



HALIFAX V

AIR CADET OVER THE REICH

A veteran of No. 111 Vancouver Squadron describes the highlights of his twenty-nine trips over Europe at the controls of a Halifax.

By P/O Ray Smith, D.F.C.

PARDON me if I just ramble on. They tell me I'm more interesting that way than if I try to make up a story.

Yes, I was an Air Cadet with No. 1601 Vancouver Squadron (now No. 111). Our training in those days was not nearly as complex as is yours today, but it was a lot of fun and served us very well when we got into the Air Force. Most of us did get into the Air Force too, and were lucky enough to get in operational careers.

I left the cadets in June, 1941, and was accepted by the Air Force for pilot training. They almost flunked me out at E.F.T.S. though. I was what you might call a high-strung type, and when I took my tests at the end of Elementary I really got in a sweat. The examiner was a tough bird who kept shouting at me from the back seat of the little Tigerschmitt. Whatever he'd tell me to do, I'd do the other thing. I only got to S.F.T.S. because my instructor testified that my day to day flying had been good--and besides I had been an Air Cadet.

Finally to England in 1942, and to

an advanced flying unit. I put in eight weeks there on Oxfords, getting the feel of twin engines again and working up a dither about O.T.U. As I said, I'm the high-strung type.

Then on to O.T.U. I remember that the train went on down past the airfield before stopping at the station. I remember looking over at the field and thinking to myself, "Smitty, you'll never get out of this one unless they carry you." And then I thought to myself that other chaps had done it, so I could too.

Those short weeks at O.T.U. were really something. I flew Wellington Is and ICs. When I first walked up to a Wellington it seemed pretty big and hot compared with the aircraft I had been flying, and there was an atmosphere about this place that I hadn't



Air Marshal Bishop watching a flight demonstration of two Mosquitos at the de Havilland plant in Toronto (story in next issue). Left is W/C George Ross, League National Director; right, P/O Ray Smith, author of this article.

felt before. We got in briefings here and bombing practice with full crew.

My first war load take-off—six 250-lb. bombs along for the ride—had me frazzled. The old Wimpy hugged the ground the entire length of the runway and then barely staggered into the air.

At O.T.U. we had access to the latest operational gen, too, and I took advantage of this. There was no compulsion to study it, but about that time I needed no persuasion.

By then it was early 1943 and most of the bomber boys were being converted to four engines. I went onto a conversion unit, and there again I had one of those feelings. We were only six weeks away from actual ops, and that is a very short time.

Again the Hallies looked about twice as big as anything I'd come up against. I was to be a Halifax man, and we were trained on Is and Vs. Sitting in the seat of a Halifax for the first time, the ground seems a long way down, but after taxiing about a bit you get the feel of it. It took me about four hours to solo, and by that time I felt pretty hot on the big machine.

After that came a long series of night and day cross-country tours, cloely approximating actual bombing conditions. On one of my first trips I got into trouble when my air speed indicator did a blackout. There I was stooging around in the dark and strictly an amateur at this kind of thing. After ten trips to Berlin it would have been fairly routine, but for a beginner . . .

Anyhow my radio op got me back to the field, and the tower cleared everything out of the air and got the old crash buggy standing by. So there

was Smith hanging up in the night with twenty-five tons of machinery and nothing but the seat of me pants to fly by. To make it all sound modest I lined up with the glide path indicator at the end of the runway—that's a set of light beams that give you your angle of approach—and rode on down, gauging my speed by the boost, the r.p.m., and the general way the whole thing shimmied. Light as a feather she touched down, enabling us all to be very casual about it. That got me a good mark in the instructor's book.

Quite a while later I went back to a conversion school as an instructor and had a better chance to study the students impartially. Funny thing, some chaps can get that far, and then even though they're only six weeks away from meeting the real thing out over Europe, they just don't bother to bone up on the latest operational gen. I never could understand that, but at that point the instructor doesn't care much how you spend your odd hours. If you don't feel like swatting, then the worries are all yours later on.

As an instructor at a Con Unit I learned some new slants on that thing called judgment, too. You know how it is when you're doing foot drill as an Air Cadet. The officer shouts a command—and some lad isn't just sure what to do. So he teeters back and forth for five seconds before making up his mind to left turn.

Well that five seconds of teetering nearly got me a nice long box at one point. You know a Halifax tends to swing in the take-off and you have to nurse her pretty carefully with your throttles. I was going up with a student one day and as we got part way down the runway the machine started to swing. Farther and farther she went, and finally right off the runway and hell bent for leather over the field. I looked at the chap, expecting him to cut his motors, and go round and try again.

But no sir, there he was teetering. By the time he made up his mind we were air-borne and just scraping over the tops of the trees. I suppose you won't believe that that could have been fixed back on an Air Cadet drill

square—but then you never do believe till you've been through it yourself, and by then it doesn't matter anyway.

