

Plt/Off Alan Raymond Collier Skone

A Peacefull View

by Arthur Skone

Alan Raymond Collier Skone was born on 18 August 1920. Parents Sidney and Edith Skone, brother Gerald.

The young Alan transferred from this "private" school in Kent to The County School, Sutton in Surrey which was founded in 1899. The school admission form recorded the "Profession or Occupation of Father" as "Boot Manufacturer". In 1931 their house on The Green, Ewell, Surrey was called "Amroth" - after the seaside resort in South Pembrokeshire !

Academically, Alan's most successful term at Sutton was Summer Term 1933 when he was placed 5th in his Form. His 2nd position in Mathematics didn't entirely satisfy the subject teacher who recorded "Good - but could do ever better" ! During Alan's time at Sutton the House Master recorded that, as well as being Form Representative on a couple of occasions, he had some success in both football and athletics. In January 1934, after seven terms at Sutton, Alan was admitted to Epsom College.



*Photographs taken on
19th May 1934
whilst spending the
Whitsun Holiday
at the
Florence Hotel
Margate*

During his time at Epsom, Alan was a member of the Officers Training Corps. The successor to the OTC is the Combined Cadet Force and nowadays at Epsom College "CCF compulsory for 2 years at age 14. Strong emphasis on leadership training in CCF."

If the fifteen year old Alan was aware of the war clouds gathering over Europe he gave no indication of it in his Easter Holiday Diary for 1936:

.....the sun peeped through and the clouds began to drift northwards.....8.00 am I got up..... breakfast.....to Ewell for a haircut.....took my racket Epsom to have a string mended.....roller the lawn.....Met Michael Smith while working in front..... accompanied mother down to Ewell village with Happy.....left mother to catch a bus to Morden.....1.10 pm lunch was served for Gerald and I.....rested in the sun bathed Loggia.....we all went for a walk over the Downs coming back via the Drift Bridge..... tea.....the Easter Holiday was discussed.....7.00 pm Dinner was served.....listened to "The Ringer", an Edgar Wallace novel, on the radio.....9.45 pm I went to bed.

At the end of the Summer Term 1936 Alan left Epsom College to begin at the Cordwainers College which, in those days, was in St John's Lane, Finsbury. Nowadays, Cordwainers College is in Mare Street, London and is described as a "word centre for education, training, research and consultancy."

In the year leading up to the outbreak of World War 2 on 3 September 1939, Alan worked as an "Assistant Cutter & Traveller" for his father's firm. Within a year of the outbreak he was to begin a new "career" - in the RAF.

He reported to No 2 Reception Centre, Cardington on 25 July 1940. Cardington had been the home of the airship R101 which crashed in France on its inaugural flight in 1931. The two vast hangars which housed it and its sister airship, R100, are still there today and are Grade 2 listed. There he would have been issued with his uniform, equipment and his first service number 1182859.

At Cardington he was interviewed by the Air Crew Selection Board and recommended for aircrew training. After a month of basic training at Cardington he was posted to No 1 Reception Wing in Torquay where the RAF had requisitioned several of the resort's hotels for the purpose of assessing the fitness and aptitude of potential aircrew. Alan was billeted in the Templestowe Hotel, Church Road. Within a fortnight Alan was accepted as suitable for Pilot Training and on 14 September he joined No 5 ITW (Initial Training Wing) in Hastings. However, during the time he was there No 5 ITW was re-located to Torquay.

By the end of 1940 he was an LAC (Leading Aircraftman) with a Grade A proficiency and very good character references. He had been found suitable for training as a pilot being classed as a U/T (Under Training) Pilot on 18 November.

On 11 December he was posted to No 51 Group Pool based at Yeadon, now the Leeds/Bradford Airport, where he was introduced to the DH82a, the Tiger Moth, to begin his basic pilot flying training. The Tiger Moth was, and still is, one of the finest light training and sporting aircraft ever built. A two-seater biplane with a single de Havilland Gypsy Major 4-cylinder 130 hp engine it was capable of flying up to 144mph with a range of 300 miles and a ceiling of 14,000ft.

Alan's potential as an Officer was recognised and, on 3 March 1941, he was posted to Cranwell, Lincolnshire - the Headquarters of No 21 Group, Training Command known as the Royal Air Force College Flying Training School - where his pilot training continued on Airspeed Oxford twin-engine aircraft.

