

Bob Jarvis with *wartime memories of his father, Sandy Jarvis*

My father, Sandy, was too old to be called up at the start of the Second World War. However he volunteered for the RAF and trained to be a flight engineer. He was assigned to Halifax bombers and joined a Canadian crew. For some reason, which I have never understood, Canadian bomber crews flying from the UK all arrived short of flight engineers and the deficiency had to be made up from British personnel. The Canadians had never flown 4 engined bombers before and some of their early attempts to take off and land were somewhat scary.

The bombing raids were mainly night flights over German cities and, as the attrition rate for bomber crew was very high, a limit of, I think, 30 raids was applied for any individual. My father survived his 30 raids.

When the crew was given leave the Canadians had nowhere to go so my father always brought two or three Canadians with him when he came home. I was 3 or 4 years old at that time but I well remember the fun I had with the crew.

The risks which they faced were very real. On one occasion my father's plane was not scheduled to fly and he was transferred to a different crew as their flight engineer had been given leave. However, at the last minute the schedules were changed and my father's plane was required to fly after all. He was transferred back to his normal crew and the engineer off on leave was brought back from the bus stop and put back in his plane. Nobody on that flight survived that night.



At the end of the war, when the crew were disbanded, they had a crew photograph taken and they all wrote their addresses on the back of a copy for each of them. Unfortunately when my father got home he found he had lifted a copy which was blank on the back. Contact was lost with others. However over 40 years later a notice in the Edinburgh Evening News asked if anyone knew the whereabouts of "Jock" Jarvis. The notice had been arranged by my father's pilot Jack May (also the Squadron leader) in Canada, and was spotted by a friend of my father. As a result contact was re-established culminating in a crew reunion being held in 1989 at Linton-on-Ouse in Yorkshire, their base during the war. It meant a great deal to all of them to meet up again -to those of us who have never experienced the perils of war it is difficult to appreciate the bond of trust and camaraderie which develops between members of a crew.

After my father died I continued writing to Jack May until sadly there came a time when I

got no reply.

Sandy Jarvis is 5th from left in second row in photo of A Flight, No 3 Squadron, 21 ITW (Initial Training Wing).



No 3 Squadron, 21 ITW, specialised in basic service training of flight engineers. Other ITW's specialised in training the other aircrew categories, namely Pilot, Navigator, Bomber (PNB Scheme) and Wireless Operator, Air Gunner (WOP / AG). The squadron was based in RAF Torquay in 1943.¹

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¹ ref <https://rafww2butler.wordpress.com/initial-training-wing-at-raf-torquay/>