

KENTON BAR & MR SMALLEY
EX-SGT FLOOR SUP

JOINED RAFVR BEFORE WAR
FAILED PILOT
REPORTED TO CENTRE & SENT TO KB
WO DRAKE
[PROTEGE OF SAUL EX FC]
[COMMISSIONED WG CDR CONTROLLER]
SAUL AND WAAF SGT BIT OF STUFF
ABOVE GROUND OPS ROOM
ON WATCH FIRST U/G SHIFT
[U/G OPS ROOM NEVER NEEDED! OBSESSION WITH BOMBING]
SET TO LEARN PLOTTING
BECAME MAP TRACER
CPL AS OPS B A/C STATE BOARD
TELLERS [?] USED OPERA GLASSES [SEE PRINT]
LOUDSPEAKERS FROM BRIDGE FOR AIRCRAFT STATE
EXERCISE EVERY MORNING 1939 1000 - 1200 HRS
GRID 60 MILES FOR 2'6" SQUARE DIVIDED IN 10
FILTER ROOM BEFORE BLAKELAW IN PUB ON CORNER [AM BLDG]
MEN PLOTTERS LIVED WHEATSHEAF HOTEL
WOMEN CLYDE HOTEL JESMOND
SOLDIERS WITH MGs IN EARLY DAYS
ROOF OF WOODEN OPS ROOM WITH ARMOUR PLATING
17-18 PERS IN OPS ROOM WATCH
SMALLEY 24 IN '39
SIR W CHATER ROCLO WITTON CASTLE PICNIC FOR 15 AUG WATCH
TANKERVILLE ROCLO
BRIDGE CORRESP OF TELEGRAPH OR TIMES SHERRY PARTY LIB CLUB 15
AUG WATCH
RDF PLOTTERS IN RHS [E SIDE] OF OPS ROOM!
ROC PLOTTERS IN LHS [W SIDE] OF OPS ROOM!

Ernest Kempson

28th April, 1997.
Tel: 0191 252 7750.

Douglas Maddison,
11, Grasmere Cres.,
Whitley Bay
Northumberland, NE26 3TB.

Dear Air Vice Marshal Hunter,

13 (Fighter) Group Headquarters, Kenton.

After the first article in the Evening Chronicle. I contact the Archives Section in Blandford St. and this was followed by a 'Phone call from an interested party. This gentleman had never heard of the No.1 Cps. Room in the wooden hut and asked for details, requesting that, if I was able, could I sketch the installation and he would telephone me again. No call has been made and I am very keen that the knowledge of the originals should not be lost.

In brief - In 1939 it was obvious that war was inevitable and measures had to be taken to strengthen the air defence of the Country. There was the Territorial Army which provided the bulk of the A.A. units, the R.Aux.A.F. which provided the reserve of Fighter Command and the R.A.F.V.R. as a pool of varying skills. With the advent of the Control Rooms and ancillary works, new trades were required. The foremost, of interest to you was the Clerk S.D. trade. Recruiting was commenced in the R.A.F.V.R. under hush-hush conditions. In addition, the T.A. was asked to assist and the local unit 37th Battalion R.E., T.A. (Tyne Electrical Engineers) supplied members from all companies 307, 308 at Tynemouth, 348 & 349 from Newcastle. This was the largest T.A. unit in the country with 1800 personnel and supplied all searchlight sites in Northumberland and Durham.

Training took place at Usworth airfield where there was a Sector Ops. Room. On mobilisation we were posted to Kenton where we met the first Group Control Room. Three watches A.B. & C. were formed. A & B were R.A.F. personnel and C was predominately Army. We tried to transfer to R.A.F. after three months service and a request went to the 37th by the R.A.F. but this was refused and we were re-called at Xmas 1939. By that time the first W.A.A.F.'s had arrived and were manning the H.Q. very efficiently (worse luck for us).

The C.O. was A.V.M. Saul with one or two Air. Commodores and other senior ranks. The army was commanded by Col. Mallinson (Signals) and the design and organisation of the Room was under W.O. (later S/Ldr) Drake. We saw the first engagement of the air war on Oct. 16th which was the Firth of Forth battle. I believe the first German aircraft to be shot down over land crashed at Tranent. Prior to this it had gone over Turnhouse at 10' feet hotly pursued by a pilot from 602 Sqn.

2.

You will notice the split plotting table which made life difficult if one was in the centre, having to do a 180⁰ turn in the middle of a series of plots.

I was on the Galashiels line for the first two months and then transferred to Stanmore line until the recall

I transferred to the R.A.F. in 1941 as a Clerk S.D. with previous experience . Records then posted me to a Bomber station (Marham) where I was as useful as a new recruit. I finished up as Signals Clerk and then re-mustered as Radar Mech. in 1942.

I don't know whether the enclosed articles on the Observing Network are known to you, if not then they should prove interesting.

I shall be pleased to supply any further information which could help you in your researches.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "R. Woodhouse". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.