

Raymond Frank Denton RFC

Details from his Pilot's Flying Logbook.

Interestingly, Ray did his basic flying training in Florida, USA but his Logbook was supplied by the Royal Canadian Airforce.





Moore Haven

Observation I

Clewiston

CLEWISTON
50

Buildings

Kreamer I

Ritta I

Lake Harbor

Chosen

Pahokee

High poles
& lock
Bacom Pt

Water
tank

Pelican Bay

Ray Denton joined Number 5 British Flying Training School Clewiston, Florida on November 7th 1941.

**He was then aged just 21.
(D.O.B. 4th December 1920)**

He was on Training Course number 4.

Back Row - Russell, J. - Turner, G.F. - Cooke, R.F. - Willis, R.H. - Bryant, A.L.
left to right - Cresswell, A. - King, O.J.A. - Campbell, R.H. - Charlesworth, A. - Sturrock, R.A.
 - Denton, R.F.
Third Row - Dyson, P. - Lee, R.G.F. - King, R.B. - Endacott, S.J. - Manning, G.B. - Peek, J.T.
 - Lasham, R.L.C. - Scott, J.N. - Bateman, D.F. - Cox, D.W. - Carrie, J.
 - Pickard, J.F. - Hole, A.C.
Second Row - McMaster, S.F. - Grove, E.G. - Aspden, E.J. - Tarran, D.G. - Durgard, H.W.
 - Morgan, A.H. - Mallinson, G.A. - Happold, W.B.J. - MacDonald, C.S. -
 - Greenhalgh, L.J. - Walters, R.R. - Kelly, H.J.
Front Row - Simpson, F. - Reeves, G.V. - Fraser, C.S. - Abbey, R.P. - Webster, D.A.
 - Divall, W.G. - Thompson, L.E. - Hazell, H.W. - Edwards, G.W. - Eyton-Jones, V.
 - McConnell, A.L. - Vero, R.L.



During his time at Clewiston, Ray flew 3 different types of aeroplane & completed courses on the Link Simulator.

These are illustrated next.



Stearman PT17



Vultee BT 13



North American AT



Link Trainer (Simulator)

Ray was at the Number 5 British Flying Training School Clewiston, Florida from 7th November 1941 until 24th April 1942.

Course details.

07/11/41 – 29/11/41	Spearman PT 17
11/12/41 – 31/12/41	Spearman PT 17 & Link Simulator
02/01/42 – 16/01/42	Spearman PT 17
27/01/42 – 31/01/42	Vultee
02/02/42 – 28/02/42	Vultee
01/03/42 – 06/03/42	Vultee & Link simulator
13/03/42 – 30/03/42	North American AT6A
01/04/42 – 24/04/42*	North American AT6A

*** During this course, on 21/04/42 Ray crash landed near Okechobee Lake. Details later.**



RIDDLE-McKAY AERO COLLEGE

RIDDLE FIELD, CLEWISTON, FLORIDA, U. S. A.

Certificate of Graduation

To all persons to whom these presents may come, Greetings:
Be It Known That

Raymond Frank Denton

has completed with honors, and high promise of credit in the Service of his King and Country, the Primary, Basic and Advanced Phases of the Royal Air Force Flying Training conducted by the Riddle-McKay Aero College, operators of the Number Five British Flying Training School, Riddle Field, Clewiston, Florida, U. S. A.

In Witness Whereof we have caused this Certificate of Graduation to be signed.

FOR THE COLLEGE:

John Paul Fernald

J. McKay

W. B. Smith

Wm. J. Tyson

GENERAL MANAGER

FOR THE ROYAL AIR FORCE:

K. J. Hamilton

COMMANDING OFFICER

On This *twenty-second* day of *May*
in the Year of Our Lord, One
Thousand, Nine Hundred and
Twenty-two

Ray returned to UK (Date unknown) to 3 Personnel Reception Centre, Bournemouth.

The function of the PRC was to orientate aircrew as they arrived, to organise refresher courses and various other attachments, and to act as an agent for the air ministry in arranging postings. The main role was really to keep aircrew employed until they could be utilised.

They would have been medically checked out, briefed on their responsibilities and forthcoming duties, attended lectures given by experienced aircrew, issued battle dress and flying gear, and, finally, assigned their next posting.

Ray was next sent to Number 6 Pilots Advanced Flying Unit from 6th August 1942 until 18th August 1942.

During this time he flew the Oxford Trainer and was also assessed on the Link Simulator.

