

RAYMOND ERNEST JOSEPH HOGG

(Known as 'ERNIE')

My first cousin, Ernie Hogg by David Harold Fitton.

These stories were told to me in dribs and drabs when I holidayed at Ernie and Audrey's farm at Ohau.

When New Zealand declared war on Nazi Germany Ernie would have been among the first to join up in the Royal NZ Airforce. He already had a pilots licence having belonged to the Palmerston North Aero Club for a few years. Mum, Dad, Bill and myself (I was about 11 years old) journeyed up to Ohau a farming community near Levin where Ernie worked on his father's dairy farm (Uncle Ern & his wife Aunty Ida my dad's sister) to say goodbye as Ernie was on a final leave.

Ernie went straight to England and trained on Whitley twin-engine bombers and took part in Air Chief Marshal Harris (Bomber Harris) 1000 bomber raid on Cologne in Germany.

His next aircraft was the Wellington Bomber, a twin-engine aircraft with radial engines and the complete airframe of aluminium Geodesic design and fabric covered. This bomber was designed by Barnes Wallis who designed the Bouncing Bomb of The Dam Busters Raid.

The "boys" called these bombers "Wimpies" because of their flexibility when airborne. Ernie had a stint training aircrew in these machines. He took a crew of young airmen up one morning training & landed safely. His counterpart took up a crew for the afternoon flight and when accomplishing a tight turn, a wing came off and killed them all. It was the same aircraft Ernie's crew had been flying previously that morning.

Ernie's next aircraft was the mighty Lancaster powered by four 1200 HP Rolls Royce Merlin engines. The crew consisted of the Pilot, Flight Engineer, Bomb Aimer, Navigator, Radio Operator, Mid Upper Gunner and Rear Gunner, a crew of seven.

Now Ernie was thirty-two years old when he joined up and his young crew members called him Grandpop. They did thirty-two bombing missions over Germany in the Lancaster.

Rolls Royce asked for volunteer pilots to take an instruction course on engine handling on missions and it was designed to save petrol and wear and tear on the engines. Ernie would come home from a mission with an extra 150-200 gallons of petrol than the other crews.

At the end of thirty-two missions his Lancaster was fitted with new engines for the next crew to take over. Rolls Royce stripped down these engines and informed Ernie they would have done another thirty-two missions.

German heavy industry such as Krupps (Guns, Tanks etc) was situated in the Ruhr Valley and was heavily defended with anti-aircraft guns and fighter protection. (I must add that the British bombed by night and the Americans by day).

One night probably over the Ruhr, Ernie's Lancaster was hit by flak exploding shells under the tail. It was not a direct hit but the force of the explosion tipped the Lancaster on its nose into a vertical dive. Height would be about 28,000 ft. Ernie told me he had the trim tabs on the elevator fully up and with his feet on the instrument panel put all he had pulling back on the control column, he also had his flight engineer helping him. They had less than a 1000 ft under them when the Lancaster came out of the dive. They were loaded up with a 1000lb block buster bomb & incendiaries.

The flight engineer had a cold and shouldn't have been on that mission and came home with burst ear drums. He spent three months in hospital but had to complete his thirty-two missions with another crew. Ernie had a mascot which he kept in his drawer and on the night of the first flight engineer's first mission with his other crew it disappeared with him. He finished his missions safely and the mascot came home. (When the war was over Ernie brought his flight engineer home to NZ with him and vouched for him as an English Emigrant).

On another mission a German night fighter (They were equipped with radar to find our bombers in the dark) attacked them. Ernie's tail gunner got in the first burst of machine gun fire and shot down the "Jerry" and this claim was confirmed by another Lancaster crew.

The night before the D Day landings in Normandy (6th June 1944) 617 Squadron (The highly specialised Dam Buster Squadron) had the task of very accurately dropping “window” (small parcels of tinfoil) over the English Channel at its narrowest point to the coast of France. Accurately dropped it gave the illusion of an armada of ships heading towards France on the German Radar, helping to keep a German counter there and away from Normandy where the invasion force was going to land. Now 617 Squadron were one Lancaster short to do the job. It fell to Ernie and his crew. In 617 Squadron history it was just another Lancaster from another Squadron and no details of who it was.

On a day where weather conditions over Germany prevented bombing operations, Ernie had an arrangement with the CO of a nearby fighter station to fly his Lancaster with his flight engineer to mock bomb the base (the time unknown to the fighter boys) to give them practise in getting airborne.

On one particular day they did a surprise attack, Ernie put the Lancaster into a steep turning bank, went to straighten up to go home, the ailerons jammed and Ernie had another emergency on his hands. He had to put on full opposite rudder and fully trim the ailerons with the trim tabs to get the Lancaster flying level and on a course for home. He had to land the Lancaster under full power on the deck and his flight engineer then cut the throttles landing in the normal way otherwise the Lancaster would have flipped and crashed. A bearing supporting the aileron control cable had seized. After their thirty-two missions over Germany, Ernie was posted back to Air Training Crews on the old Wellington Bombers.

Taking off one day with a student pilot at the controls (take-off speed was 95 mph) Ernie told him it was time to lift off and at the same instant the port undercarriage collapsed, and then the starboard side, ripping both wings and engines clean off and the crew went skidding down the runway in the fuselage when it came to a stop. The fire engine was right beside them. The fuel tanks were way behind them in the wings, but the young crew was falling over each other to get out while Ernie just sat there having a quiet chuckle.

Another day an American B25 twin engine bomber landed at Ernie's training base short of fuel. On this day Ernie was duty officer for raising the fire truck alarm in case of any take-off or landing accidents. Fuel available for the B25 was too low an octane rating and the crew were advised. She'll be right guys we'll take it and go. They duly started there take off run when one engine cut out and the B25 roared off the runway and hit a tree. The fuselage broke in half and the crew walked out unharmed as it burst into flames. Ernie could see what was going to happen and the fire crew were there in time to douse the flames.

When the war finally ended Ernie had to live at the base waiting for a ship to take him home to NZ. They had next to nothing to do, so they (all six of them left at the base) decided to give the air controller in the tower a test of endurance. They told him they would fly six Wellingtons in line astern, do a fly wing-over the control tower and scare him out before the last plane went past. No way he said.....all bets were laid and in line astern the first two wings came straight for the control tower and lifted over at the last minute. The controller was gone.

The next bet was the six Wellingtons to climb to 10,000 ft and see who could be the first on the deck. "Who won?" I wasn't told, but when Ernie went to land he had to come in faster than normal as a large piece of fabric had torn off the top of the wing reducing lift.

The last escapade was firing signal rockets at each other in their barracks. One went through the CO's office window and they no doubt got a rocket back from him.

That was the end of Ernie's war.

Just a note... The Army Boys called the Airforce Boys "Blue Orchids" as they were in their minds molly coddled and spoilt with better uniforms.