The Oxford was used as an advanced trainer for over 16 years. A twin-engine monoplane, it could carry three men, sometimes four, and were more complex than the Tiger Moth, hence a "step up" in pilot training. It was also used for navigator, gunner, bomb-aimer and wireless operator training. Its top speed was 182 mph, range 910 miles and ceiling 19,200 ft. And, unlike the Tiger Moth, its crew was in an enclosed cabin.

Unlike Alan, many trainee aircrew received their basic flying training "overseas under the auspices of the Empire Air Training Scheme". The Dominions also contributed large numbers of first-rate aircrews to Bomber Command.



Alan Skone, Torquay 1940



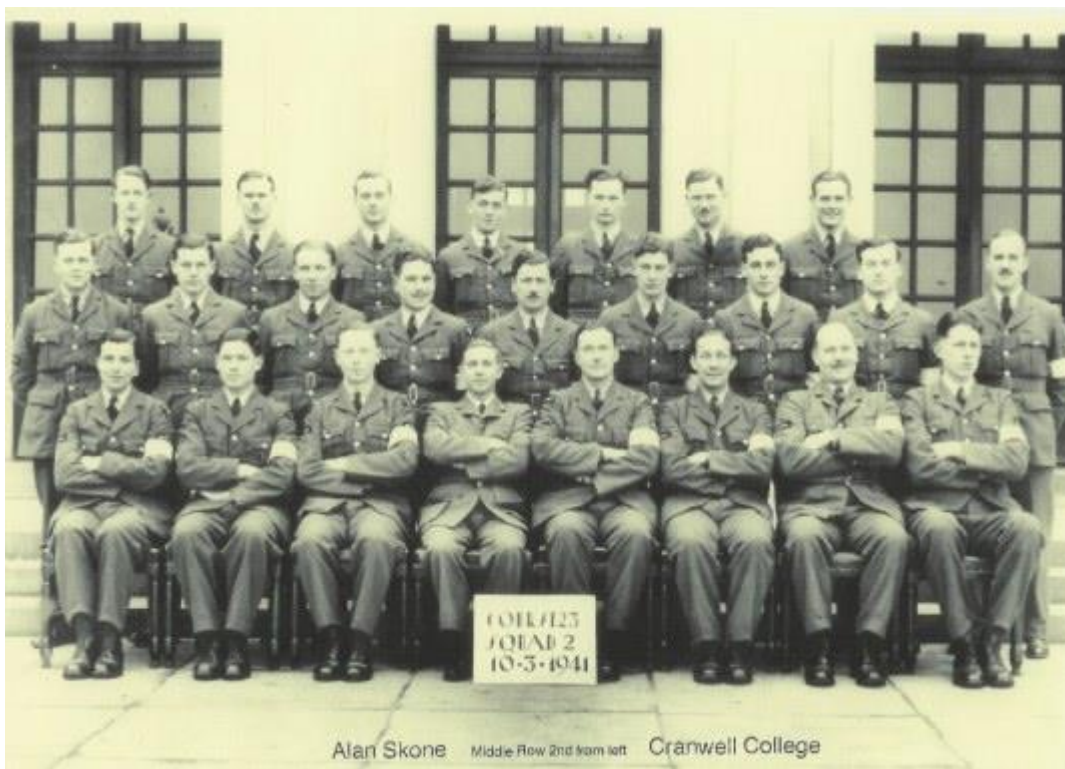
Alan Skone, with companion, Torquay 1940

Towards the end of 1940, the rank of Sergeant became the lowest rank for a flying airman. Until then Aircraftmen and Leading Aircraftmen were crew members of fighting aircraft although the pilots always held the rank of Sergeant or above. These "Other Rank" flyers received none of the privileges of Non-Commissioned and Commissioned Officers yet were sharing their duties and the dangers incurred in the air. Shortly after he became Prime Minister in May 1940, Winston Churchill decreed that, in multi-crewed aircraft, the pilot, irrespective of rank, was always to be the Captain of the crew.

On 28 May 1941 Alan qualified as a fully trained pilot, was promoted to Sergeant and then "discharged from the RAF ! He was then re-engaged as a Probationary Pilot Officer in the RAF VR (Volunteer Reserve) with the new service number 68186 and the necessity to purchase a new uniform.

Out of his newly Commissioned Officer's outfit allowance of 40 pounds perhaps Alan was spared the necessity of purchasing RAF Regulation shoes !