Oxford Trainer illustrated next.



Oxford Trainer

21st August 1942 Ray attended the Number 5 Flying Instructors School at Perth (Scone)

Course details:

21/08/42 – 23/08/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth)

01/09/42 – 14/09/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth), Miles Magister & Link simulator.

DH 82 (Tiger Moth) & Miles Magister are illustrated next.



DH82 Tiger Moth



Miles Magister

17th September 1942 Ray moved to Number 10 Flying Instructors School Reading.

Course details:

17/09/42 – 23/09/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth) & Miles Magister

25/09/42 – 30/09/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth) & Miles Magister

02/10/42 – 15/10/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth) & Miles Magister & Miles Master

16/10/42 – 22/10/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth) & Miles Magister

24/10/42 DH 82 (Tiger Moth) & Miles Magister

Between 22/09/42 and 13/10/42 several sessions on Link simulator.

Miles Master shown on next slide.



Miles Master

Next move was to Number 6 Pilots Advanced Flying Unit, Little Rissington, Gloucestershire.

Course details:

17/11/42 – 18/11/42	Oxford Trainer
23/11/42 – 29/11/42	Transferred to 1517 Beam Approach Training also at Little Rissington. Oxford Trainer.
07/12/42 – 29/12/42	Back to 6(P) AFU Oxford Trainer
03/01/43 -21/01/43	Oxford Trainer & Link simulator

10th March 1943 attended Number 26 Operational Training Unit, Wing Buckinghamshire.

Course details:

10/03/43 -28/03/43 Wellington 1 & 111

03/04/43 - 28/04/43 Wellington 1 & 111

01/05/43 - 14/05/43 Wellington 111

Wellington shown on next slide.



Wellington

1st June 1943 Number 1657 Conversion Unit, Stradishall Suffolk.

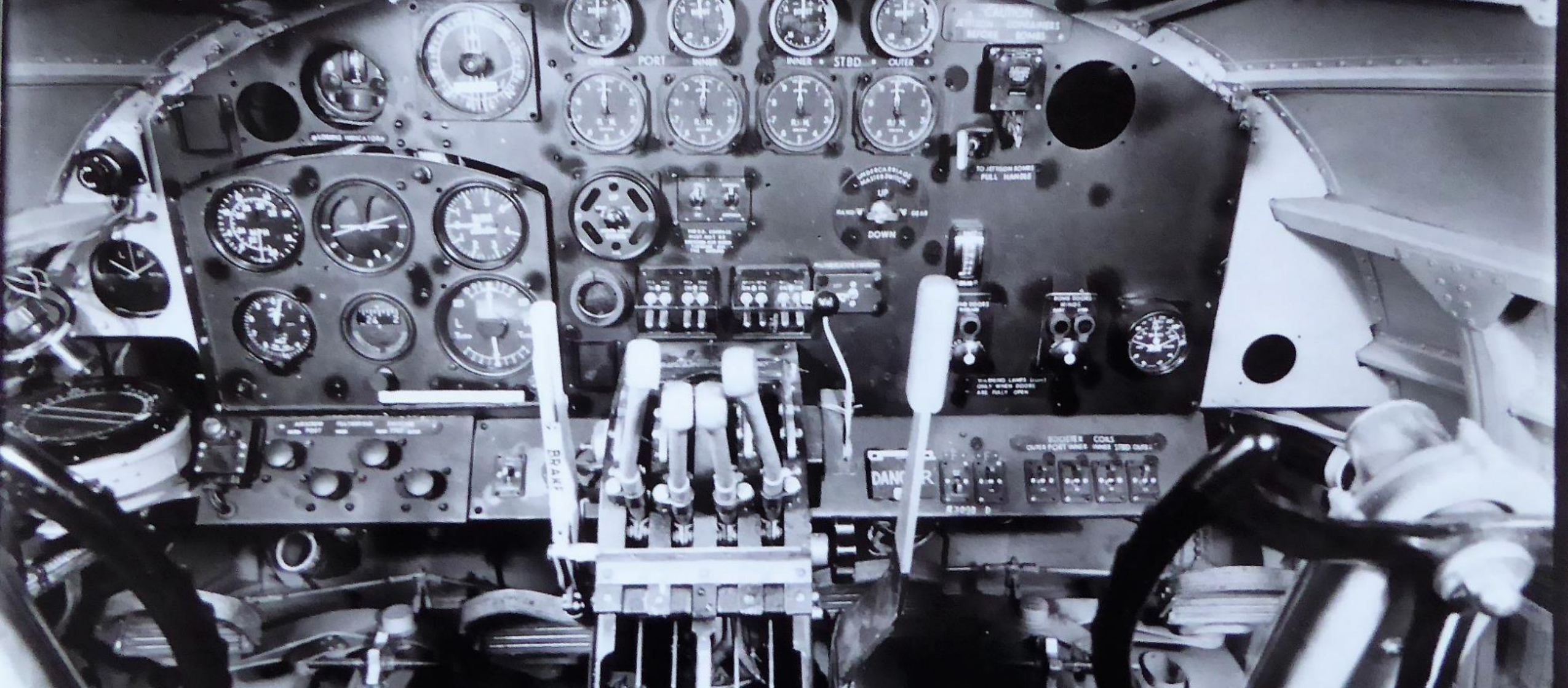
Course details:

