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#3

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Dear Paul.

It is a truely warming and envigorating experience to be hearing from so many of my R.A.F. compatriots after such a long time. When cooperating with Max Hastings in the preparation of 'Bomber Command', as you also surely did, I never realised how many would be getting in touch with me as the result of it: they did and I will be telling you about it. However, in our case I realise that we have renewed our aquaintance through your excellent article in Fly Past.

Well, however it came about, I was delighted to get your letter and was hoping that you would get in touch with me. It is good to hear that you also survived the war and are now enjoying your retirement on a farm as I am.

To talk for a moment about personalities: Did you know that Square McKee is in good health, is retired and living in New Zealand as is, of course, understandable because he was a New Zealander. They tell me that he was knighted and became Sir Andrew McKee. I did hear that he acquired the nick-name of 'Sir Square'!

My front gunner, a Vic. Burgess also now lives in N.Z. He read Bomber Command and wrote to our rear gunner, Eric Billson (who is secretary of the Air Gunners' Association), thathe had read of me. Eric wrote to Max Hastings for my address and started up a busy correspondence between us. He told me in his first letter that he had been looking for me for 30 years! It is now tentatively agreed that he will be coming to Canada next June to visit us. In the course of all this I was astonished to learn that Vic is 78. Time passes so quickly.

One of the most interesting contacts I made was with a Bill Chorley who is writing a new history of 9 Sqdn. He wanted all I could tell him of the sqdn. and in the course of his letters he came up with the serial numbers of the Heyfords we had on strength and wanted to know which I had flown. I was able to give him everything down to the number of hours and flights on each. This was mostly at Scampton where I joined the squadron from F.T.S. at Ternhill. We corresponded about the sqdn's early experience with Wellesleys and Wellingtons at Stradishall and Honnington including the notorious crash there when the two aircraft collided over the village. He came up with the aircraft numbers and crews of the first raid to Brunsbuttle when my No.2. and I were the only ones to get home. My No.3. came down in the drink just off the coast and was all picked up by a trawler.(out of fuel due to holed tanks). Bill McRae, then in 149 was the very first to drop a bomb. His Nos. 2. & 3. turned back whereas we three all got there some 20 mins. later as I expect you know. We then discussed the Wilhelmshaven debacle, but nothing was mentioned that you wouldn't know about.

I have also heard from a Jock Whitehouse who had read Fly Past & who is working on a history of the R.A.F. at Stradishall which 9 Sqdn. opened in Feb. '38. We ex R.A.F. seem to have turned into quite a group of writers!. I am astonished to see the amount of data that people such as Hastings have been able to did out of A.M. records Stradishall, by the way, is now a prison, he tells me.

We were visiting my son and his wife who live near Ottawa (600 miles from here), where we were near on an antique car rally, when a friend of his walked in with a copy of Fly Past and said "is this F/Lt. Grant your dad?" "Yes," said Ian "and I would like to introduce you to F/Lt. Grant!" A remarkable chance, I thought. I was given the magazine and when I got home I sent off the letter and some pictures to the editor. I gather that he printed all or most of my letter and I have not seen a later issue though somebody I will tell you about is sending me the copy. I did have a reply from the editor who said that my letter 'raised some interesting points'.

Anyway, just a couple of days a go I had a letter from a Bert Harris, with whom I have exchanged a few letters, saying that he had read the piece and would send me a copy of the magazine.

Incidentally, my son flys for a company called Bradley Air who do a lot of charter work for the government up North. Often he is based at Resolute (74.41N), for 3 weeks at a time flying out to such places as Baffin Island, Greenland, Inuvic, and smaller settlements with fuel and such supplies. They are sometimes called on so called Medflights taking out sick (or shot) Eskimos and Indians to hospital in Montreal. One Eskimo girl, who tried to wrestle a gun from a drunk friend at a party when he was threatening to shoot her brother, got shot when the gun went off. She had a miscarriage in the aircraft and it seems that she didn't even know she was pregnant! The other side of the coin is that much of the work is interesting and challenging. For instance, there was a party of scientists installed up near the N. pole studying the location of the continental shelf in the Arctic ocean as there is some dispute with Russia as to exactly where the boundry between Canada and the U.S.S.R. actually lies. He was sent up to fly them out when the ice got too thin for the Herculese to land. The permissible ice thickness in relation to the aircraft weight is laid down in regulations. He flys the B.A.C. 748. A twin turbo-prop machine.

What happened to me after the war, you ask. That's quite a book full. The main parts were: Took a job with Avro as trainee executive and part time test pilot which ment that I helped out in the flight test dept. when they were particularly pushed such as after a spell of bad weather. About all I did was to fly a Lanc. or York occaisionally on some engineering test work or more extensively fly the Ansons (which they were still building with the metal wing). Otherwise I was at university in the mornings and in the Works Manager's office helping out on all sorts of factory organisational tasks. While there, I had to look after some geezer who came to collect a York which we had built for a company, which nobody had then heard of, called Skyways . He was Ashley, the General Manager and he offered me a job as Junior Capatin at a salary so very much larger than I was getting at Avro that I left and flew extensive charter with them mostly outside the U.K. After a few years I left them for a Chief Pilot's job with a branch of Hunting. Did a stint in India during the Partition of India. All very interesting. However, I was having marriage problems so decided to quit flying and go into agricultural machinary on my own.

Well, this failed because, as my bank manager said, I had more enthusiasm than business acumen. My marriage failed also though it certainly was not because of any lack of enthusiasm there ! There was nothing for it, then, but to go and work for somebody else and that somebody was a firm called Walter Kidde with world wide operations. It is actually a U.S. company with a branch plant at Northolt. I was called a 'Systems Engineer' and we designed automatic fire extinguishing systems and the control equipment that went with them. These were CO2 systems in industrial locations such as sub-stations, printing plants, clothing mills etc. Also ships.

