

Chapter 18

RAF Northolt - 41(F) Squadron

We were, I think, given three weeks holiday on passing out from Halton in December 1932. As a newcomer to Northolt in January 1933, I was attached to Station Workshops. As it happened, this proved to be a lucky move for me as the Sergeant in charge was an ex-boy who had passed out as a Corporal. This was a procedure relative to earlier entries



Skegness 1933

and was subsequently cancelled. Instead of working on aircraft, I was put in the office to update all the technical Air Ministry Orders (AMOs) which were sadly out of date. The Sergeant told me to read them carefully because the subjects in AMOs often cropped up on the LAC's written exam. I was allowed to take the first exam in 1933 and sure enough there were questions related to the AMOs I had dealt with. The result was that I had the highest marks at Northolt - 83%. Soon after that I was sent to West Drayton to take the LAC's board exam. With a written mark of 83%, the examiners didn't ask any really awkward questions, merely went through the motions.

My "props" were sewn on in August 1933 so I was off to a good start. During that time I did a rigging and fabric job privately for a Flight Lieutenant Wheeler who had a small private Bluebird aircraft. He did the engine himself. We had two attempts at a test flight but both times the engine cut out on take off just as the aircraft was about to turn. He was a good pilot, however, so managed to land it safely on the aerodrome. Generally, Northolt was a good station but the Commanding Officer would not allow new boys to wear civilian clothes; it was a case of wearing pantaloons and puttees or slipping in and out without getting caught. Other snags were Guard Duty, Coal Fatigues (deliveries to Married Quarters) and Fire Piquet. I was excused the latter as someone decided that I would make a good "Airman of the Watch". This duty was a week's duration with responsibility to the Duty Pilot. It included sending out weather reports, cloud cover and types of clouds etc.

By this time I had been allocated to the flights on a Bulldog aircraft. My fitter was a 17th Entry chap called Cyril Kimber. He was a good friend and I took him home a few times to meet Perle and her friend Brenda. Unfortunately Brenda got too serious for Cyril and so his visits ceased.

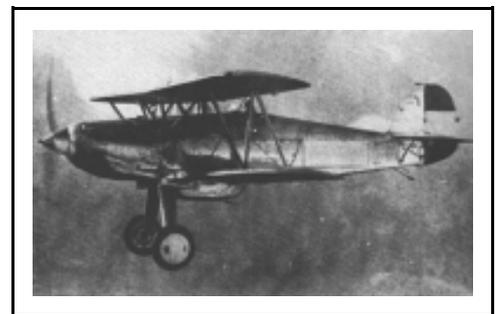


Bristol Bulldog Mk IIA

During this time I was getting more involved with Perle and I suppose that I fell in love with her and saw her most days. She lived in Hounslow where Mum, Dad and Betty lived in the barracks. We used to spend a lot of time cycling. Unfortunately her father resented me and, on one occasion, walked across the street when he saw me coming towards him on the same side. Basically I believe that he was a bully and generally not a nice person. Her mother was a lovely person but crippled with arthritis and could only sit in a wheelchair. Perle and I used to take her to the cinema and Park on Sundays to listen to the band; she was very grateful for this. She died early and Perle went to live with another couple. I was able to visit there and as a fact I learned to fish since the man of the house was a keen fisherman. Just prior to Perle leaving her father's house, he broke up her cycle. I went out and bought two new ones which solved that problem.

Whilst at Northolt I did not play much sport except tennis. I ran for the Flight in the Cross Country race and came in second. I got the usual invitation to join the Station Team, but at that time my friendship with Perle was the most important thing to me so I refused.

In the Summer of 1934, I was detached to Tangmere. 43 Squadron had got into a mess with their Hawker Furies, most of them being unserviceable. One Rigger from each Fighter Squadron was sent there for a month to help them out. I spent a pleasant time there and played a lot of tennis with a 17th Entry chap called "Split" Brightwell. Our final game was for five shillings



Hawker Fury

which he won! During this time, I had borrowed £32 from my Mum and bought a 350cc BSA Blue Star Motor Cycle. Just before going to Tangmere I had a crash, the handle of

the bike going through a car door. No one was hurt and both me and my passenger had baled out. An AA man witnessed this and it was settled knock for knock thanks to his evidence.

During the time I was at Tangmere, Cyril Kimber rescued the bike and replaced the forks so that when I got it back it was as good as new. I promptly sold it! At Northolt itself, the CO had decided that airmen in civilian clothes should wear hats and acknowledge officers by raising them in passing. We all bought berets with a little sprig in the middle. To raise our hat therefore, we got hold of the sprig and pulled. The whole thing was a farce.

At holiday times we went, as a family, to stay with Aunt Rose at Winchelsea. Perle came with us and some snaps of us at Winchelsea are in the albums. Our love story was a very innocent one but we were very good friends.



Perle & Me at Winchelsea - 1934

Then the blow fell (I had been forewarned by the Orderly Room Corporal); a telegram arrived at Winchelsea requesting my return to Unit for Posting. I was posted to 800 Squadron Fleet Air Arm and The Courageous. Around that time, my parents moved to Chatham barracks. It turned out well for me because Courageous was in the middle of her commission and the posting counted as an overseas posting which, at that time, was a five-year stint in Iraq, India, Egypt or some such place.