01/06/43 – 30/06/43 Stirling 1

Stirling shown on next slide.



Stirling



Stirling cockpit

Ray was next moved to 90 Squadron at Wratting Common, Cambridgeshire to undertake operation duties.

Operational details:

12/07/43 to 30/07/42

**Achen
Hamburg – abandoned, unable to maintain height.
Essen
Hamburg
Remsscheid**

01/08/43 to 30/08/43

**Hamburg
Nuremburg
Turin
Turin
Nuremburg
Munchen Gladbach**

01/09/43 to 22/09/43

**Mannheim
Boulogne
Modane
Hanover – See extracts from the London Gazette and from the History of
Wratting Common next.**

EXTRACT FROM LONDON GAZETTE DATED 19 OCTOBER 1943

THE KING has been graciously pleased to approve the following awards in recognition of gallantry and devotion to duty in the execution of air operations:

Distinguished Flying Cross

Warrant Officer Raymond Frank DENTON (1390284), RAFVR No 90 Squadron

Warrant Officer Denton was the Captain and Pilot of a Stirling aircraft detailed to attack Hanover on the night of the 22/23 September 1943.

Just after bombing, and while still over the target, the aircraft was attacked from astern by a JU 88. The first attack killed the rear gunner, rendered the inter-communication u/s and started two fires in the rear of the fuselage. The Captain, smelling smoke gave the order to 'Prepare to abandon aircraft' but this had to be shouted without the aid of the inter-communication. The wireless operator and bomb aimer misunderstood and baled out. Two further attacks developed from the enemy aircraft and during the subsequent action taken by the Stirling the Pilot sustained a bullet wound in the leg. A petrol tank was holed and owing to lack of fuel the Pilot was forced to feather the port outer engine. In spite of this and his wound the Pilot set course for Base.

On reaching England, with W/T, R/T and I.F.F u/s, the Pilot saw Lakenheath airfield lit up, fired the colours of the day and obtained permission to land. The undercarriage would not lower into position, due to damage caused by a cannon shell, but the Pilot managed to make a crash landing to one side of the flare path without causing injury to his crew.

Extract from the History of Wratting Common.

Nineteen of 90 Squadron's Stirlings took off in balmy weather on the evening of 22 September 1943 to carry out a raid on Hanover, and, once airborne, the crews settled down to the job in hand. Over the target, Stirling EH944 was attacked by a Ju.88; it immediately caught fire, and the rear gunner was killed. The pilot, W/O R. F. Denton, suffered severe leg injuries, the navigator, Sgt. R. W. Suddens, lost a hand, and Sgt. O. N. Jones, the flight engineer, received minor injuries. Before long, two of the engines failed and the pilot ordered the two uninjured crew members, the bomb-aimer and wireless operator, to bale out. As the pilot could not operate the rudder pedals unaided, Sgt. Jones helped him while at the same time struggling to maintain power on the two serviceable engines. By the time the English coast was first sighted, fuel was running low and the three men, badly fatigued, realised that the most difficult job, landing safely, was yet to come. Most of the electrical system had failed, the radio was out of action, and the landing gear could not be lowered except by hand, an impossible task in the circumstances. Soon the lights of Wratting Common's runway were spotted, but, being unable to make contact with the aircraft, the airfield controller suspected a German intruder and switched the lights off. The fuel gauges told the three crew members that they had very little time left and they began looking for a more hospitable airfield. A few minutes later they saw one and made a straight-in approach to a successful crash landing. Only after they were rescued from the crippled aircraft did they discover that they were at RAF Lakenheath.