Finally on to operations in April of 1943. I was nineteen years old by then and ready to take on the Ruhr Valley—which is just what we proceeded to do. I was with an R.A.F. Squadron, and for the next five months we beat up German industry in Pilsen, Stetten, Frankfort, Hamburg, Berlin and the other targets you've read about.

We worked plenty hard too. In that time I made twenty-nine trips; was out one week for five nights, and believe me that gets to be a little heavy.

I won't tell you much about the flak and the night fighters, because you hear enough about that. It's pretty much the same for one machine as another, and anyhow you don't really believe it till you feel it. But there are some other angles you might enjoy.

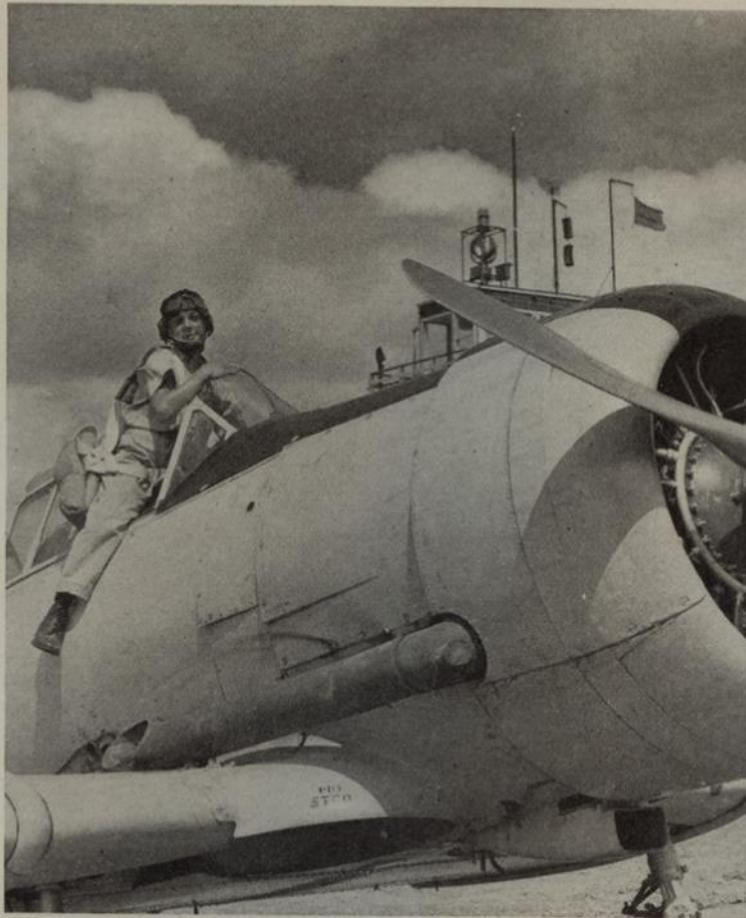
Our aircraft was a Halifax II called X for Breakfast. As we used to say, it always reminded us that there was something to come home for.

Our first trip was to Frankfort, and it was a killer for a very unusual reason. We had heard about this business of weaving, and we figured it sounded like good operational gen. So the moment I got over France, back and forth I started, all over the sky. Weaving down to Frankfurt went X for Breakfast. At last we planted our load and started weaving back to England. By the time we put down, four out of seven of my crew were casualties—victims of weaving. The tail gunner was strictly good for nothing. The veteran crews laughed like mad when they heard of this. Actually a small weave makes no difference at all to flak or night fighters. All it does is make you sick and wastes time and money. Our next trip was straight and level.

I am often asked about fear: "My dear Mr. Smith, you must be simply livid up there with all those people shooting at you!" Well, the fact is a man does get a little anxious, but that's a good thing providing it does not run away with you. Fear gives you quick reactions—and how! We used to say a man who isn't scared is a menace to his outfit. He's just got no sense.

Funny thing about fear. On your first trip you're scared green, but you don't know what you're scared of. It's something mysterious out there in the dark. Then you get shot at from above and below and somehow you come home anyhow. After that you know what you're scared of, but

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Yes, They Really Fly!

This year Air Cadets were permitted to fly at summer camp . . . a fact which prompted RCAF pilots to term them "gremlins" or "termites" . . . for obvious reasons! Here Corporal Ken Camken of Belleville, climbing into a Harvard at Hagersville.

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Cadet Over the Reich

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you've been through it before so it doesn't seem so bad now. At least that's how it worked with me.