His aptitude for flying was very good and as, at the time, there was no shortage of pilots for Operational Flying he came an Instructor for Elementary Flying for "Learner" pilots. He was posted to the No 2 Central Flying School, also based at Cranwell, carrying out his duties with pupils in the Oxford aircraft.



After a month he joined No 2 SFTS (Service Flying Training School) at Brize Norton, Oxfordshire. Here he continued with his duties as a flying instructor but this time with Blenheims. These aircraft had been the front line light bombers right from the beginning of the war. In fact, as Neville Chamberlain was broadcasting to the nation on 3 September 1939 stating that the nation was at war with Germany a Blenheim, from Wyton in Huntingdonshire, was already on its way to take photographs of the German Fleet. They were now being used for the final training of pilots before going on to their front line Squadrons.

During this period, on 18 September 1941, Alan was admitted to the SSQ (Station Sick Quarters) and transferred to the RAF Hospital at Oxford. What was wrong is not apparent but it could not have been too serious as he was soon back at Brize Norton continuing with his instructing.

By the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942 the demand for Operational Bomber Pilots was becoming acute and, on 7 January 1942, Alan was "caught up" in the chain and posted to No 11 OTU (Operational Training Unit) which was based at Bassingbourn, Cambridgeshire.

A typical description of a bomber crew at the time was provided by an Air Ministry publication entitled *Bomber Command*, which was issued by the Ministry of Aviation in 1941. "The men of Bomber Command are appointed to fulfill a special mission. Their life is not that of other men - not that even of those in the other branches of the service. Its very physical conditions are different. For them nowadays much of the night is day, much of the day a time for sleep and repose. Discipline is constant yet flexible...Triumph and disaster are met and vanquished together.

` The captain and its second pilot do the actual flying, the observer navigates and drops the bombs; the wireless operator helps the navigator and the air gunners do the fighting. The same spirit and practice of co-ordination is required of a bomber crew as of a crew of a racing eight or the members of a football eleven...

` The bomber pilot differs in training and environment from his colleague flying a Spitfire or Hurricane. A pilot of the Royal Air Force is subjected at an early stage to a process of selection by which it is determined whether he is better fitted to fly a fighter or a bomber. Both will have to fly aircraft; both will wear pilots wings; but here their ways diverge. The fighter pilot is in action for an hour and a half to two hours at the most, often far less. He is usually led into the fight by his squadron leader.

` Very different, but equally important, qualities are required of a bomber pilot. He must be capable of

considerable physical and mental endurance, for it may be to fly for the most part of the time over hostile territory or across the unfriendly sea. During much of the flight he may find his aircraft the object of attack by enemy assailants can break off and renew assault at any moment. Surprise, that weapon which more than any other wins a fight, is theirs to wield at will. The bomber pilot must fly doggedly on, defending himself with the aid of darkness and cloud outside and with the skill of his crew and their machine guns inside. The bomber pilot must not forget that he is one of a team and that the team is not flying separated from him in another Hurricane or Spitfire, but the same aircraft, crouched over the navigator's table or hunched up in the gun turrets. He must be imaginative, yet not dismayed by his own imagination, brave yet cautious, cool yet daring.

On June 1942 Alan joined Operational Squadron No 214.

Details of Alan Skone's Operational Flights

Each raid is recorded in sequence including an overall Bomber Command aspect, the commitment of 214 Squadron, individual details regarding Alan's aircraft and the crew report.

After his arrival at Stradishall he took part in a few flights as Second Pilot. These would have been made with an experienced crew as part of the familiarisation procedure prior to his first operational flight. Unfortunately, no details of these flights exist.

2 July 1942 BREMEN

Bomber Command sent three hundred and twenty-five aircraft to attack the city.

Thirteen were lost.

It is believed that the main attack fell outside the Southern Borders of the city but German reports state that more than a thousand houses and four industrial firms were damaged with three cranes and seven ships, in the port, being hit with one actually sinking. Only five people were killed and four injured in a population which had become very air-raid shelter conscious.

The Squadron sent seven aircraft, losing one.