For the gallantry displayed in this episode, Sgt. Jones was awarded the CGM, which, for NCOs, is outranked only by the VC, and he received his medal from HM King George VI on D-Day, 6 June 1944. W/O Denton received the DFC and Sgt. Suddens the DFM.

About 90 Squadron RAF.

On 7 November 1942 the Squadron again reformed as a night bomber squadron, part of No. 3 (Bomber) Group, at RAF Bottesford. It was to be equipped with the Short Stirling Mk.I, receiving its first Stirling on 1 December and moving to RAF Ridgewell on 29 December 1942. Its first operational venture were mining sorties on 8 January 1943.

The months following saw the Stirling Mk.III (an improved version) introduced to the Squadron, which moved to RAF Wrattling Common on 31 May 1943. As a three-flight unit, the squadron was capable of providing 24 aircraft to the Group's Operational Battle Order, with a further six aircraft held in immediate reserve, and a total of 33 crews. The unit's resources were thrown into the Battle of the Ruhr and sent to many of the German targets that were most heavily defended, including Berlin. The Squadron suffered considerable losses over an eight-month period and found it difficult to maintain reserves of men and machines.

The Stirlings suffered from deficiencies in design, due to restrictions laid down in the original Air Ministry specifications. After suffering heavy proportionate losses by type, their operations were restricted to Special Duties i.e.: Dropping sea mines, low level supply dropping to the Maquis, shorter bombing raids on invasion objectives. The Squadron was active on all these fronts.

By June 1944 the Squadron had been declared operational on Lancasters.

The last raid was to Bremen on 22 April 1945, the squadron flew 4,613 operational sorties for Bomber Command during the war and lost 86 aircraft.



Distinguished Flying Cross.

**An Account of the Events
of 22nd / 23rd September 1943
by
R.W. Suddens**

1943.

Compiled with the assistance of:-

Ray Denton, D.F.C.
Owen Jones, C.G.M (Flying).
George Barker.

90 SQUADRON.
3. Group Bomber Command
Wratting Common.

Station Call Sign....."Codbolt".
Aircraft Call Sign....."Lampost".

CREW:

W/O R.F. Denton.....Pilot & Captain.....Ray.
Sgt. G.A. Barker.....M.U.Gunner.....George.
Sgt. G.F. Davis.....W/Operator.....George.
Sgt. O.N. Jones.....Flight Engineer.....Owen.
Sgt. W.A. Morgan.....Rear Gunner.....Bill.
Sgt. J.W. Purcell.....Bomb Aimer.....'Percy'.
Sgt. R.W. Suddens.....Navigator.....'Sammy'.

Wednesday, September 22nd had been a fine, warm, late summer's day. The cereal crops in the fields surrounding Wrattling Common airfield were still being harvested. The warmth of the day was continued into the evening and had caused us to decide not to wear flying gear other than boots. Briefing had taken place after the usual early supper of eggs and bacon. The briefing was more or less, by now, routine, the weather forecast for the night was good and the target was Bochum in the Ruhr - contemplation of a short but dicey trip, with the target being heavily defended.

On arrival at the aircraft dispersal, there was a Tannoy announcement ordering all Pilots and Navigators to return to the Briefing Room. The crew bus took us back to the Briefing Room where we discovered that the target had been altered to Hanover - no reason for the alteration was given. Flight plans were accordingly altered and we were prepared to return to the dispersal, with time running short before the arranged take off times. I went to pick up my parachute harness, only to find that there was only one harness hanging up, and it wasn't mine! It was obvious, by the way the straps were adjusted, that it had been previously worn by a shorter person. The straps that pass through the legs before clipping into the bottom of the harness clasp were too short to pass through - (more of this later). I had no recourse other than to grab the harness, put it on, and think about readjusting it as soon as I could.

Ray and I were the last pair to head for the dispersal, but there was no crew bus available. However, the station ambulance appeared and the driver offered to drive us out. Ray declined the offer at first, making the comment - "If you go out in the 'blood wagon', you come back in it". We had, however, no alternative.

It was now twilight and we joined the line of aircraft taking off, and commenced circling the airfield to gain height before setting course for our first turning point, which was Cromer. Whilst circling, Owen, who had taken up his position in the Astrodome, and George from the mid-upper turret, reported a Stirling aircraft about 2,000ft. below us, and almost directly over the airfield, had exploded in mid-air; this turned out later to be Sgt. Hayman's aircraft.

