

FRANK HAMILTON

Frank was born on 26th of November 1923 and joined the Army initially as a member of the 33rd Anti-tank Regiment, training at Pt Walter, Western Australia. He served as a Bombardier in a battery attached to the 6th Infantry Brigade, which patrolled areas north of Geraldton during 1942.

He transferred to the R.A.A.F. air crew. After rookie training at Victor Harbour, South Australia, Frank continued at Cunderdin, Western Australia, flying Tiger moths. He then went to Calgary, Canada as part of the Empire Air Training Scheme, flying twin engine Cessna Cranes. After obtaining his wings he was posted to England as a Sergeant pilot in April 1944, later rising to Warrant Officer.

After various airfield control duties Frank, along with 20 other pilots, was selected to do a flight engineers course at St Athens in Wales. The object was to supply second pilot-engineers for the proposed "Tiger Force", whose object was to fly out to the Pacific as a ready-made bomber group.

He eventually joined Squadron 467, R.A.A.F. Lancaster Squadron, based at Waddington, Lincolnshire. Following victory in Europe 467 Squadron was transferred to "Tiger Force". Based at Metheringham the squadron continued training for the Pacific theatre. It was spared the Pacific service when Japan capitulated.

Following V.E. day it was decided to use 467 Squadron to fly Italian Prisoners of War home to Italy from a base in Southern England. Accordingly, 20 Red coated Italians were loaded into each Lancaster for the flight to Bari in southern Italy

The Lancasters were very limited for interior space for passengers, and having no interior lining, certain control rods to the rear rudders and elevators were exposed to view, as they continually moved under the pilots' directions.

On one occasion a severe electrical storm was encountered over Italy, with a writhing band of electricity forming about the tips of one propeller. [The writhing band of electricity was similar to that phenomenon familiar to early sailors at St Elmo's Lights. It collected around the mastheads during storms]. The combination of turbulent conditions, writhing bands of electricity and the rapid adjustments of the controls by the pilot caused the Italians to panic. They grabbed the moving control rods inside the fuselage, having the mistaken impression that the aircraft was falling apart. The result was that the aircraft was locked in a shallow dive with the two pilots unable to move the controls. A panic stricken rush by the crew eventually made the Italians release the rods, thus avoiding a rather delicate situation. A very shaken group of Prisoners of War were eventually off loaded at what was left of Bari airport.

Of the 1814 aircrew members that passed through the unit, 590 lost their lives. 117 became prisoners of war and 84 evaded capture and returned to England. The squadron flew 3,395 sorties. (Note that the loss ratio of about 1/3 was par for the airmen of the Empire Air Training Scheme).

Frank was discharged in February 1946. On returning to civilian life he joined the Education Department, firstly as a Primary teacher, then seconded to the National Fitness Council as a field officer and secretary.