transit since July, of course, the travelling was crowded with others like myself. A few days later an article in the London Free Press announced that I was one of the lucky ones and had been awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross. On Jan. 16/46 I received a discharge and was placed on the RCAF Reserved. On March 19/46 I moved out to Larry and Hilda Taylor's farm east of Exeter. The pay was \$55.00 a month and room and board. I got one weekend off per month to go to Hagersville. Hollis came to the Taylors on a few weekends. I bought a 1946 Ford from Larry Snider in Exeter. It cost \$1365.00. Before going overseas I bought a diamond ring in Hamilton with the intention of asking Hollis to wear it. I left to soon so I took it along with me.