Yes, fear is an interesting subject. I used to watch it at work in various types of chaps when we were sitting around waiting to go out to the aircraft. One would keep rubbing his chin, another would light cigarettes and put them out, another would keep fussing about with a newspaper. One chap I knew used to keep blinking his eyes rapidly . . . but he sure didn't blink over target. To wind this up, fear is okay providing you don't let it run your life. There could be no courage without it.

So we kept on flying, down to Hamburg, Nuremburg, Munich, Stuttgart, Berlin. We got the hang of it pretty quickly and began to be sure of doing the right thing. Of course you have a while to get organized before starting out. The first aircraft up has about thirty minutes to get altitude and to do circuits. The last machine has about ten minutes of preparatory floating around. Then you all push off at the same minute.

At what is called the concentration

point all squadrons join up for the trip to the target. Actually every aircraft is on its own and you see very little of the other machines. But you

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know they're there, out beside you, above and below you. You are then in what is called "the bomber stream," and for safety sake it's a good place to stay. You don't weave unless you get shot at and then you really throw the old machine around. So long as you stay in the bomber stream Jerry can just throw the flak up and hope that somebody runs into it, or vice versa. But if you get off course, either through navigation, or because you want to swing too wide of a defended area, then you're really in trouble. You show up as a little individual dot on Jerry's radio locator screen and he can train the guns dead on you personally. He can predict your position and then let you have it right on the nose. The first shots are the ones to worry about. If they miss, then you can take heavy evasive action and generally mess up his predictions.

Sometimes they get the lights on you, and that's not good. I always think that running through the lights is like running through a bunch of trees. You run right up to one, and then at the last moment weave off to the side and toward another one. Sometimes they get you, though. If

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Cadet Over the Reich

(From page 21)

they can get ten lights on you it's a sad case, because they can then build up a really big cone. I remember one night Jerry got a cone of light on a Halifax beside me. Then they filled the cone with flak. Then night fighters started to come in. The Halifax gunners were blinded by the lights and didn't have a chance.

Always you have to worry about the Ju 88s. They pack a mass of radio location gear, and can pick up any of our bombers that get out of the stream, and home on them. Often they fly in packs with a Ju 88 out in front with lights in the wings and nose. The others formate on this machine, and only break off to go in for the kill.

Other Jerry night fighters get instructions from radio location units on the ground, but we have tricks to bust this up. Our radio ops keep trying the wave band till they hear a Jerry ground unit vectoring the night fighters. Then our chaps go to work and fill the band with the darndest collection of sounds you ever heard. This game is known as "tinselling" and is most effective.

As you get in toward target the Jerry fighters often try another stunt. They fly along above the bomber stream and drop a long lane of flares right above you. Then the cat's eye boys—non-radio equipped—swoop down into the lane and bang away at you.

Over target it's just about like daylight, between the fires below, the searchlights, and the flares above. You can see your own chaps all over the place, but you really don't have much time or inclination to think about it. I always followed the same procedure over target. The last thing before the run I put my compass on the new course—that is, my home course. Then I drop the nose down and run like the devil, losing a thousand feet in a hurry. I levelled for the actual run, gave the bomb aimer the speed, wait forever while he got bombs away and took a picture, then swung the aircraft onto the compass heading and lit out for home.

And so it went for twenty-nine trips. As I mentioned before, you begin to feel pretty confident after about five trips. Then about fifteen you're a veteran and nothing can happen to you. After twenty you begin to think that you may be a little too lucky and you start to get careful. Finally, after twenty-five trips you can count the rest of them on one hand and that's when you begin to get too careful. How can a man be too careful? Well, he can start to give too wide a berth to defended areas, which is apt to put

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QUIZ ANSWERS

(Questions on page 30)

1. P-61 Black Widow.
2. Five.
3. Spitfire XII.
4. True.
5. Leading edge.
6. Kingcobra, Commando, Havoc, Baltimore.
7. Bristol, Vickers, Fairey, Junkers, Douglas, Blackburn
8. Wright Cyclone.
9. Albermarle, Mariner.
10. (a) back, (b) in, (c) in, (d) out.
11. Tempest.
12. He IIIK.
13. Five.
14. Fixed.
15. Lightning, Boomerang.
16. It is "bubble shaped." Wellington.

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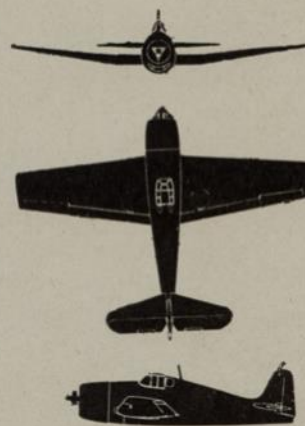
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(Canadian Aviation)

Cadet Over the Reich

(From page 23)

him out of the stream and all by himself. And then—bingo! We managed to avoid that though—you would be annoyed if you were shot down on your last trip, wouldn't you?