At 2201 hours Short Stirling Mk 1 R9335 took off from Stradishall with the following crew:

Pilot Officer C.D.Ince Pilot
Pilot Officer A.R.Skone 2nd Pilot
Sergeant R.A.Hamlin Flight Engineer
Sergeant C.J.Stokes Bomb Aimer
Sergeant F.C.Fray Navigator
Flying Officer A.Arnold Wireless Operator/Air Gunner
Sergeant W.J.Dempster Air Gunner
Sergeant W.John-Biggs Air Gunner

They attacked at 0137 from 17,950ft dropping 1620 x 4-lb incendiaries and 8 x 40lb incendiaries. There was no cloud with a bright moon and good visibility. Bremen was identified by the river and docks being closely seen. The bombs seemed to burst to the South of the docks. Fires were visible 80 miles away and seemed to be well spread. One photograph was attempted without a flash bomb. Strangely, their landing time at Stradishall was not recorded.

In his memoirs 'Inside the Third Reich', Albert Speer, the German Minister for Armaments and Production during World War 2, recalled one evening in 1940.

'Hitler had, in the course of a monologue, worked himself up to a frenzy of destructiveness: Have you ever looked at a map of London? It is so closely built up that one source of fire alone would

suffice to destroy the whole city, as happened once before, two hundred year ago. Goering wants to use innumerable incendiary bombs of an altogether new type to create sources of fire in all parts London. Fires everywhere. Thousands of them. Then they'll unite in one gigantic area conflagration. Goering has the right idea. Explosive bombs don't work, but it can be done with incendiary bombs - total destruction of London. What use will their fire department be once that really starts !'

The Glowing orbs bursting bombs display

Trails of bright horror thro' th' aerial way...

From: `The Miseries of War' by Thomas Skone (1740 - 1775)

7 July 1942 GARDENING

One hundred and two aircraft were sent `Gardening', a term used for minelaying, without loss.

The mines were, likewise, called `Vegetables' and the areas in which they were to be dropped were also code named following general horticultural association implied by gardening and vegetables.

On this occasion the Squadron sent four aircraft without loss.

R9355 was the Stirling which took off at 2359 to the destination `Nectarine' (The Frisian Islands) with three `vegetables'. Alan was, again, 2nd pilot. The crew comprised, always in the order as the previous operation for duties, as follows:

Pilot Officer J.D.Peel

Pilot Officer A.R.Skone

Sergeant P.J.Withers

Sergeant D.F.Dobson

Sergeant H.E.Orr

Sergeant J.B.Fleming

Sergeant F.A.Thome

Sergeant E.H.Cooper

The `vegetables' were planted at 53.39N x 0541E at ten second intervals from 2,000ft at 0129 hours. The results were not seen because it was pitch dark. They landed at 0315.

28 July 1942 HAMBURG

Two hundred and fifty-six aircraft were sent, thirty were lost.

The weather both on the outward flight, and over the British bases, was very bad and worsened during the night. Many aircraft turned back, and it is believed that only sixty-eight bombed in the target area. A direct hit on the Eppendorf Hospital, where twelve patients and nurses were killed, was the worst incident and damage of the night.

The Squadron sent fourteen aircraft without loss.

Alan now had his own crew and was the `Skipper'.

R9355 Stirling Mk 1 took off at 23.25 hours with:

Pilot Officer A.R.Skone

Sergeant J.King

Flt. Sgt. S.Newcombe

Flt. Sgt. R.A.Colehan

Sergeant W.J.Bushell

Sergeant R.R.Gray

Sergeant A.C.Lyle

Owing to thick cloud, with icing, the furthest point reached was 55.10N x 0810E (just off the Danish Coast near Flensburg) where 3 x 2,000lb bombs and 1 x 1,000lb bomb were jettisoned at 0109 hours from 13,000ft. The Stirling landed safely at Stradishall at exactly 04.00 hours.

`Ice was the worst menace. It formed in thick layers on the wings. It turned hydraulic systems to jelly; gun turrets, bomb doors, undercarriages all stopped working. It formed an opaque sheen over Perspex windows, making it impossible to see out. Ice played havoc with instruments and the radio.

'Frostbite was not uncommon among those who flew in these pioneer bombers. Hands were encased first of all in a silk glove, over this a woollen glove, and finally a thick leather gauntlet. In order to carry out some essential duties, plotting a course on a chart for instance, writing up a signals log, or accurately tapping out a message on Morse key, this protective clothing had to be removed. If a bare hand inadvertently touch a metal part of the aircraft it would freeze to that object immediately.' (From: Aircrew - The Story of the Men Who Flew the Bombers by Bruce Lewis)

29 July 1942 SAARBRUCKEN

Two hundred and ninety-one aircraft were sent on the first large raid to this target.

Nine were lost.