After 2 years with them the post of Assistant Factory Manager at the Montreal plant was advertized. I applied for it and got it. They transferred me in 1956. Worked a couple of years in factory reorganisation setting up quality control systems and the manufacture of portable extinguishers, amongst many other things.

before transferring to another small associate organization building fire alarms. Here I was responsible for designing and supervising the construction of all manner of special fire alarm control panels, burglar alarms, hospital paging and calling systems, power supplies and such equipment. This entailed all circuit diagrams, wiring diagrams, panel and sheet metal cabinet layouts and drawings with assembly and test details. Also in this job was the development of a complete line of alarm bells, horns, hooters, annunciators and what not to go with them and to be superior to our competioton. For this I did all my own design work, experimental work, built the prototypes, did the testing making some of my own instrumentation such as sound level meter (because the firm was too poor to buy such things manufactured). It was quite a wonderful job and it taught me a lot. I started out with a one man engineering department and even did my own drawing printing in the early days!

However, all good things come to an end and in about '69, I think it was, they were bought out and amalgamated with the Cincinnati Time Recorder Co. (For whom I did more development work at the parent plant in the U.S.) They closed the Montreal plant to amalgamate us with their time clock assembly operation at London, Ontario (near the U.S. boarder). They offered to transfer all us executives at their expense. I declined the offer, which turned out to be a good thing because within a year all those who had moved had either been fired or quit because fellows from the U.S. plant were put in over them. I suspected that this would be the ploy when they refused to give me a contract as I requested.

Having a little money put away and some which my mother left to me, I, with my Canadian Wife's agreement, decided to 'go into real estate'. Though I did not make much money in listing and selling properties I did learn the ins and outs of it and I was one of the first to know of good old houses as they came onto the market. Some of these I would buy to renovate to convert into apartemtns or use as rooming houses. selling off some of those converted at a large profit and assembling a block of properties in downtown Ottawa where we then lived

We worked like hell at this. I did almost all the repair and conversion work myself, (I'm something of a carpenter and plasterer too!) of these huge 3 story mansions, while my wife ran about 50 and more rooms in the rooming houses -laundry, cleaning, everything- looking after the renting. I looked after the money and did the argueing with the tenants when this was needed though she is a pretty rough customer when necessary. We ran the whole operation on strict, almost military lines which was not popular with some -

One day, in the summer of '78 I had a discussion with my accountant who said that he thought I must be either crazy or greedy to own so much rental property and still have all the aggrevation of a landlord (I should tell you that tenants have a lot of power and 'rights' over here under the Landlords & Tenants Act.) "Sell out at today's prices and you could live in luxory on the interest", he said. I came home, we talked it over over dinner and next morning I listed the whole assembly of properties which we had. Within some 3 weeks we had a full price offer from a developer who had been watching for these properties to come on the market.

I was just about 60 by this time. You asked if I was a Canadian. Yes, I became naturalized in '68. We had decided some time before that when we retired we would get a country place in a warmer part of the country. (Ottawa is said to be the coldest capital city in the world!) Buy a small farm and settle into the bucolic life of what in England would be called a Gentleman Farmer. But now we had about 12 weeks to find somewhere in the 2nd largest country in the world. Our serch turned up this ideal spot which is 10 miles from Niagara Falls.

The house is an 1870 farm house which is now restored absolutly but in keeping with its period. I suppose I am bragging a little when I say that it is quite a show place (not that we show it exept to friends and to such as the historical society group to which we belong) We have 5 acres, two ponds with an island in one, a small stream with lots of fish and a large barn. It was a requirement that we had a good out-building such as this as I have 4 antique cars it being one of my hobbies to restore them. I have an Alvis and and an A.C. about which I will tell you some other time if you are interested. In the garden we grow everything in the way of fruits and vegetables and store enough for the year all from seed some of which I start early in the greenhouse. Of course, we have allsorts of fruit, grapes from which I make wine and bees.

Though I am retired completely I'm more busy than ever, it seems. In the first place our property keeps us really busy. There is nearly 3 acres of lawns to mow which, with the equipment I have takes my wife and I half a day to mow . In the summer there is a lot of planting and hoeing to keep up to date also pruning, spraying, fertilizing and so forth but I'M sure you know just as well as I how much time and work these things take. Apart from this, being retired I get hooked into all sorts of charity things, horticultural society (president this year), historical associations of which I belong to two and am on the executive of one, I'm vice president of our antique car club and am always being asked to attend this, seve on the committee of that.

Much of the forgoing must sound rather like bragging and line shooting, but it was not ment as such but merely as an account of some of what I have been doing since I came out of the R.A.F. You asked for it!.

How about you? Do please write and tell me about yourself and how things are with you. It was really great to get your letter and I look forward to hearing from you again.

About the book; Bomber Command. I have held off replying until I had something definate to tell you as to it's availability over here. I sent to England for my copy to an address inEngland which Max Hastings gave me. As it happens, one of our best friends is the librarian at Brock University in St Cathrines (about 5 miles from here)He, of course, has access to all sorts of knowledge as to where to get books and I asked him to try and locate a copy for me. Heard nothing more of it so I checked yesterday. He tells me that he has put in an order for a copy but at this stage he cannot tell whether or not he will be able to get it.

Thank him.

If it does come through I will send it off to your sister as you requested with an explanation and will let you know in due course what it cost. This is the best I can do.

Well. so long for now, but don't forget to write and let me know all about yourself.

Sincerely yours,

Peter Grant.

From Mary & I.

With warm and friendly wishes
* ❄ for a ❄ * *
Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year
1983.

PETER GRANT

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