How do you ever get through all the stuff they throw at you? Partly on luck and partly on skill. Skill is the big factor; not of one man, but of the entire crew.

My crew was really on the beam—at least I think so. The navigator was Bert Page, D.F.M., a big Englishman who knew his subject and didn't rattle. The bomb-aimer was Harold Cork, D.F.M. He was an old man of twenty-nine, quite cautious but very able. Low flying disturbed Harold. Jerry Jones was the wireless op, a quick-moving youngster who knew his job and kept his worries to himself. Frank Jones was mid-upper gunner, a Welshman whose accent used to amuse me even over the intercomm. Ronnie Jones, the engineer, was a carefree Cockney who hated new uniforms and loved to wallow in grease. He really kept X for Breakfast out of the frying pan. Twice we came home on two engines, but never

was it Ronnie's fault. The rear gunner, Freddy Smith, was another man that never let anything worry him. Thus we had three Jones and two Smiths, none of us related.

I did my best for my crew, and they did their best for me. I think we worked well as a team. One thing we learned early was to keep shut up over the intercomm. There's an awful temptation to chatter, but you can't talk and work at the same time, and there's plenty of work to be done on a trip. Also, excess talking disturbs the navigator, and that's one man whose every thought must be a little gem.

Funny how hard it is to think sometimes under operational conditions. I remember calling out my course to the navigator three times in succession on one trip, as was our custom, and he asked for a re-check. A fourth check revealed that I had the wrong setting! Just two points off will send you plenty wide on a long trip.

The navigator and I had an agreement that he would always say something positive over the intercomm., even if he wasn't sure. If I asked where we were and he were to say "I'm not quite sure," it would be inclined to make the rest of the crew

jittery. The gunners would get to worrying about being lost instead of searching the sky; whereas if the navigator immediately shouts "twenty miles south of Paris," and then spends the next five minutes getting an exact fix and gives me the position at the end of that time, everybody's happy because the "expert" knows where we are.

The worst beating we ever took was not from the enemy at all, but from a storm. It was one night over Hamburg when the met man had been about ten miles out in his guess. Instead of skirting the storm we drove right into the middle of it. Inside all hell broke loose.

We saw flashes from miles away, but didn't realize what they were.

We had met a new type of flak around here before, and figured that this must be a new super-flak. It looked pretty to watch, but also deadly. The navigator called me, "Man, what have they got over there tonight?" We soon found out. Sparks started banging all over X for Breakfast, including in the cockpit. The props were whirling blue with sparks and just out beyond our wingtips the lightning was being manufactured.

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Still Champ. Flying in bigger groups than ever, the Lancs are helping to open the road to Berlin.



Cadet Over the Reich

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Then the rain started. Rain? It was more like being in the submarine service, except that we had no periscope to throw up. Then ice started to form and you could hear it rattling against the fuselage as it flew off the prop tips. I had to keep the control surfaces moving to keep them from freezing up solid.

Well, we had gone into that mess at twenty-one thousand feet, and a few minutes later we were flung out the bottom at ten thousand, right over the city. Our bombs had gone somewhere, perhaps near the target. And our compass had been fritzed by the storm. Ultimately we ended up at base, much to everyone's surprise. X for Breakfast was sure scrambled that night.

Finally you're coming home from your last trip, and you're the happiest man in the world and a little sorry at the same time. Coming in over England you put your lights on and

throttle down . . . and you look out beside you, and there stretching along the night are the lights of perhaps a hundred aircraft all coming back to base at once. You're home then. At least so some say. Others say that you're home when you see the outer circle of light on your own field. Still others, including me, say that you're home when you climb out of the aircraft and take off your flying kit. As you probably know a good many Jerry bombers have been shot down by our Mosquitos just before they touched down on the landing strip.

And then . . . then you're back in Canada shooting a line to the Air Cadets and wondering what comes next. So long now.

Future of Flying Clubs

(From page 15)

Unless this is directed along sound lines in each community, by a flying club, there might be real danger of ill-directed enthusiasm, over-development, and flying activities hazardous

to the public, which could only bring disappointment and retard our aviation progress. Thirdly, there is the training of pilots. Flying training after the war will not be limited to clubs by any means, but their share in the aeronautical education of our youth will be widespread and influential. The clubs' co-ordinated training organization will be of great potential value to the nation. Fourthly, both by direct demand and indirectly through expansion of private flying, an extensive flying club movement will be a substantial factor in maintenance of a peacetime aircraft industry. Fifth, we have many airports coming free from the Air Training Plan. The flying club movement after the war can ensure that airports of potential usefulness, whether or not of immediate commercial value, are kept in action.

It would be no exaggeration to say that re-establishment and extension of the flying club movement throughout Canada is a first essential toward stability and organized progress in civilian flying after the war.