Defences at the target were not expected to be strong and crews were told to bomb at lower altitudes than usual. Two hundred and forty-eight aircraft reported that they had bombed, 75% of them doing so from 10,000ft. Severe damage was claimed.

Saarbrucken's records show that three hundred and ninety six building were destroyed, mainly in the centre and north-western districts and in excess of one hundred and fifty people were killed.

The Squadron sent out eight aircraft on this raid without loss.

Stirling Mk 1 W7577 was the aircraft in which Alan, with the same crew as on the previous night, took off at 0012 hours.

They attacked Oberstein (North West of the main town) at 02.23 hours from 9,500ft dropping 192 x 30lb incendiaries. The Primary target could not be identified visually and the aircraft was too low for its Navigational Aid (GEE - a radio device, with two radio beams, transmitted from two sites in England intersecting at the aiming point.) It is not known where the bombs fell but they were seen to burst.

31 July 1942 DUSSELDORF

Six hundred and thirty aircraft were sent on this raid and twenty-nine were lost.

Training units were sent with the main Command Force but it was not an attempt to reach 1,000 bombers. More than 900 tons of bombs were dropped with some 450 buildings being destroyed and more than 15,000 damaged.

The Squadron sent seven aircraft without loss.

N3729 was the Stirling in which the usual crew took off at 0110 hours. (It should be noted that where take off times are in the early morning hours, as this one, the date is actually the day after the 'official' raid date. Take-offs invariably went through the night so, for example, this raid date in fact should read 31 July/1 August 1942.)

Their report states `Attacked Dusseldorf at 02.36 from 14,500ft dropping 3 x 2,000lb and 2 x 500lb High Explosive Bombs. A pinpoint was obtained on the river and the docks to the west of the town which were clearly seen. Bombs fell in the town slightly north of the aiming point. The glow of the fires

could be seen, on the way back, almost to the coast.' They landed at 0430 hours.

5 August 1942 GARDENING

Bomber Command sent out twenty-five aircraft on bombing missions to Essen and Bochum losing five. Fifty-seven aircraft went minelaying off France, Holland and Germany. Fourteen went on leaflet flights from which the only loss of the night occurred. Seven of the fifty-seven minelayers were from 214 Squadron with R9155, skippered by Alan Skone, and its usual crew going to 'Nectarines 111' - one of the areas around the Frisian Isles.

They took off at 2230 hours and identified the target with 'their navigational aid' at 0024 hours from 3000ft on a magnetic bearing of 309 degrees. They 'planted' their two 'vegetables' at a ten second interval in area 53.51N by 07.29E. Once more it was too dark to see either the parachutes or splashes. The Stirling touched down at 0230 hours.

16/17 August 1942 GARDENING

Another night of minelaying only as fifty-six aircraft went to the Frisians once more.

This night saw two Lancasters lost.

The Squadrons sent five Stirlings including R9155 crewed once again by Alan and his men. They left at 0025 carrying three 'vegetables' which were 'planted' at five second intervals from 3,000ft on a heading of 060 degrees (magnetic) at 5345N by 0633E. Again, no splashes were seen. They landed at 0405.

18 August 1942 OSNABROOK

One hundred and thirty-nine aircraft were sent with five being lost. Eleven crews reported that they had bombed accurately and the Osnabrook records showed a sharp attack on the north and north west parts of the town with eighty buildings being destroyed and over one hundred and twenty others being seriously damaged including the town's main hospital, a paper mill and a copper wire factory.

The Squadron sent nine aircraft without a loss on this mission.

It was in Stirling Mark 1, R9356, that the usual crew took off at 2220 hours. On the way across the North Sea the electronic controls for rotating the mid-upper and rear gun turrets went u/s (unserviceable) thus robbing the aircraft of 75% of its defensive weapons, so it was decided by Alan that they would return having reached 53.14N by 03.48E (about seventy miles off the North Dutch Coast). At that point they decided to jettison forty-eight of their 30lb incendiary bombs at 2320 hours and brought back the remaining one hundred and forty four. They landed at 0020 hours.

~ LAST OPERATION ~

On 27 August 1942 three hundred and six aircraft were sent by Bomber Command to attack mainly the aircraft factories at the German city of Kassel situated some forty miles to the north east of the 'Dams' which had been attacked in May 1942 by the 'Dambusters'. The Command lost thirty-one aircraft, 10.1% of the force sent. One squadron, No 142, lost five of its fifteen Wellingtons taking part in the raid. It is believed that the German Night-Fighter Controllers were 'spot on' in assessing just where the target was, hence the heavy casualties.