We crossed the English coast at about 11,000ft., still climbing and by this time the light was really fading into darkness. The next leg across the North Sea was uneventful. Routine tests with fuel tanks being changed to use the fuel in the smaller tanks and guns fired in short bursts were carried out. I.F.F. was switched off and recorded. Gee was operating well and we were on track with many sightings of the other aircraft on both port and starboard. I don't recall precisely the next turning point, - Owen seems to think that it was Heligoland, but a direct south east course to Hanover from there, would have taken us over Bremen. I rather think it must have been one of the Friesian Islands, Ameland or Terschelling, a favourite turning point.

Crossing the coast, anti-aircraft fire was sporadic and didn't bother us unduly, but we continued to carry out the laid down corkscrewing and weaving manoeuvres.

We were now beginning to make out the glow from the target area and searchlight activity was far greater than usual, with the Master searchlight probing the sky and the associated 'slaves' lying horizontal. Several aircraft were reported to be coned, and Owen reported a Halifax ahead of us going down in flames. By now, I had worked out the course to be set on leaving the target, so I left the navigator's table and took up my 'target position' in the co-pilot's seat. Up to this time Percy, the bomb-aimer, had occupied this seat, but he had now taken up his position at the bomb site in the nose of the aircraft. On course for the aiming point, the searchlight activity intensified and I was having to give Ray course alterations to avoid them. We had just completed one of these manoeuvres and had levelled out to drop our bomb load, when we were momentarily caught in one of the Masters and almost simultaneously, by it's 'slaves'. Ray immediately turned to starboard and we were, thankfully, back in the darkness. The damage, however, had been done, the bombing run had just been completed and the bomb doors closed, when we were attacked by two J.U.88s, the first attack from the starboard quarter, and the second from the port quarter.

Ray's recollections confirm my own, that the attacks came immediately after Percy had announced "Bombs Gone", one of the gunners shouted "Fighter-Port-Go" and Ray took immediate corkscrew action to port, but the enemy fire came from the starboard quarter. The second attack mounted by another J.U.88 from the port quarter was almost simultaneous.

The first attack put out of action both gun turrets, though not before Bill and George had managed to get in a couple of bursts at the attacking aircraft. It also put out of action the inter-com, severely damaged the instrument panel and started a fire near the entrance door. The second attack followed immediately, and Ray put the aircraft into a corkscrew and dived to starboard, losing about 10,000ft. in altitude.

The cockpit had started to fill with smoke, and Ray struggled to open the side window but without success. The second attack did the job for him, shattering the windows and clearing the cockpit. He still has vivid recollections of pushing his head back against the rear armour shield behind him and seeing the tracer go through the cockpit. He gave the order "Prepare to abandon aircraft", but without inter-com, it was impossible to know how the order had been received. We believe that Bomber Command instructions regarding the abandoning of aircraft were later altered to include the words "Put on parachutes", to avoid ambiguity.

Communication was virtually impossible, other than between Ray and myself. George (D) had been stationed at the flare chute, throwing out 'window'; he yanked at George (B) legs, and gestured that we were abandoning the aircraft, and then rushed past Owen and between Ray and myself, to the bomb bay escape hatch below where Percy had been stationed. Owen reports that, as George (D) passed him, he was clutching at his stomach with both forearms as though he had been hit.

There had been no communication from Percy since "Bombs gone", he had either been hit or had baled out. George (B), making his way to the forward escape hatch, was stopped by Ray who told him that we were establishing control.

During the second attack, both Ray and I had been hit by shrapnel, Ray in the right leg, and myself in the right hand. Meanwhile, and most importantly, Owen had grabbed an extinguisher and progressed along the fuselage, putting out the flames on the blazing duck boards. He asked for a second extinguisher which he used to completely douse the fire, and then obtained a third to put out webbing belt that was still smouldering. We had lost the two pursuing J.U.88s thanks to Ray's skilful evasive action and the fact that Owen had got the fires out. We were no longer a sitting target.

We had now set a westerly course, flying at about 4,000ft. and it was time to take stock. I remained in the second pilot's seat, helping Ray to hold on right rudder because his right leg had started to stiffen up. Since the enemy attack, no contact had been made with Bill or Percy, and it was assumed that Percy had baled out from his position above the forward escape hatch.

Owen went down to the bomb bay to verify this and to close the escape hatch. This proved to be a difficult and dangerous operation since there was little room to manoeuvre, and a wind pressure that was acting against closing the hatch. He also went aft to the rear turret and found that Bill was dead.

