

New Forest Remembers WWII Project

Oral History Team: Transcription Document

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Ok Doug, just tell me who you are and how you joined in with the hostilities.

Yep, my name is Doug Beasley and I joined up at Lords Cricket ground in August 1943 and I was, at that time, eighteen and a quarter years old. We were there for three weeks and then went on to initial training wing which was in Torquay and then I went to the Force School of Technical Training at St Athens in Wales and this is where I trained to be a flight engineer. When I completed the course, I then went to Heavy Conversion Unit where we, I met the rest of the crew on the Halifax bomber aircraft and then, when we'd finished the training there, went to '76 Squadron' Bomber Command which was based at Holme-on-Spalding-Moor in Yorkshire and I was there from February 1944 until, sorry I was there from August '44 'til February 1945 and completed a tour of operations which happened to be 38. After I'd finished, I then went on to be an instructor and this took me back again to the Force School of Technical Training, St Athens and then I was posted to various operational training units, talking and teaching future aircrew. During the course of this I was at an O.T.U. in Silverstone and a decree had come out that every airmanship hall, which was where we taught the aircrew had to have an Air Sea Rescue Officer and I was asked to do this and this took me to Calshot.

0:02:43

So Doug, what were your first impressions when you arrived in Southampton from the train?

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Well, I was absolutely amazed at what I saw when I got off the train in that the destruction of Southampton, as far as the eye could see, was almost complete and this gave me a certain amount of pleasure that we'd been able to give a little bit back of that to the Germans.

So what were your impressions of Calshot when you arrived?

Well, not very good really. It looked very run down [recording stopped and question repeated]

So what were your impressions of Calshot when you arrived?

Well, when I arrived, it appeared very run down [recording stopped]

So what were your impressions of Calshot when you arrived in Calshot?

Well, when I arrived in Calshot, I found it extremely run down but in a way, it didn't surprise me too much 'cause most of Britain at that time was, was similar. The accommodation which we were given was also rather primitive but as we were only going to be there for one month, we weren't too worried about that. It went, the course was excellent in that it covered all aspects of air sea rescue training and the things I remember most about this was, this was in March when it was still pretty cold and we had to go to outside swimming pool because it was really said to us, "Well, we can't guarantee the weather if you happen to come down in the sea." And this, this was quite an extremely difficult part of the course and then we learned all aspects of air to sea rescue and one of the latter parts of the course was to take us out first thing in the morning, and I mean first thing, it was about 9 o'clock, they left us in a dingy, the equivalent of a crew which was seven of us and left us there from early morning and picked us up just as it was going dark. Now, that was pretty horrendous because the weather was good when we went out, not so good when we came back and one or two of the other members, some were sea sick [laughs]. It was unpleasant but again, it gave us something to talk to people when we were instructing, "This is the sort of thing you can expect." Then towards the end of the course, we all flew in a Sea Otter aircraft, which was amphibious. This was with a pilot who, besides going out to sea and rescuing people, also told us he'd dropped some of our agents into enemy territory during the Second World War. So he was a very experienced person and really brought it home what part they played in rescuing people like ourselves who happened to come down in the sea.

0:06.35

And the other thing I particularly remember at Calshot was, I don't know whether it was every time a course was there, but certainly we had a party to celebrate the end of the course and we were told that at this particular party people were invited from Odstock

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Hospital which was where the famous surgeon McIndoe had dealt with the extensive burns which could not be avoided when you, when you, when you crash landed or whatever happened in an aircraft. And the other interesting thing was, each one of them was accompanied by a beautiful girl and it brought it home to us how lucky we were and the fact that McIndoe was so good that each of those, even though they looked awful in appearance, were talking to us normally and that was a tremendous impression of what Calshot did in those days.

- Joined up at Lord's Cricket ground
- Trained to be a flight engineer
- 76 Squadron Bomber Command
- Air sea rescue officer at Calshot
- Destruction of Southampton
- Flying Sea Otter aircraft
- Party attended by special guests from Odstock Hospital who had received surgery from McIndoe

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So Doug, tell me about the last few days of the war.

Well from our point of view, a tour of operations was thirty and in the early part of 1945, because of heavy casualties and also bad weather to train up other air crew, they introduced a point system which was three points for French targets, or any other country but if it was Germany, four points. This point system meant that instead of finishing at thirty operations, we had to do another eight more and some of the targets were pretty horrendous, one was coincided with the Dresden one but we were on a diversionary flight to Kemnitz and then we also went to Leipzig and in those eight operations extra, we did about, an average of about seven hours flying in each one. So instead of finishing as we hoped on February 1st 1945, it was the 24th February.

- Change in operations tour meant much more flying time

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