There was very little cloud cover over Kassel and it was well illuminated by the Pathfinders. Widespread damage was caused, particularly in the south west of the city, with over seventy large fires being started and severe damage being done to all three of the Henschel aircraft factories.

214 Squadron sent twelve aircraft on this raid, including Stirling Mark 1 R9155 Q - BU which took off from Stradishall at 2029 hours. On this occasion Pilot Officer Dunckley took the place of the regular navigator Sergeant S.Newcombe. Pilot Officer R.H.Dunckley was a New Zealander and Sergeant R.R.

Gray was a Canadian. The others were British.

FLYING OFFICER A.R.SKONE PILOT
SERGEANT J. KING FLIGHT ENGINEER
PILOT OFFICER R.H. DUNCKLEY NAVIGATOR
SERGEANT A.C. LYLE AIR GUNNER/BOMB AIMER
FLIGHT SERGEANT R.A.COLEHAN WIRELESS OPERATOR
SERGEANT R.R.GRAY AIR GUNNER
SERGEANT W.J.BUSHELL AIR GUNNER

Nothing was heard of them again. It has been established that they were one of the twenty-five bombers shot down by Luftwaffe fighters out of a total loss of thirty-one. They had bombed their target and were on the way back when, shot down by a night fighter, crashed at Issum ten miles to the north west of Moers with no survivors. They were all buried temporarily, in the local cemetery.



214 SQUADRON STIRLING Q-BU

Lost August 27, 1942

PHOTO SOURCE : Cartmel War Memorials and Priory Church

After the end of the War in 1945, thousands of graves of soldiers and airmen were brought, by the Commonwealth War Graves Commission, to lie in the Reichswald. Nearly four thousand airmen are buried in the cemetery. Some lost their lives in supporting the advance into Germany, but most died earlier in the war taking part in the intensive air attacks on German targets, and were brought to the Reichswald from cemeteries and isolated burial places in the neighbouring area. A peaceful view ? *Ein friedliches bild* ? Certainly a sight which evokes extreme feelings of poignancy.

Alan Skone was the one serviceman by the name of `Skone' killed in action during World War 2 and he and five members of his aircrew are buried in Collective Grave 8-13. Sergeant R.R. Gray is buried in the adjacent Grave 7.

Of the 2,371 Stirling bombers built, not one exist today.

Reichswald Forest War Cemetery *lies within the Reichswald Forest and on the road between Kleve in Germany and Gennep in the Netherlands, on the German side of the border, about 5 kilometres from Gennep. It is the largest Commonwealth cemetery of either world war, in terms of area and contains 7,654 graves.*

Six of the crew of Stirling Mark 1 R9155 Q-BU who died on Thursday 27 August 1942 were buried in Collective Grave 28. H. 8-13:

Flying Officer Alan Raymond Skone 68186 Age 22
Son of Sidney Walter & Edith Skone of Ewell, Surrey.

Sergeant Jack King 626528 Age 21
Husband of Georgina Swan King
Son of William Green & Margaret King

Pilot Officer Raymond Harold Dunckley 404344 Age 22
Son of Harold Edward & Doris Dunckley of Blenheim, Marlborough, New Zealand.

Sergeant Cyril Lyle 1379354 Age 22
Son of Percy & Mary Lyle, of Pimlico, London

Flight Sergeant Robert Arthur Colehan 632891

Sergeant William James Bushell 13101132 Age 29
Son of William James & Ellen Bushell, of West Brompton, London
buried in adjacent Grave 28. H. 7:

Flight Sergeant Robert Reid Gray R/93121 Age 22
Son of Robert & Jane Gray, of Toronto, Ontario, Canada

"A PEACEFULL VIEW" written by Arthur Skone

With apologies to Arthur, what is found here is but a glimpse of the original document and in no way does it justice. The original is one of the most extensively researched, most well written biographies I have ever had the pleasure to read. "It is also one of the most selfless undertakings I have ever come across".

On behalf of all the families and veterans of the 214 Squadron, thankyou for the tremendous amount of time and effort you have put into this and thankyou for sharing it with us Arthur.

NOTE

Throughout the site there are excerpts from 'A PEACEFULL VIEW' in relevant locations. There are also numerous photographs and documents that will be added in time.

An original copy is on hand for those who wish to read it. I only ask that you return it so that it can be kept available for others. Please ask the authors permission before copying or using any of the material.