Looking around the navigation table, I found that my navigational charts and flight plan had gone, presumably sucked out of the aircraft. However, the Gee box was still working, and started to be functioning usefully as we neared the Dutch coast. There was also an appropriate Gee lattice chart, which I was able to use until the end of the trip.

During the flight to the Dutch coast, there were no further hostile incidents, only sporadic anti aircraft fire in the distance, and we managed gradually to restore height to 10,000ft. Owen was examining the engine instrument panel which, he discovered, had been so severely damaged that it was useless. The petrol log sheet, from which he could determine the amount of fuel we had and it's tank distribution, was nowhere to be found, presumably also sucked out of the aircraft. He decided to utilise the small tanks, and this he did successfully.

The Dutch coast was crossed, with a great deal of relief, I obtained a Gee fix which confirmed our position and we all felt more positive about our chances of survival. Then the star-board outer engine coughed, Ray and Owen immediately suspected fuel problems. Owen switched on all tanks, it was now becoming obvious that we had a major fuel leak (the small tanks should not have run dry by this time). The problem of having all tanks in use simultaneously, was one of the air locks - a problem that could only be surmounted by use of the wobble pumps.

It wasn't long before Ray started to experience difficulties with the other engines firing intermittently. The decision was taken to close down both outboard engines and keep the two inboard ones going without fuel starvation. It was necessary to use both wobble pumps.

Throughout the return journey, George, who had also been wounded in the leg, had the unenviable task of occupying an inoperable gun turret, with no heating. He soon became extremely cold and his leg stiffened up. Halfway across the North Sea, whilst Owen and I were operating the wobble pumps, he spent a spell in the second pilot's seat. At least he was less cold and certainly no longer isolated.

We were now losing height and it became apparent that we would be crossing the English coast well below 2,000ft. Ray was now trying to contact Wrattling Common by R/T, but without reply. I can vividly recall him calling "Hello Codbolt - this is Lampost A-Able" repeatedly, followed by "Hello any Codbolt aircraft, this is Lampost A-Able" - but dead silence. Then exasperatedly, but not without a trace of humour, "Hello any bloody aircraft, Hello any bloody aircraft, this is Lampost A bloody Able" - all to no avail.

Crossing the English coast near Cromer, at below 2,000ft. meant that the IFF (Identification Friend or Foe) would not be effective and it was necessary to identify ourselves by means of the Very Pistol, so I fired off the appropriate "colours of the period". As we approached Wrattling Common, Owen was still having to use the wobble pumps. The airfield flare path was lit up, so I fired off two reds, the recognised S.O.S. signal, but as we flew nearer the airfield, the lights were put out. It should be stated here that the Luftwaffe had started to employ J.U.88s as intruders who shadowed R.A.F. aircraft back to their bases, and there attacked them whilst the crews were more relaxed and, obviously less vigilant.

I was again occupying the second pilot's seat when Ray and I spotted another airfield about 20 miles away - with it's flare path illuminated. As we approached I fired off another two reds, but, once again the flarepath was extinguished. I now fired off all the remaining cartridges we had - reds, yellows, blues and greens. The flarepath was immediately relit and we received permission from the Airfield Control Pilot on the runway to land. We were now at treetop height, skimming over Brandon Woods. Ray thought there was no time to consider lowering the undercarriage by manual means (the electrics were U/S), so he decided to 'pancake' the aircraft on the grass. We landed on the port side of the runway - the aircraft ploughing through the sandy soil of R.A.F. Lakenheath. We each jumped out of the aircraft at the exit nearest to where we had taken up our crash positions, and ran like hell.

The Station ambulance was there to transport us back to Sick Quarters (we had, indeed, returned in the 'blood wagon'), and from there to R.A.F. hospital, Ely.

Our flight had lasted 6-hours 45-minutes.

Owen, who needed no medical treatment, went out to the aircraft the following morning. The ground crew were already tidying the debris - EH 944 was, of course, a complete 'write off' and it was confirmed that all fuel tanks were virtually empty.

In addition to the airmanship displayed by Ray and Owen, the remaining essential element in our survival, was the vigilance of the Lakenheath Airfield Control or a nearby Observer Corps unit - or maybe both.

I made reference at the early part of this narrative that I would write more about the parachute problem I had in the crew room before take off. Some time later, when I was stationed at 85 O.T.U. I read in "Tee Emm", (an aircrew Air Ministry publication) that a parachute not correctly fitted and in the same mode as mine, had come completely adrift from the body of the user who had plummeted to his death - Enough said!

