

Chapter 28

The Gambia - Bathurst Again

On my return, things were rather chaotic. A number of aero engines had appeared in large packing cases however nothing had been done with them; I organised the hangar so that it looked as though it could go about its business. I unpacked the engines and set them up on a sort of production line, allocated people to each and had them checked over.

I was concerned about Bill Tyson who seemed to be having nerve trouble. One of his jobs was to make out returns for GHQ. He would seal up the envelopes and then unseal them to check that he had done them correctly. We had been out there for over a year by now and I decided that it was time to send him home. This was arranged and he, and others who had been there longer, went home on the next available boat. Where corporals were involved, I was able to recommend the best LACs for promotion, thus I was able to reward some of the best men who had worked hard throughout. Some of the men came up from South Africa and when new people arrived I would check their records. I found one who had been in prison for a year and when I questioned him about this, it turned out that he had been found drunk in a native quarter. Such was apartheid. I sent him home too.

I dabbled in fishing as a hobby. We used to fish from a bridge over the river. It was teeming with fish of all sorts but the ones we caught most commonly were small with vicious tails. However I didn't get involved the way some did.

I gradually saw home all the chaps who had come out with me on the Arethusa. I obviously wanted to go home but thought it only fair that I should be the last. When my time was near, my replacement turned up. I say replacement but, instead of singular, it was plural in the form of three Pilot Officers! I thought, and still do now, that this was funny. To get home, the last batch had to fly back to Hastings in a DC3 from an airfield which I think was called Yum Dum. As usual, when we got to Hastings, no-one knew we were coming, but fortunately we soon got sorted out. I had to relinquish my WO badges and revert to Flight Sergeant. After a few days we boarded a Polish ship named "Batori". I looked a right mess with a Warrant Officer's cap. I wasn't too happy in a ship which was in convoy and moved at the speed of the slowest, however, we arrived

home without incident. It was September 1943 and the Atlantic war had turned in our favour. I think we landed at Liverpool because we were sent to Morecambe and housed in a B&B. Morecambe had been virtually taken over by the RAF, for instance, Woolworth had become the NAAFI. We were there for three days getting more and more impatient as, fairly obviously, we wanted to go home. I got friendly with a NAAFI girl and we spent a pleasant afternoon out at a small zoo and garden. Four of us took a ride in a horse drawn gharry which, on a roundabout, turned too sharply and tipped us out. No-one was hurt and it was all good innocent fun. Finally we were sent on holiday and I got a proper cap.

Odd Memories of Bathurst.

- *The Pan-Am flying boats coming in with famous people, such as Deanna Durbin, on board.*
- *The ship load of sanitary towels which arrived but, for who?*
- *The lovely real silver bracelets made by the native silversmiths from Queen Victoria half Crowns.*
- *The medical inspections of our native helpers carried out by our MO. Any with VD were sacked.*
- *The typhoons and hurricanes which would blow up at a moment's notice.*
- *The odd Sunderland returning with only three engines, the fourth no longer possessing an airscrew or reduction gear. They had a habit of falling off, it was thought due to over boosting when trying to take off on calm water. Sometimes they travelled five miles before they got clear of the water.*
- *The Hot Pants worn by the French Lieutenant's Wife. People think that they were invented in the seventies - Not so.*

Now for home and some surprises!