-oOo-

This account is dedicated to the memory of Bill Morgan, who is buried in Newport, and to George Davies who was taken prisoner of war but died of his wounds in a German hospital and is buried at Limmer near Hanover.

-oOo-

"Percy" Purcell was taken prisoner of war and returned to the United Kingdom after the war.

-oOo-

Ron Suddens. D.F.M. 1994.

Glossary of Terms.

GEE - was a navigational aid which produced signals, that plotted on to an appropriate chart, converted to a 'fix' or position.

WINDOW - were metallic strips scattered from aircraft for the purpose of deranging enemy Radar.

ASTRODOME - is the plastic bubble on top of the fuselage from which star shots were taken with a sextant.

Following a period of recuperation, Ray transferred from 90 Squadron to become a trainer.

08/11/43 to 29/11/43	Number 14 Operational Training Unit based at Cottesmore, Rutland. Training on Wellington 1c.
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01/12/43 to 03/03/43	Moved to Number 16 Operational Training Unit at Upper Heyford, Oxfordshire. Training on Wellington 1c as part of the Group Instructors Flight.
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George VI.

George VI *by the Grace of God*, OF GREAT BRITAIN, IRELAND
AND THE BRITISH DOMINIONS BEYOND THE SEAS, KING, DEFENDER OF
THE FAITH, EMPEROR OF INDIA, &c.

To Our Trusty and well beloved

Raymond Frank Denton

Greeting :

WE reposing especial Trust and Confidence in your Loyalty, Courage, and good Conduct, do by these Presents Constitute and Appoint you to be an Officer in Our *Royal Air Force Volunteer Reserve* from the *Ninth* day of *April* 19 *44*. You are therefore carefully and diligently to discharge your Duty as such in the Rank of *Pilot Officer* or in such higher Rank as We may from time to time hereafter be pleased to promote or appoint you to and you are at all times to exercise and well discipline in their Duties both the inferior Officers and Airmen serving under you and use your best endeavours to keep them in good Order and Discipline. And We do hereby Command them to Obey you as their superior Officer and you to observe and follow such Orders and Directions as from time to time you shall receive from Us, or any your superior Officer, according to the Rules and Discipline of War, in pursuance of the Trust hereby reposed in you.

GIVEN at Our Court, at Saint James's

the *Sixth*

day of

June

19 *44* in the *Eighth*

Year of Our Reign

By His Majesty's Command

W. Bennett

W. Bennett

AIRMANSHIP
OFFICER -
F/L^T R.F. DENTON
D.F.C

Post War

It is not known when Ray left the RAF.

In 1988 a trip to Florida was being planned and it was thought to be a good idea to visit Okeechobee for old times sake.

One thing led to another and an invitation was arranged to visit the Mayor of Okeechobee.

This occasion was duly reported in the “Okeechobee News” including a description of the crash landing on the 21st of April 1942.

The airfield at Clewiston was visited and a photo taken of the plaque.

One more surprise awaited Ray as he was presented with the Key to Okeechobee by the Mayor!



City of Okeechobee

COUNCIL MEMBERS

Nick Collins
Andy Rubin
Oscar Thomas
Dowling Watford, Jr.

MAYOR

Oakland R. Chapman

CITY CLERK

Bonnie S. Thomas, C.M.C.

February 3, 1988

R. F. Denton Esquire, DFC
48 Meon Road
Milton, Portsmouth
Hants. PO4 8NL

Dear Mr. Denton:

We are in receipt of your letter of January 14, and it came as quite a surprise.

Our local newspaper features a "Remember When" column on a regular basis. I took the liberty of having your photographs included (copy enclosed). As yet, no one has called that was actually there that fateful night; however, I'm told several persons remember the incident. Perhaps when your itinerary has been established, we can have the photos rerun and include the dates you plan to be in town; someone may come forward at that time.

As I said, it was quite a surprise hearing from you but a most pleasant one. If we can help to make your visit to Okeechobee more pleasant, please feel free to contact me. You are welcome to visit city hall, please call in advance to avoid conflicting obligations.

Sincerely,

Oakland R. Chapman, Mayor

sf

Okeechobee News

25¢

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Two Sections



Pilot owes his life to Okeechobee residents

By MISSIE DELANEY

A very special visitor in Okeechobee attributes his life, his marriage, his children and even being decorated by the King of England to the residents of our small city.

Former British Royal Air Force (RAF) pilot Ray F. Denton, who "dropped in" on Okeechobee this week, received a key to the city from Mayor Oakland Chapman at the regular Okeechobee City Council meeting Tuesday and then honored the people of Okeechobee in return.

"I am pleased and honored to be here today, because I really feel the people of Okeechobee saved my life that night," said Denton. "I just dropped in out of the sky, and you welcomed me with open arms."

Denton told the gathering about the routine training flight he flew over Okeechobee in 1942 during World War II. Sometime during the flight, he became disoriented and was lost. While he knew he was somewhere in the vicinity of Clewiston and Lake Okeechobee, his exact location was unknown to him. He later found out the compass in his airplane was 40 degrees out of true - adding to his confusion.

It soon became clear to Denton that he would have to make a forced landing in the pitch black night.

"Previously I had crashed twice in daylight, so you can see I had already made a practice of it," the former RAF pilot joked. "It was

Okeechobee Mayor Oakland Chapman presents former RAF pilot Ray F. Denton and his wife with a key to the city. (Photo by Howard Neddo)

Continued on Page 3A

frightening at night, though, because you don't know where you are going to land -- or what you are going to land in.

"I finally saw a very small row of lights," remembered Denton. And I went around and around and around and around."

That small row of lights turned out to be Okeechobee's main street. Denton said as he circled the lights, he reviewed all of his options including landing on the main street of Okeechobee and taking the chance of hurting innocent bystanders; landing the plane outside town and taking the chance of killing himself by not being able to see where he was landing; and even the option of bailing out and ditching the plane, which could also lead to innocent folks being harmed. None of the options quite suited him, he said, but he

had just about settled on landing on the main street, when another avenue was opened up for him.

"Fortunately, the people in Okeechobee had some common sense," Denton said. "They lined up their automobiles and turned their lights on the landing strip, so I could see to land the plane."

Laurenn Reeves, who was a teenage boy at the time, said he remembers the night just like it was yesterday. Reeves said that it was obvious to those on the ground that the airplane was in trouble and would have to land. It just kept circling around and the noise attracted their attention.

Reeves' father, who owned the barber shop which is still located next door to the Okeechobee County School Board building, was among about a dozen resi-

dents who drove their cars to the landing strip and focused their lights for the troubled plane to land.

"There were about a dozen cars," Reeves remembered. "We all put our lights in one direction. He came down right over our cars at the end of the runway with his wheels up and landed the plane pretty as you please. He couldn't see a thing."

Reeves came all the way from his home in Orlando to visit with Denton Tuesday, and to see Denton awarded with a key to the city.

"It's the key to our city," said Mayor Chapman during the presentation. "It doesn't open many doors, but it's yours."

Denton once again told the council and those gathered at the meeting that he owes his life to the quick-thinking residents

of Okeechobee.

"I got married soon after the war, and I wouldn't have been able to do that without the folks here," he said. "I have three children and eight grandchildren, who also would not be here without you."

"I've had a wonderful life, I've been before the King, been decorated by the King, all due to the people of Okeechobee," he said. "There is an old saying about being up the creek without a paddle. Well, on that night in

1942, I was up the creek and had no paddle. Okeechobee gave me the paddle."

Teens to host weekend dances

The Quality of Life Teens hold dances every Friday and Saturday night from 7 - 11 p.m. at Teen Town through August. Charge is \$1 at the door. For more information call B.J. Duquette at 467-4131.



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AND ARE REMEMBERED EACH YEAR BY THE PEOPLE OF THAT CITY.



There is one final twist to the tale!

Purely by coincidence, Ray's son, Peter Denton acquired a copy of the "Victor" comic whilst at boarding school.

Much to his surprise he realised the front and rear cover pages were about his Dad!

Close examination however reveals considerable journalistic licence in that the aeroplane is described as a Lancaster not a Stirling.

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FLAMES IN THE SKY



On January 1, 1945, during the Second World War, a force of ten Lancaster bombers from No. 9 Squadron attacked the Dortmund-Ems Canal in Germany. Flight-Sergeant George Thompson was the wireless operator in the bomber piloted by Flying-Officer Denton. After an uneventful flight out, the Lancs ran into heavy anti-aircraft fire around the target.



Two shells scored direct hits on Thompson's Lancaster.



THAT SHELL MUST HAVE HIT US WELL BACK. I'D BETTER GO AND SEE IF THE GUNNERS ARE OKAY!



TAFF AND ERNIE ARE TRAPPED BACK THERE! I'LL HAVE TO GO AND HELP THEM.

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